

# Education Reform in Post-War Japan: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Policies, Impact, and Historical Context (1945–1952)

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## Article Information

## Abstract

### Keywords:

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Women's Education,  
Historical Context.

This academic study examines the profound educational reforms that took place in post-war Japan from 1945 to 1952. The paper focuses on the transformative impact of the United States Education Mission on the Japanese education system during the Allied Occupation. The overarching objective of these reforms was to establish a democratic educational framework encompassing changes in administration, curriculum, textbooks, and teacher performance. This study sheds light on the historical context, policy implementation, and societal responses to these reforms. Additionally, it explores issues related to women's higher education during this transformative era, providing a comprehensive analysis of a pivotal chapter in Japan's history.

### Kata kunci:

Reformasi Pendidikan,  
Kekuatan Pendudukan,  
Demokratisasi Pendidikan,  
Pendidikan Perempuan,  
Konteks Sejarah.

### Abstrak

Studi akademis ini meneliti reformasi pendidikan yang mendalam yang terjadi di Jepang pascaperang dari tahun 1945 hingga 1952. Makalah ini berfokus pada dampak transformatif dari Misi Pendidikan Amerika Serikat terhadap sistem pendidikan Jepang selama masa pendudukan Sekutu. Tujuan utama dari reformasi ini adalah untuk membangun kerangka kerja pendidikan yang demokratis yang mencakup perubahan dalam administrasi, kurikulum, buku teks, dan kinerja guru. Penelitian ini menyoroti konteks historis, implementasi kebijakan, dan tanggapan masyarakat terhadap reformasi ini. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga mengeksplorasi isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan pendidikan tinggi perempuan selama era transformatif ini, memberikan analisis yang komprehensif tentang bab penting dalam sejarah Jepang.

## INTRODUCTION

The distinctive characteristic of the Islamic education curriculum is the social element or, primarily, an Islamic education that seeks to equip a learner with a social period based on religion so that as a result it can help him to adapt well where the community he is in (Elmali-Karakaya, 2022; McKernan, 1996). As for realizing it is through learning methods. The learning method is a method used to implement a plan that has been designed in real activities to achieve a goal well in activities that involve several individuals both a teacher and a student (Jannah, Rodliyah, & Usriyah, 2023; Rapanta, Botturi, Goodyear, Guardia, & Koole, 2020). Learning methods are ways that contain standardized procedures for carrying

out educational activities, especially the activity of presenting the subject matter to students (Alwehaibi, Bikdash, Albogmi, & Roy, 2022). Meanwhile, the lesson method contains a teaching style that is significantly influenced by the teacher's way of providing information that has been owned.

In the aftermath of World War II, Japan witnessed a profound transformation of its educational system between 1945 and 1952. This period marked a critical juncture for the nation's post-war recovery and reconstruction. Central to this transformation was the pivotal role played by the United States Education Mission, which exerted considerable influence in reshaping Japan's educational landscape. The overarching goal of these reforms was to establish a new democratic educational framework.

Notably, these reforms encompassed multifaceted changes, incorporating alterations in administration, curriculum, textbooks, and teacher performance, all of which were aimed at realigning Japanese education with democratic principles. This study delves into the intricate tapestry of post-war educational reform in Japan, spanning the years from 1945 to 1952. The examination of this critical period sheds light on the broader societal and political shifts occurring within Japan. Within this larger context, the study also directs a particular focus on aspects of women's higher education during this transformative era.

While the specific research objectives and questions have yet to be explicitly delineated in the initial search results, this research paper aims to fill this void by offering a comprehensive analysis of the educational reform initiatives and their implications for gender-inclusive higher education.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to provide a detailed account of the metamorphosis of Japan's educational system and the enduring impact of the educational reforms spearheaded by the U.S. occupation forces following World War II. Moreover, the study presents a unique opportunity to examine the challenges and opportunities faced by women in their pursuit of higher education during this transformative period.

