ABSTRACT

Understanding *Futōkō* as a Social Problem in Japan:
The Social Context and Motivation for Change

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Futōkō is a growing social issue in Japan in which students experience so much anxiety from the school environment that they become physically unable to attend, regardless of their intentions. There is much conflict behind the framing of this issue by society, academia, the media, and the government, each of which have competing interpretations about responsibility for the problem and appropriate responses to it. Reform efforts motivated in part by *futōkō* focus mainly on either economic interests or progressive moralist values, but there is a gap between the rhetoric and actual change resulting from political and ideological conflicts. Options available to children struggling with *futōkō* at present include counseling or *free-schools* (institutions independent from the state-mandated system), and the perspectives found within the latter are strikingly different from those reflected by the discourses, representing an inclusive, child-based approach to education that may hold valuable concepts for society as a whole.

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UNDERSTANDING *FUTŌKŌ* AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM IN JAPAN:

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION FOR CHANGE

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Dedicated to all those who have ever been afraid to be themselves.

花屋の店先に並んだ
いろんな花を見ていた
ひとそれぞれ好みはあるけど
どれもみんなきれいだね
この中で誰が一番だなんて
争うこともしないで
バケツの中誇らしげに
しゃんと胸を張っている
– 槇原敬之

CHAPTER ONE

Definitions and Discourses for *Futōkō* Today

In this thesis, I intend to consider the presence of *futōkō* as a social problem in relation to Japanese society. *Futōkō* on a basic understanding simply denotes students who do not attend school, but viewed as a social problem it refers to children who have developed an actual phobia and *cannot* attend school without suffering physical illness due to the high level of anxiety the experience causes (行きたいのに、行けないという場合). To properly discuss this problem, I will begin in this first chapter by carefully considering the definition of the topic itself, which is disagreed upon by different discourses within Japan, along with how the terminology applied has shifted over time. I will then continue by analyzing how *futōkō* has developed as a social problem, and how it has been viewed by society throughout this process. The underlying beliefs about the nature of education and society that often arise in literature regarding *futōkō*, which are essential in understanding the perspective and motivation of the arguments, next serve as a lens through which I consider the wider Japanese perceptions (what prominent Japanese academic and social critic Shoko Yoneyama refers to as the "sociological *milieu*") (80). Following discussion of these foundational attributes of the Japanese view on society, I address what is being done in response to the *futōkō* problem, and how this compares to similar social problems in other countries. Throughout I will discuss the results of my own primary research conducted while living in Tokyo,

Japan, in the form of interviews and surveys with the goal of using these recent, first-hand accounts to verify or challenge the conclusions precipitated by the literature that informs the chapters. I often include the Japanese *kanji* for specific terms and concepts unique to Japanese culture so as to more accurately indicate the particular word or idea being referenced without the uncertainty of using only translated terms, though English equivalents or explanations are also included.

Through this thesis, I will endeavor to illuminate the complex relationships between the *futōkō* discourses and Japanese society, guided by the following questions. The first, "How is *futōkō* defined both substantively and with relation to terminology?" will be addressed in this first chapter, and the second, "What characteristics and causes are attributed to it, and where have these perceptions come from?" will also been touched upon. Moving forward I will continue to consider the following: How and in what social environments have the primary discourses regarding *futōkō* formed? What role do the Japanese institutions, including the educational system and the government, play in terms of defining, responding to, or perhaps causing *futōkō*? Does the unique Japanese character, including a tendency to favor conformity, have a part in causing *futōkō*? And lastly, what solutions are being enacted to address the situations of these children, who despite their youth have already concluded either consciously or involuntarily (through their body's physical rejection of the experience), that they cannot function within the boundaries society has set for them? I will endeavor to provide a balanced response to these questions based on my own experience, primary

research in the form of interviews and surveys, and significant literature-based research on the subject.

1.1 Development of the Terminology

In order to give the reader a more full understanding of the discussion in later chapters, and of the significance of the use of one particular term over another by myself and other academics, I open this examination of *futōkō* as a social problem by tracing the history of the vocabulary used to refer to the issue. A range of words have been applied at different times in the development of thought on *futōkō,* and each of them implies a different outlook held by the speaker on the nature of the problem, often primarily regarding the degree of agency held by the child.

