



Life in a Japanese Women's College: Learning to Be Ladylike

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p. 124) are fascinating. They combine calls for reforms (e.g., local bodies to settle conflicts and more mobility between high schools) that date back to the occupation,⁸ as well as calls to “increase the confidence and joy of learning” of children that could well have been pulled from the Report of the California Commission on Self-Esteem. This apparent mixture of recurrent issues of contention along with apparently new conceptions of the basic role of learning poses new challenges for thinking about how social relations and social expectations for learning are changing in Japan.

Similarly, in her section on individuality (pp. 155–84), Roesgaard describes the conflicting definitions, and political concomitants, of various terms bandied about in recent educational reforms and reform attempts. The amount of attention given to these terms again suggests that Japanese expectations for schooling are changing in the face of increasing exposure to (and possible absorption of) ideas such as “children’s rights.” However, here again Roesgaard would need to go deeper in order to expand upon ideas previously articulated by Hall or Horio.⁹

For those interested in educational reform, Roesgaard’s work provides detailed vignettes that should be useful starting points for discussions of the politics of school reform in Japan. While the overall flow of the book is hard to follow, several individual sections are well written and could be used as topics for graduate discussions.

Life in a Japanese Women’s College: Learning to Be Ladylike. By Brian J. McVeigh. Nissan Institute/Routledge, London, 1997. xv, 264 pages. \$75.00.

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Beginning with the early studies of John Singleton on an urban middle school in the mid-1960s and Thomas Rohlen’s work on five high schools in Kobe in the mid-1970s, a welter of ethnographic case studies has told us a great deal about formal teaching and learning in contemporary Japan.¹ One

8. H. Wray, “Change and Continuity in Modern Japanese Educational History: Allied Occupational Reforms Forty Years Later,” *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (1991), pp. 447–75.

9. Hall, *Mori Arinori*; Horio, *Educational Thought and Ideology*.

1. John Singleton, *Nichū: A Japanese School* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1967); Thomas P. Rohlen, *Japan’s High Schools* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

curious lacuna, though, has been observational studies of tertiary education—the universities and two-year junior colleges that have attracted over one-third of the 18–21-year-old population in the last 25 years and whose credentials have become necessary for white-collar employment. Thus, this new study of a junior college in a Tokyo-fringe city by Brian McVeigh demands particular attention.

It is much remarked that the Japanese government in the decades following World War II allowed the increasing demand for tertiary education to be met mainly by private initiative. Private universities and colleges, and especially junior colleges, have a reputation for lower-prestige student bodies and overcrowded and underfunded facilities. At present, 80 per cent of the nearly 600 junior colleges are privately operated (many in perilous financial condition), 60 per cent enroll fewer than 300 students, while only 10 per cent have over 700 students. Even the larger junior colleges, usually affiliated with four-year institutions, face stiff competition and tight demographic projections.

Over 90 per cent of junior college enrollment is female, a stark indicator of the subtle but pervasive gender tracking of education, and over 90 per cent of junior college graduates go immediately to some form of paid employment. Only a few go on to further education or marry immediately upon graduating. Japan's junior colleges may be “finishing schools” but they are as vital in training “polite women and cheerful OLs” as in encouraging “good wives and wise mothers.” Therein lies, I think, some potential sand in the gears of the well-oiled societal machine.

Takasu, pseudonym for the junior college that is McVeigh's subject, is part of a corporate educational complex, organizationally and spatially. The parent company, an educational foundation, operates the junior college, a four-year university, a vocational school, and a graduate school, which share a sprawling campus somewhere in the outskirts of Tokyo. The Japanese name, Takasu Joshi Tanki Daigaku, directly translates as “Takasu Women's Junior College,” but significantly the college has adopted a different formal English name, Takasu International College (henceforth, TIC). Its 739 students (in 1993) are enrolled in one of four departments of a single faculty, “Kokusai Kyōyō” or “International Liberal Arts.” Indeed, the juxtaposition of its Japanese and English names reflects what McVeigh identifies as the two overarching objectives of Takasu education—to train its students to be ladylike and to internationalize them. Much of the substantive argument of his book is how these twin objectives are pursued and why they produce such paradoxical results.

Anthropologists characterize their fieldwork as participant observation, although we generally do little of the former. McVeigh, though, was able to combine full participation with observation; he was a regular member of the TIC faculty in 1992–94, teaching courses on Japanese culture and society, and this experience and those years form the basis of the book. Additional

teaching experience at other Japanese colleges and universities both before and since those years complement his perspective on TIC. He offers fascinating details and a highly critical account of the layering of overt education and hidden curriculum at TIC.