The research design employed in this study primarily hinges on narrative historical research, buttressed by an interpretive approach. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of the complex historical context surrounding post-war educational reforms in Japan. As for sources, the study draws extensively from historical documents, official reports, and relevant academic literature. These sources collectively contribute to a comprehensive and well-rounded exploration of the subject matter. With meticulous diligence and a dedication to professionalism, this study aims to illuminate a pivotal chapter in Japan's history, shedding light on the intersection of education, democracy, and gender equity during a time of profound societal change.

## **Historical Background**

After a grueling three-year war in the Pacific, the U.S., which was led by General Douglas MacArthur, defeated the Japanese Imperial army. The powers granted to General MacArthur as commander-in-chief of the occupying power in Japan were spelled out in the official statement of the Authority of General MacArthur as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers on September 6, 1945, based on the following three points:

First, the subordination of the authority of the Emperor and the Japanese government to the Supreme Commander, who has full freedom to exercise his powers as he deems appropriate to conduct his mission, means our relations with Japan are not based on a contractual rule but on unconditional surrender (MacArthur, 1945). Second, full control over Japan and the implementation of occupation policies using the Japanese government as the executor of the directives of the Supreme Commander so that convincing results can be reached. However, this does not mean that the Supreme Commander is prevented from acting directly whenever he finds it necessary, including his right to use force (O.J.P.P., 1946). Third, there is a need to give the Potsdam warning full importance in letter and spirit because it is part of U.S. policy about Japanese activity as well as peace and security in the Far East (N.D.L, 1945).

Through these broad powers granted to him by the U.S. government, General MacArthur began to organize his authority in Japan, seeking to leave no doubt that he was the leader. He began his authoritarian grasp with the creation of the General Headquarters and its various sections. To elaborate, the general headquarters were divided into two main sections. The first section was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), which was given immense importance as the de facto organizer of the implementation of the occupation policy and the planning of parts not covered by U.S. orders and directives (Finn, 1992). The second section is the Far East General Headquarters, whose purpose is to organize the Allied military forces in the Far East.

The General Headquarters was divided into several categories. The Economic and Scientific Section, the Department of Civil Information and Education, the Natural Resources Section, and the Department of Welfare and Public Health were just some of the categories that the General Headquarters focused on in the development of education, science, finance, and health in Japan. Also, other sections were initiated to fixate on certain topics such as internal security, law, diplomacy, and statistical data. Another notable division was the Government Department, which supervised the internal structure of the Japanese government and took care of diet, parties, and political matters (O.J.P.P., 1946).

With these divisions, the occupation of Japan became a pure American pledge in style and direction, especially since all the occupation forces were Americans (Hilgenberg Jr., 1993). These forces were estimated at two hundred thousand soldiers, increasing, and decreasing according to different circumstances (O.J.P.P., 1946; Willoughby & Chamberlain, 1954). Additionally, there was a small force of the British Commonwealth, specifically the Australian army, placed under the instruction of the Supreme Commander (Wood, 1998). Note that the Soviet Union refused to participate in any forces placed under American command, while China's large military force was not used in any military operations inside Japan. It was a deterrent force ready to be used in emergencies (Finn, 1992).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Occupation Policies and Their Impact on Japanese Society**

The Japanese Empire was implicitly regarded as a state, Shinto Kokka Shintō, although imperial legislation provided for the separation of church and state, influenced by the conservative German School of Monarchic Constitutional Law (Pittau, 1967). The initial U.S. Post-Surrender Policy of September 6, 1945, prepared by the U.S. Departments of State,

War, and Navy and sent to Commander MacArthur, makes it mandatory to suspend all members of the Imperial Command, the General Staff, the Army, and Navy commanders. Similarly, nationalist leaders and members of military organizations were also suspended. All persons who have been active advocates of militarism and ultra-nationalism must be removed from public office and from any other positions of great private and public responsibility. Furthermore, U.S. policy called for the dissolution of all institutions and associations that advocate aggressive nationalism or militarization of society, and the education system must be purified of military and nationalist ideas and practices, including paramilitary training. With the removal of all advocates of intolerance from positions of supervision and education (N.D.L, 1945).