Katsunobu Shimizu claims that, "throughout modern Japanese history, the issue of long-term non-attendance at school has been a recurring theme of discussion on education and society," indicating the multiple occasions on which the issue has become a social "hot topic," early in the 1950s, during the mid-1960s, and again in the mid-1980s (165). He continues to point out that while there are a range of terms for related and sometimes overlapping concepts, "in Japan, the various terms have tended to succeed each other rather than to coexist," allowing a particular term to act as a specific reference to a conceptualization of the issue at a given time, in contrast to the conceptualization of the same issue later in the discourse progression (165).

In his discussion of the roots of the issue, academic Keiichi Nakayama states that, "historically, the concept of not attending school was first discussed by Broadwin (1932), and was considered as a result of fearfulness and anxiety" (109).

This observation serves as confirmation that the *futōkō* issue was present in Japanese society as early as the 1930s, though it had not yet been framed as a social problem, and so had little developed academic thought to represent or define it, at least until the 1950s at which point the "standard term" became simply "long-term absence (*chōki kesseki*)" (Shimizu 169). Compared to later terms, this phrasing is very direct, with few connotations to potentially skew responsibility towards one party or another, something which would become a problem later and eventually cause certain terms to be intentionally phased out. The first part, *chōki* (長期), means literally a long period of time, while the second, *kesseki* (欠席), means a "lacking seat" or described more naturally, absence.

Concurrently, during the 1940s and 1950s, non-attendance was intermittently described as a phobia, *kyōfushō* (恐怖症), and also as resistance, *tōkōkyohi* (登校拒否), both of which bear heavier implications than the previous term (Nakayama 109). The first of these, *kyōfushō* (恐怖症), combines characters for terror and illness, implying that the fear behind children's inability to attend school indicated a disorder of some nature with the child himself. The second, *tōkōkyohi* (登校拒否), takes the word for attendance, *tōkō* (登校), and pairs it with one meaning to reject or defend against, *kyohi* (拒否). This term, then, takes what society perceived to be the same act and colors it with shades of willful resistance.

We now have a spectrum from which the child who finds himself unable to meet the demands of school may be framed either as a truant, a damaged individual with psychological problems, or a delinquent willfully resisting the guidance of

authority (Yoneyama 91). Yet, the details of students falling into this non-attendance category vary so widely in terms of causes and motivations, that this judgmental framework cannot avoid misrepresenting the actual situation, especially considering that authors on the issue tended to utilize only the term most prevalent at the time, applying it to all within the non-attendance category (Shimizu 167).

Authors Sumi, Tamai, and Kobayashi in particular used the term *gakko kyōfushō* in their work during the 1960s, but Nakayama notes that "teachers and parents were uncomfortable with the application of the term of phobia" which led to the term *tōkōkyohi* being used to represent the way in which the "phenomenon is regarded as social impairment rather than psychiatric disorder" (109). Therefore from the 1960s until movements that resulted in a terminology change took hold, *tōkōkyohi* was the primary label applied (Shimizu 169). The views that formed behind this label nontheless included a psychological aspect, as "school non-attendance increasingly drew the attention of child psychiatrists, who believed that the children had pathological problems requiring special treatment" (Shimizu 168). It was reported that the "first school refusal patient was treated in 1957" at a clinic run by researchers Honji, Kasahara, and Ohtaka, and there is also a wealth of literature in Japanese that discusses *tōkōkyohi* as having a basis in certain disruptions of the circadian rhythm and other biological or psychological aspects (Nakayama 109). However, in the late 1980s, perception shifted as it came to light in part through the media that the children affected by non-attendance were not initially outliers – those with particularly defiant attitudes or a distinct lack of social adjustment – but ordinary children who were unable to attend for reasons difficult

to pin down, "giving way to the view that any child might refuse to attend school" and universalizing concerns (Shimizu 168).

Thus, as sympathy for children in such situations began to grow in the 1980s a push for the use of the term *futōkō* (不登校), combining the previously explained term for attendance preceded by a negating character, in order to remove assumptions and negative connotations from discussions of the issue gained momentum (Shimizu 169). Hiroshi Inamura, an often cited researcher and author on *futōkō,* suggests that the formulation of this word is in fact a case of western influence: a direct adaptation of the English term "non-attendance" first used in a publication by Hersov in 1960 (Nakayama 108). Nakayama's first-hand research on the term *"futōkō"* via "the National Diet Library of Japan, *zasshi kiji sakuin* [Index of Magazines and Articles] from 1959 to present" shows that the first usage of the term occurred in 1970, while it did not come into common use until the 1990s, at which point there was a matching decrease in the usage of "*tōkōkyohi"* (109). Two principal causes for movements that headed this change included "the rising tide of activism by citizens" and "the influence of frequent media reports on problems within schools, such as 'violence of children towards teachers' (*kōnai boryoku*), 'bullying' (*ijime*), 'corporal punishment' (*taibatsu*), and so on" (Shimizu 168). In other words, it became clear to the public that the problem rested, to say the least, not in *futōkō* children alone, but also in the social environments they faced at school and the system they were subject to.