To a reader like myself, for whom junior colleges are the least known of the many educational levels in Japan, there are two unexpected features of TIC. First, the physical facilities are plush—fancy architecture, well-appointed classrooms, high-tech resource centers, etc. Moreover, students spend a lot of time in class. Each of the 12–15 courses they must take each semester meets once a week. Attendance is recorded (and three classes missed out of thirteen results in failure). All courses at TIC must give closed-book midterm and final exams, and the administration enforces strict grading (e.g., 30 per cent of students in language classes must be failed). Class time, plus the students' need to commute to campus (there are no dorms and 60 per cent live with their parents) means there are very few of the student-run clubs that seem to be at the center of student life and enthusiasm at many Japanese universities.

McVeigh warns us, though, that these surface impressions do not signify a seriously academic campus life and intellectual rigor. Instead, they are clues to a thoroughgoing regulation and ritualization of TIC education. A top-down administration by a “one-man” president, numerous school ceremonies, and everyday routines socialize students by ritualizing their bodies into ladylike and internationalized forms and dispositions. As the body is formed so the mind is shaped is McVeigh's message.

Indeed, McVeigh describes the many ways TIC administration is intrusive—in regulating not only the student body (e.g., a dress code that would make a high school vice-principal envious) but also the faculty, who are required to be present each day and given guidelines about course structure and grading curves. To encourage giving homework, they are given a small sum for each assignment handed in, and soon realize responses will be higher if students must hand them in to the school office, where they are counted, numbered, and then returned to the instructor. Testing everywhere in Japan is highly structured, but entrance exams at TIC have the tenor of a military operation. This is certainly “kanri kyōiku,” managed education!

Seeking profits in a cutthroat business, the president, his dean, and the parent ownership are thus highly conscious of purveying and protecting an image of disciplined and responsible but refined and upscale education. Girls are shaped less into women than into ladies. Thus, the book makes much, perhaps too much, of gender at TIC and not enough of class. McVeigh estimates that most TIC students are from middle to lower income brackets, with many reporting that their fathers were self-employed and their mothers worked at paying jobs as well. “Becoming ladylike” is an

appealing credential to parents and children alike, although I am not sure that they see it as “a tactic that coats one’s identity with the patina of the upper class” (p. 82). I doubt that “upper-class” and earlier notions of genteel propriety have much resonance in late twentieth-century Japan. Certainly “*ojōsama-ishiki*” (a sense of being a proper lady) must be strong at TIC, but the 90 per cent job rate on graduating complicates a simple notion of aping upper-class manners. It is rather that TIC is a way of mainstreaming their identities and family background, which would repeat a familiar class dynamic of postwar Japan. These are manners for middle-class propriety and metropolitan sophistication, not upper-class refinement. (It would be of great interest to know, further, just how family location, felt identity, and household income status relate to their choice of TIC among junior colleges and of junior college among alternatives.)

Internationalization, TIC’s other image, has been a highly politicized theme of public talk for almost 20 years, and the college deploys this in required English-language classes, many foreign faculty, and short study-abroad programs. McVeigh claims, however, that the effect is perverse. Little active interest or progress is made in English language competence. Relying on Roy Andrew Miller’s caustic evaluations of foreign language teaching in Japan, McVeigh found that “learning English becomes a ritual, an academic rite of passage, by which Japanese students are socialized to have a Japanese identity vis-à-vis the linguistic Other” (p. 74). In the college’s yearbook, he notes, every non-Japanese faculty member is identified as “English instructor” no matter what subjects s/he taught. Internationalization, in demarcating an insider-outsider boundary, unwittingly (or perhaps for some, deliberately) reinforces a Japanese national identity at Takasu as elsewhere.

McVeigh’s accounts of the ceremonies and classroom activities of TIC make for vivid, if dismaying, reading (chapters six and seven). Entrance exams, freshman orientation, convocation, sports and culture festivals, the TIC Christmas party (an exotic dress-up affair at the Versailles Room of a local luxury hotel), and other events are exquisitely planned and carefully monitored. Beyond their particular themes, they are occasions to practice and perform ladylike forms of sitting, walking, dressing, and making polite talk. Japan Airlines (JAL) flight attendant trainers are brought in as motivational speakers, and JAL manuals are used in classroom materials.