In defiance of this prevailing custom, the occupying power issued the Shinto Directive on December 15, 1945, to spread the Western concept of religious freedom (Directive T. S., 1945). This notion aims to abolish discriminatory laws based on religious foundations while proclaiming religious freedom for all and entrenching the concept of the humanity of the emperor's person in the minds of the Japanese people (Aduard, 1953). Over time, Shintoism has become a powerful nationalist spirit. It can be said that there is a living national spirit in the hearts of all Japanese, so the directive canceled the fact that Shintoism is the official religion of the country, prohibited religious education in schools, and most importantly, prevented the promotion of the idea of the Emperor of Japan by the rest of the leaders of nations and the attribution of divinity to him (Schonberger, 1953).

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importantly, prevented the promotion of the idea of the Emperor of Japan by the rest of the leaders of nations and the attribution of divinity to him (Schonberger, 1953)..

### **Japanese Education System Pre- and Post-War**

Education reform in Japan was a top priority for the occupation authorities, even if it was imposed, as the imperial education system was the product of Japanese militarism and ultra-nationalist propaganda supporting it (Lagotte, 2006). From the Meiji era to the end of World War II, the education system raised Japanese generations on the Kokotai principle, which was based on the old Confucian Shinto idea of family principles (Pittau, 1967). At the heart of Japanese ideology was the cult of the emperor, who was seen as the head of the family – the state *kokka kozuku* family nation.

Therefore, in the application of imperial desire and in line with right-wing thought, the Ministry of Education issued a booklet called Kokutai no Hongi in March 1937, and millions of copies were quickly printed and published in the Japanese islands and the rest of the empire's colonies. Immediately, the text became mandatory in the subject of national education as it included the official education subject of the Japanese state regarding domestic politics, foreign relations, as well as cultural and civilizational affairs (Beasley, 1963).

The concept of Japanese uniqueness was emphasized. What is Japanese uniqueness? Simply put, the “Japanese Uniqueness” idea highlighted the various Japanese activities that were ethnically, culturally, and socially homogeneous and distinct from Westerners and Asians alike (Dale, 1993). Hence, Kokutai was an apt expression to refer to the political and racial uniqueness of the Japanese nation, which is at the same time superior to all the nations of the earth (Miller, 1982).

During the war, teachers were obliged to serve in the military for five months before starting education to absorb the military spirit. At the same time, officers were sent to public schools to plant a military nature in the classroom (Schoppa, 1993). Confucian thought formed the basis of educational policy during the war, where Japanese history was taught (Khan, 1997). Chronicle of Japan Nihon Shoki says that Japan is the land of emperors and that it is a nation like no other, focusing on the legitimacy and eternity of imperial rule. The ideology of the educational system described professors as the emperor's servants, urging students to courageously give their lives for the nation (Schoppa, 1993).

Eighteen million Japanese students were waiting for the unknown, while four thousand schools were destroyed. Furthermore, education could be conducted with only 20% of teaching supplies, including books, to the point that there was no longer an educational structure (Beauchamp, 1991). The Japanese authorities' initial action was to try to reopen the remaining schools with the abolition of curricula that advocated nationalism and encouraged militarism. Likewise, military academies were closed, and their students transferred to civilian schools (Beauchamp & Vardman, 1994). Therefore, on September 12, 1945, students were allowed to study in schools near their place of residence. In rural areas, agricultural work was considered due to Japan's food crisis, and students were asked to participate in agricultural production. School administrations were also asked to use public buildings such as temples, clubs, and military barracks as educational centers (School Education, 1945).