Furthermore, Nakayama justifies the continued use of the term *futōkō* itself to refer to the phenomenon even within western literature on the topic by

describing the particular qualities of the very specific discourse it belongs to. First, he points out that it has been identified primarily in the context of Japanese society, and so to use the Japanese term seems fitting. Secondly, the etiologies of the cases in Japan are likely to be unique from that in other countries, he claims, so to keep the term tied to studies of such cases is reasonable, regardless of the language in which the studies are presented. Lastly, it draws attention to the fact that *futōkō* is not "mere non-attendance, which could include truancy and sickness" but is a more complex response to social pressures which is due more careful consideration than labeling it as simple non-attendance would perhaps contribute to (Nakayama 108). Yoneyama's definition gives some indication of the complication behind the concept. She writes, "*Tōkōkyohi* refers to the situation in which students, on a long-term basis, cannot or do not go to school. Whether the refusal to go to school is intentional or not, *tōkōkyohi* students often show signs of excessive fatigue and exhaustion. They may also have symptoms such as stomach ache, headache, nausea, breathing difficulty and dizziness" (77). Yoneyama elects to use the *tōkōkyohi* term since she argues for a view of non-attendance as a kind of resistance by children (perhaps even unconsciously so) that indicates signs of distortion in the system that children sense as a threat to their individual being, so intensely that they experience a physical reaction (92). I will more closely consider such arguments later in the paper, but for now this brief description serves to illustrate the complexities of the arguments surrounding the *futōkō* issue.

1.2 Social Views of the Characteristics of Futōkō

To continue developing an image of what *futōkō* is perceived to be, I will now consider some of the basic assumptions held about *futōkō* children within society at large. Most simply, of course, *futōkō* children are those who "do not or cannot go to schools…although Japanese education is compulsory up to the ninth grade" (Nakayama 107). They have been "regarded as social dropouts" during early stages of the phenomenon's recognition, and this has become more layered as it has come to light that "there are students who are not intentionally refusing, but still cannot go to school" (Nakayama 118).

The 2001 definition from Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (abbreviated as either MEXT or MOE depending on the text) denotes *futōkō* as "a condition in which students do not or cannot go to school for more than thirty days in a school year because of psychological, emotional or physical problems, or social factors unrelated to sickness and/or economic reasons" (Nakayama 108). As this definition alludes, and Shimizu points out directly, the term *futōkō* "covers a range of behaviours described in the English-speaking world variously as 'absenteeism', 'truancy', 'school phobia' and 'school refusal'" (166) each of which has varied etiologies of its own. This results in the frequent claim that "youth problems often remain, as a form of collective behaviour, difficult to get a handle on" which accounts for the inclusion of a statement to that effect in the introduction of much of the literature on the topic (Toivonen 1). Conclusions held about such youth by the general public, then, cannot be taken as relevant to all or even most of the children in these situations, but tells us more about the public

consciousness and the way its perception informs the sociological framing of the issue, than about the children themselves.

To focus on those who cannot attend school, as the category most unique among the umbrella of *futōkō* related cases, Yoneyama gives a rundown of common attributes, which include, "(1) Severe difficulty in attending school – often amounting to prolonged absence. (2) Severe emotional upset – shown by such symptoms as excessive fearfulness, undue tempers, misery, or complaints of feeling ill on being faced with the prospect of going to school. (3) Staying at home with the knowledge of the parents, when they should be at school, at some stage in the course of the disorder. (4) Absence of significant anti-social disorders such as stealing, lying, wandering, destructiveness and sexual misbehaviour" (77). The last point is centrally important, in that it underlines that *futōkō* children of this category are *not* failing to attend school through willful or remotely delinquent motivations, which is a point that cannot be stressed enough in considering appropriate responses to the situation. When the term *futōkō* is applied in this paper it will refer exclusively to cases of this nature, unless quoted from another author. Those who do fail to attend school under reasons of their own volition belong in another category, with those acting out of intended resistance to the social system in which they find themselves representing the next most significant category, which will here be referred to with the *tōkōkyohi* term. Often it is the case, as in the concept of *tōkōkyohi* which Yoneyama argues for, that what develops into *tōkōkyohi* begins as *futōkō*, from which the student later gains the sense of self-assuredness which

allows him or her to assert views independent from and opposed to practices within the educational system (92).