Behind this ceremonialization is an “ethno-morality” of two related tenets: one’s demeanor and comportment shape internal states of being and belief, and one’s behavior can create and sustain the social forms of occasions and relationships. That is, feeling follows form; as one of the JAL manuals advised girls, when feeling depressed, “look into a mirror and form a smile with your eyes and mouth. Mysteriously, as you look at your own smile, a feeling of cheerfulness gradually grows. Forgetting your own un-

happiness, the smile seen in the mirror then becomes the real thing: a vivid, warm, facial expression" (p. 160). And forms make frames: if everyone dresses up in kimono and acts as she should in a banquet decorated appropriately, then a Christmas party will be produced. One is treated as one presents oneself, and learning to be presentable (polite, pliant, and perky) will assure success in the job and marriage markets to come.

McVeigh's descriptions of these and other rituals and routines of TIC life are themselves informed and engaging, but the larger question of the book is equally provocative. How best should we theorize the socialization by which these particular pedagogical aims are pursued, or, as he puts it early on, what is "the relationship between practice, body, self, and knowledge acquisition"?

His answer brings together several strands of analysis. The first draws on Erving Goffman's work on the theatricality of social life. In training the body, one is inhabiting a role, and the presentation of self is artful stagecraft. The second strand is a particular take on what is often called embodiment; McVeigh aims to examine "the way in which experiences of the body build categories of the mind," a quote he draws from the anthropologist Elaine Combs-Schilling (p. 13). This is surely a key to what is significant about TIC, but it strikes me as unhelpful to cast this argument in the context of a rather broad indictment of anthropology and Western philosophy for still being trapped in artificial, dualistic separation of mind and body, belief and behavior, unable to appreciate the mind-body indivisible (see especially chapters 2 and 10). He mentions in passing some like-minded anthropologists, of Japan and elsewhere, but they deserve much more careful attention—as does the work of many others who have traced the connections, both literal and figurative, between the physical body, the "social body," and the body politic. Indeed, part of the sophistication of the anthropology of education and of selfhood in Japan has been the demonstration of just such a point of view.

Finally, McVeigh is influenced by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu to show how these body experiences are in turn shaped by structures of power, not just of higher education but of the larger societal order. "The total participation of the individual (i.e., bodily, emotionally, cognitively, etc.) in sociopolitically determined forms of action—along with concomitant practices—socializes and builds cognitive patterns" (p. 119). He does not claim this managed socialization of subjectivity is entirely and deviously designed. At least the proximate agents of instruction are not fully aware of the larger structures that are being reproduced. But the book is a vehement critique of Japanese education as state-managed technocratic training and sorting, to the severe detriment of humanistic teaching and learning.

McVeigh is not so naïve to claim that such domination is seamless and uncontested. He points to several of the unresolved tensions in the hidden

curriculum of manners and morality. For instance, the two broad rubrics themselves, becoming ladylike and becoming international, suggest paradoxical imperatives for students; notions of a demurely passive Japanese sophisticate are at least complicated by their images of free and liberated Western women. And despite the generally conformist opinions and collusive behavior of the students he profiles in chapter 8, he does not suggest a completely hoodwinked student body moving in decorous lockstep through appointed paces: "Participation does not necessarily mean acceptance or espousal of the norms highlighted by the social action. Nevertheless, participants do acquire a sense of what is expected of them socially and these expectations constitute knowledge that may be used in the future" (p. 119; see also his account of student karaoke, pp. 141–43). Yet it is precisely this acknowledgment that calls into question the radical nondualism of mind and body that he stridently insists upon. Indeed, he himself slips into dichotomies such as "I-me identified" and "I-me separated" in describing student karaoke (p. 142) and elsewhere. This is not surprising. Recent graduates of TIC are now pouring tea and making copies in corporate offices throughout Tokyo. But maybe a few are working at Tōzai Bank, where the sociologist Yuko Ogasawara found widespread cynicism and playful subversion of the male office order among the OLs. Many adopt the fads and fashions of stylized "cuteness," which so fascinate and disturb their male colleagues and bosses.² And more than a few may be among the one-third of Tokyo women remaining single into their thirties.

McVeigh is right to insist on the power of the lessons at and of TIC—about outer forms and inner feelings and social frames. They can imprint themselves, often below the threshold of self-awareness, as categories of thought and structures of feeling through the routinization of body dispositions. They can make certain options seem natural, even desirable—an OL job, a white-collar husband, a two-generation mortgage. But a radical dissolution of the mental into the physical would be as mistaken as a radical separation because it forecloses any formulation of agency. Perhaps that is why JAL manuals are not catalogued in the social science section of the library.

2. Yuko Ogasawara, *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese Companies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). See also Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, eds., *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), pp. 220–54.