This was followed on September 15, 1945, with the definition of the innovative approach as educational policies different from the past to contribute to building a new nation that seeks peace and human development after evaluating the educational system and developing a new system from which military concepts are eradicated. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education has abolished all military education curricula and associated research centers. Moreover, it was decided that it was necessary to develop plans for the retraining and rehabilitation of teachers and returnees. The country of soldiers and staff, taking into account the enrichment of the cultural level of the masses through art, music, cinema, and theater, must also focus on religious concepts that respect the individual and tolerance among human beings, strive towards work for peace, and promote friendship between religions and their adherents in the world (Education, 1945). Thus, the occupation authorities issued directive AG350 on October 31, relieving all teachers who are supporters of militarism, advocates of extreme nationalism, and opponents of the existence of the occupation from their teaching positions, losing their positions either by dismissal or even voluntary resignation to avoid accountability (Brinkman, 1954; Kobayashi, 1978).

For its part, the US government, through the Joint Coordination Committee of the Departments of War, Navy, and State SWNCC, sent a report to the Supreme Commander on January 8, 1946, that included an explanation of the reality of education in Japan and multiple recommendations to change it. The report stressed that most Japanese, to varying degrees, share a single intellectual position based on feudal concepts such as classism, glorification of the military, and obedience to authority. They are also racists who are hostile to everything foreign, although they seek access to all things. The material progress made by foreigners at the technological level (State-War Navy Coordinating Subcommittee for the Far East, 1946).

Therefore, the achievement of the US goals of the occupation cannot be guaranteed without radical changes in these ideologies and ways of thinking that led the Japanese people in the past to adopt militaristic chauvinism. It has become necessary to reconstruct all the concepts that underpin Japanese culture while implanting concepts that lead to new mentalities consistent with the basic principles of democracy. It is more effective that change be made through the Japanese authorities and their leaders. To ensure this occurrence, the Allied authority must seek people qualified to play this role to guarantee the success of the most challenging task of building a peaceful Japanese generation.

### **American Influence on Japanese Education**

The rebuilding of culture and thought should not be limited to reforming the formal education system but should extend to the rehabilitation of young people. Appropriate plans must be made to reach the minds and hearts of the Japanese through every available channel, such as newspapers, magazines, cinema, radio, lectures, schools, and universities. These programs must be carefully designed to ensure maximum responsiveness and acceptance from the Japanese. It is important to encourage Japanese people to develop the concept of individuality, which will gradually lead to the reorganization of the Japanese political system. It is self-evident that the only effective political reform is that which emanates from the people themselves, as the reform imposed by any occupying power will

either be resisted by the people or will be ignored. The U.S. policy must be designed to make our ideas a demand of the Japanese themselves through a comprehensive reorganization of the Japanese people and their concepts.

The report praised the Japanese people as illiterate and aware of the importance of education, so by exploiting the new educational system, the U.S. would make the Japanese accept the process of ideological reorientation by presenting it properly, and one of the most effective means to achieve this goal was to introduce them to the outside world. The program should be generalized with the aim that the Japanese can continue it after the withdrawal by encouraging the participation of local organizations. This program should be a top priority and must be supported to achieve U.S. goals.

The General Headquarters responded by issuing a directive on October 22, 1945, with the need to immediately abolish militarism and extreme nationalism from education and the need to purge educators who played a role in spreading Japanese aggression. To elaborate on this context, religious education must be separated from systematic education, and the teaching of moral philosophy, history, and geography must cease because they contain colonial content and ideas contrary to democracy. Likewise, the national student body should be abolished and replaced by local youth organizations (Education, 1945).

In early 1946, an American academic mission of twenty-seven experts in the field of education arrived to radically change the Japanese educational system. In April 1946, it submitted its report to the General Headquarters with the aim of a comprehensive reform of education, which contains several recommendations (Beauchamp, 1991).

Numerous recommendations were presented to the General Headquarters regarding education reform in Japan. Adding social activities, developing the Japanese language using Latin characters, encouraging scientific competition among students, and appointing educational departments from within the educational structure were just a few examples of these recommendations. The transformation of the education curriculum from indoctrination to knowledge acquisition and interactive participation was another suggestion for educational development. Besides the previous ideas, the abolition of the custom of prostrating the image of the emperor in schools and the termination of central control over schools were further expert commendations presented to the General Headquarters. Finally, the suggestions also encompassed gender equality, where it was requested to offer equal opportunities for education to all females.