Initially, however, "children cannot seem to explain why they have decided not to attend school. Apparently, many do not know themselves. What is clear is that they feel suppressed at school – and hassled at home too" (Kurita 301). This was exactly the case for one student I personally interviewed at the Seisa Institute of Education (星槎教育研究所) in Tokyo. When I asked her whether she felt non-attendance was a decision, she said that, "I felt really scared at that time, but I didn't know what I was scared of. Really, I didn't know, but I just didn't want to go." She continued to describe that at times after she had begun her *futōkō* she did feel that she wanted to return to school, but then she was afraid of the questions that she might have been faced with from fellow students and teachers who wanted to know the reasons she had failed to attend before – reasons that she herself was unsure of, and did not have a way to explain. She felt they would not be able to understand her, and she was afraid of being asked questions she had no answer for, so she found herself unable to attend. Yet, she also said that it took her the benefit of nearly ten years time to be able to reflect and pin down actual reasons that she had been averse to school.

As Yoneyama's points above indicate for *futōkō* students, the girl I interviewed had not been anti-social before her *futōkō*, and was not so even during that time. She described spending her days not shut away within the house, as in the case of *hikikomori*, a different social issue that is sometimes related, but outside at the park, library, store, or other ordinary places. There was something, then,

about the particular environment of school itself that caused her aversion. It cannot be dismissed as something caused simply by a socially maladjusted personality, since she still participated socially in other ways. Despite her remaining uncertainty over her previous *futōkō* experiences, she went so far as to describer herself as an outgoing person, and observed that she has benefited from the uncommon experiences she was able to have while pursuing life and education outside of school. She spent several years studying abroad in Australia following her *futōkō* in Japan, and does not see herself as at a disadvantage because of it. A significant portion of our interview was held in English, which to the contrary of social assumptions that depict *futōkō* students as lacking ability, reflected her mastery of language skills at a level *at least* on par with regular students within the educational system. This too serves as evidence that the reasons behind her *futōkō* were not a lack of ability or application, but something more complex related to the relationship between the student and the particular social environment of the school. She also stressed that even if the problem is addressed sympathetically, one cannot really understand *futōkō* students while they do not understand themselves, as the experience and the factors that drive it are intensely personal and individual. "You can try to understand them, so they know you are trying," she told me, "but it just takes time."

Yoneyama describes *tōkōkyohi* as having similar, if more dramatic roots, in which, "in the beginning, *tōkōkyohi* is an almost complete state of alienation, in which conscious understanding is utterly at odds with the way one's body registers the experience" (92). She describes the physical symptoms that *futōkō* children experience as being their body expressing the stress they are under before they

themselves can even recognize it as such. "The fact that students cannot explain their *tōkōkyohi*," she explains, "is not accidental, but a manifestation of the very nature of the problem. They are in a state of profound alienation" (92).

Kurita continues in this direction by discussing exactly the concern that had arisen in my interview. An increasing number of children, he writes, are becoming "victims of school phobia, rejecting school and refusing to venture outside their homes for fear of meeting schoolmates or teachers....They hide in their rooms, and no amount of pleading, cajoling, or threatening can get them out and into the classroom" (298). While the first part matches exactly the fears that came up in the interview, the second part differs. Kurita describes youth who do share more traits of those within the *hikikomori* category, not only avoiding the school environment, but society overall. It is cases such as these which lead to the perception of *futōkō* students as having "lower social communication skills and self-concepts than non-*futōkō* students" because, it is claimed, they usually stay at home, do not engage in much social interaction, and so do not have the chance to build the social communication skills expected of them (Nakayama 107).