The most prominent axis was the amendment of the old educational curriculum from six years in the primary education stage, followed by five years in the secondary stage, and then three years in university education (6, 5, 3) to 6-3-3-4, where the primary stage remains six years while the second educational stage is divided into a three-year preparatory phase, followed by the secondary stage for three years, so that the university stage becomes four years to make the educational system a lever and a curriculum for programming scientific standards. Additionally, changes included the implementation of cooperative educational methods and teaching social sciences to introduce the Japanese people to the rest of the world's people and their diverse cultures (Trainor, 1983).

In turn, the US State Department prepared a study to modify the Japanese education system, in which it stressed that the primary goal of education should be to prepare a democratic nation through adherence to the responsibilities of freedom, consolidation of the

concept of individual freedom, and development of an independent personality while respecting the rights of others, the sanctity of both individual and national commitments in all human relations, and the assertion that the Japanese themselves should modify their educational system in light of these concepts for the benefit of their country first as well as world peace (U.S. Department of State Revision of the Japanese Education System, 1947).

### **Japanese Response and Adaptation**

On August 5, 1946, the Japanese Parliament adopted the Reconstruction of Japanese Education project and referred it to the government, which issued on March 29, 1947, the Basic Education Law based on the recommendations of the report of the American academic mission and the directives of the study of the US Department of State (Thomas, 1985; School Education Law, 1947).

The main concepts of the Basic Education Law included replacing the existing 6.5.3 education system with a 6.3.3.4 system. Also, this legislation validated the rights of people with disabilities to pursue an education and ensured free and compulsory education throughout the primary and middle educational phases. Furthermore, the law authorized the distribution of educational supervision power through elected governorates and municipal councils. Moreover, competitive examinations for university placements at the last stage of secondary school were certified by the Basic Education Law. Finally, the law legalized denying education only to individuals who called to overthrow the new Japanese constitution.

In line with this law, the Ministry of Education announced the curriculum in the same year, which was a plan based on several criteria. This plan was used to clarify the general lines of teaching materials and teaching methods. It was decided to prepare a study strategy based on the individual initiative of teachers. From this, teacher training became part of the competence of universities and not specialized vocational schools, which represented an independent curriculum of higher education (Trainor, 1983).

This was followed in 1947 by the formation of the Japan Teacher Union, “Nihon Kyoshokuin Kumiai” (Duke, 1964). Japanese educators quickly accepted these concepts without reservation, finding them an appropriate entry point to reformulate the culture that previously focused on glorifying expansionist wars and currently accepts concepts of peace and international cooperation. All these systemic changes to the Japanese educational system were the product of an American occupation power that sought to introduce its concepts against local traditionalism (Feinberg, 1993).

As part of the educational reform, Americans tried to interfere with the way the Japanese language was written by replacing the four traditional characters: Kanji, Hiragana, Katakana, and Romaji with the Hepburn System as a Romanization system (Nishiguchi, 2021). However, they failed for political and national reasons, the most important of which was the attachment of the Japanese to their language. Other reasons were primarily linguistic, which prevented the possibility of communication and understanding what was meant in the absence of a written system.



### **Outcomes and Legacy**

With the beginning of the practical application of the Basic Education Law, new obstacles arose, such as the need to interpret a clear meaning of freedom because of the excessive misinterpretation of this concept. This was accompanied by a decline in public morals and a loss of respect for the traditions of the nation due to the misinterpretation of the idea of progress, the spread of political partisanship among university students, and the noticeable backwardness in the quality of culture. These alarming results made raising the efficiency of teachers necessary, so a committee of senior officials was formed. This committee contains Japanese education specialists who are linked to the Prime Minister's Office and founded the Education Reform Council to align Japanese traditions with Western modernity (Yoshida, 1961).