These are the two primary social flaws ascribed to *futōkō* students by society: "lack of social communication skills" and "lack of a self-concept." Both of these are intimately tied to the Japanese perception of what society ought to be, and how the individual defines self, both of which will be addressed more fully in later chapters. Of the first, however, Nakayama explains that "*futōkō* students tend to be introverted and not good at asserting themselves," yet there is a degree of irony in the latter part of this complaint given that self-assertion is perhaps not often argued

to be a priority of the Japanese system's educational goals (113). The second claim also, that such students are not able to develop a self-concept, depends heavily on the way a "self-concept" is defined. Brinton comments on the importance of a "*ba*" or a social location through which one gains a place inside an "organization or bounded collective to which individuals belong and from which they derive a sense of identity" within Japanese society (3). She claims that it is "important for their material success in life and important also for their identity and sense of well-being" that a person has such a connection (Brinton 3), and it is just this which Nakayama is arguing *futōkō* youth lack. It could be argued, however, that a more independent sense of identity would lessen the need for such a definition by association, and so if *futōkō* youth are able to come to a re-defined, self-directed sense of identity as Yoneyama (77) discusses in the case of youth whose *futōkō* becomes conscious *tōkōkyohi*, this "lack of self-concept" as Nakayama would describe it, may not really pose a critical problem for them.

It is in part for this reason that some children struggling with *futōkō* in Japan are encouraged to gain experience in another country, and another society, by those within the modern institutions working to help them. One teacher and councilor at another school I visited, Keiyū Academy (恵友学園), recommended just this when I asked her what she thought the best response to children just beginning *futōkō* would be. "Sometimes I think it is not necessary for children who have experienced *futōkō* to stay in Japan," she said, "because there are more people who can accept and understand them outside of Japan rather than inside of Japan. So," she concluded, her advice summarized to, "go abroad or come to us." The question of

just where the problem in *futōkō* cases is based is still present in modern consideration of the issue, then, as it has been throughout the history of the topic. Within Japan, *futōkō* children are seen to be lacking certain traits that are considered necessary to be a functioning part of Japanese society, placing them at fault. Yet, if they are able to go abroad, they may find themselves within a different social structure in which they are not faced with the same disadvantages, suggesting that it is not the child himself who is unable to function, but rather, a perceived incompatibility with the particularities of Japanese society.

1.3 Variation of Causes and Impact on Definition

Even so, the details for each individual case cannot be so broadly concluded, and the actual causes and experiences for a student struggling with *futōkō* have always been many and varied. Shimizu writes that "long-term school absence had been open to a variety of interpretations in contemporary Japan" and the "wide variety of reasons for school non-attendance" has led to "difficult definitional problems that thereby arise" (166). Just what constitutes conditions like *futōkō* and *tōkōkyohi* is difficult to establish, and Yoneyama agrees, "there is much controversy over its definition, conceptualization and interpretation, as well as measures to counter it" (78). Researchers Hanatani and Takahashi approached this issue by developing five main categories of causes and eight of treatments; the prevalence of each of these from 1960-1997 is reflected below (see fig. 1) (Shimizu 168).

The figure displays each of the five identified categories as portions of a bar that represent the percentage of *futōkō* cases overall that it was considered to be responsible for. The line representing the "number of works reviewed" indicates