The teaching methodology was the second goal of the occupying power, as the core of the Japanese education curriculum was to instill the *Kokutai no Hongi* "spirit and the memory of Japanese history in the minds" of younger generations. The educational system included the cultivation of the military spirit in teaching, training, and the scientific branches. Therefore, the Americans introduced their educational system, which the Japanese benefited from by abolishing subjects and institutes with military characteristics and modifying the old educational curriculum from 6-5-3 to 6.3.3.4, to make the educational system a lever and a method for programming scientific standards. Also, the U.S. strategy of cooperative education and teaching social sciences was to introduce the Japanese people to worldwide communities and their diverse cultures instead of seeking to colonize them. The goal of the Japanese authorities was the self-advancement of their people by modernizing and raising the level of education for their citizens and not submitting to the dictates of the foreign occupier.

We note that the Japanese people responded to the educational and religious reforms imposed by the occupying power by adopting the "Jakuryo Puroguramu" system to preserve the Japanese Shinto tradition in the face of Westernization.

With Shidihara taking office, he announced his government's program, which included encouraging democratic practices, solving the food problem, helping war victims and demobilized soldiers, and reorganizing education, media, and industry (Atcheson, 1945). Preserving ethics through the development of education with an emphasis on cultural heritage standards (P.R.J.S.S., 1949) Thus, we conclude that the Japanese authorities and their people understood the repercussions of the defeat and the dictates of the occupation and were able to manage the crisis by limiting concessions under the circumstances of falling under the authority of the occupier and striving for a better tomorrow for Japanese generations while preserving their national specificity.

The post-World War II era in Japan witnessed a transformative process of demilitarization, with the educational landscape emerging as a crucial arena for change. This period, spanning from 1945 to 1952, saw the dismantling of military influence and the establishment of a more democratic, inclusive educational system. This interdisciplinary analysis delves into key findings, policy recommendations, and future research directions, shedding light on the profound impact of education reform during this critical juncture.

## CONCLUSION

**Curricular Changes:** The curriculum underwent substantial revisions during this period, reflecting a deliberate move towards democratic principles, human rights, and civic education. Nationalistic content, once prevalent, was expunged, paving the way for a curriculum that emphasized individualism and critical thinking. This transformation aimed to nurture a generation of citizens with a broader, more informed worldview.

**Demilitarization of Education:** Post-World War II, Japan underwent a profound shift away from militarization in its education system. Military influence was systematically removed, marking a departure from the wartime emphasis on nationalist indoctrination. The restructuring aimed to foster a democratic and inclusive ethos within educational institutions.

**Equal Access to Education:** Policies were enacted to ensure equal access to education for all citizens. These initiatives targeted the elimination of discrimination based on gender and socioeconomic status, fostering a commitment to creating a more egalitarian and meritocratic society. The goal was to dismantle barriers and provide equal educational opportunities for all.

**International Influence:** Occupation forces, particularly from the United States, played a pivotal role in shaping the post-war educational landscape in Japan. The influence of these external actors underscored a global approach to rebuilding Japan, emphasizing democratic values and progressive educational philosophies.

**Role of Teachers:** The role of teachers underwent a fundamental evolution during this period. From being conduits for government ideology, educators became facilitators of critical thinking. Professional development programs were introduced to equip teachers with innovative pedagogical approaches, empowering them to cultivate independent thought among their students.

## Recommendation

**Civic Engagement:** Investigating the role of education in fostering civic engagement and democratic values among successive generations is essential. Understanding how educational reforms influenced the civic consciousness of individuals contributes to a deeper comprehension of the societal impact of these changes.

**Comparative Studies:** Undertaking comparative studies with other post-conflict nations provides an opportunity to identify transferable lessons and best practices. Such research enhances the understanding of how education can contribute to the reconstruction and development of societies emerging from conflict.

**Globalization and Education:** Examining the effects of globalization on Japanese education and identifying strategies to prepare students for a globalized world is a pressing research direction. This includes evaluating the adaptability of the education system to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by an interconnected world.

**Long-term Impact Assessment:** Conducting longitudinal studies is imperative to assess the enduring impact of post-war education reforms on Japanese society. This includes examining economic outcomes, social cohesion, and political participation to gauge the lasting influence of the restructured educational system.

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