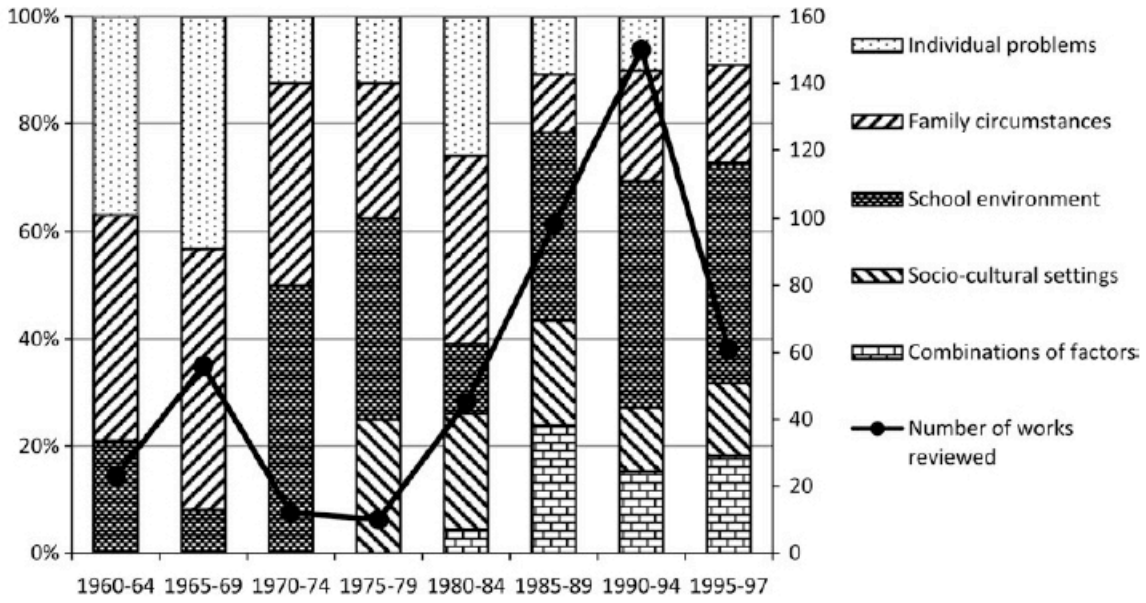


Figure 1. Discursive Trends Regarding Causes of Non-Attendance, 1960-1997
Source: Katsunobu Shimizu, "Defining and Interpreting Absence from School in Contemporary Japan," *Social Science Japan Journal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 168. Web.

the number of publications that discussed the issue during the relevant year. It is apparent that during the early stages, *futōkō* was framed as a problem of the individual and family, while recognition of the roles the school, education, and social systems held were largely overlooked until the 1970s. Furthermore it appears that the concept of *futōkō* as caused not simply by one entity or another (whatever it may be) but instead the cumulative effect of the child's environment, and the combination of factors therein, was not admitted as a significant cause until the mid-1980s.

The way in which the term *futōkō* is nonetheless often applied to all cases of non-attendance regardless of the causes behind it has "turned that word into a battle ground for rival interpretations" (Shimizu 167), and created a complex

"multivocal" symbol from it (Toivonen 21). That is, the term has become "multivocal" in that it has been "defined and employed differently by different social groups," and while these discourses are "not entirely coherent" given the range of disagreement between them, the types of arguments present "do exist within identifiable boundaries and broad structures" (Toivonen 20). To explain, "academics operate in their own conceptual and semantic communities; practitioners and 'experts' (such as youth supporters and psychiatrists) produce discourses rooted in their own experiences; the government has its own, necessarily politicized, way of discussing essentially the same issue" (Toivonen 20). Each of these different communities has recognized *futōkō* as a social problem, and in the process of addressing it within their own domains, has developed terminology and concepts used to interpret the same issue in different ways.

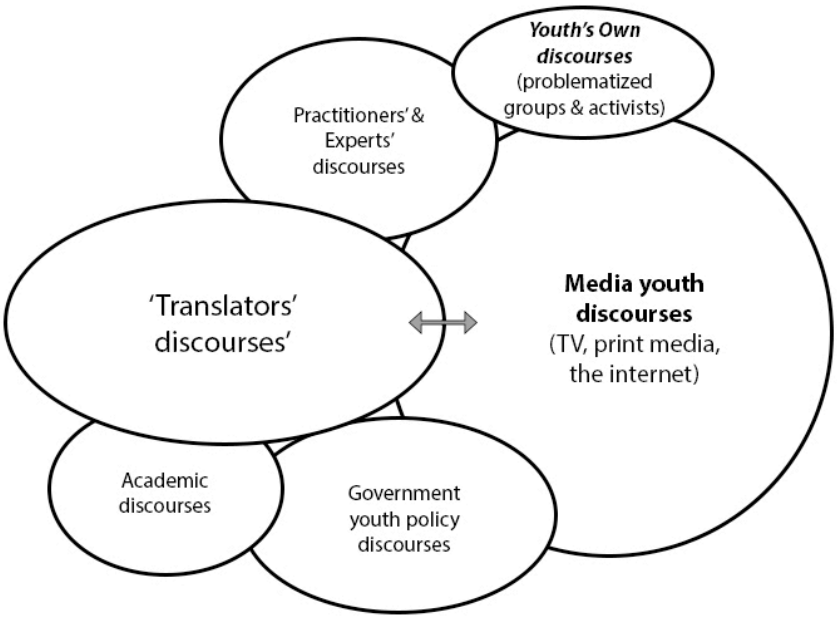


Figure 2. How youth discourses can be broken down into analyzable sub-units. Source: Tuukka Toivonen, "Making Sense of Youth Problems," *A Sociology of Japanese Youth* (New York: Routledge, 2012) 20. Print.

The terms produced are best viewed as symbols, Toivonen argues, "defined by the qualities of multivocality, complexity of association, ambiguity, open-mindedness, primacy of feeling and willing over thinking in their semantics" (21). Additionally, each of these symbols has a "propensity to ramify into further semantic subsystems" that create a language and set of thoughts unique to each discipline (21). This has given rise to a multitude of labels competing for precedence, as discussed earlier, and also for a collection of different meanings behind each one of these labels, depending on the discipline in which it is being applied, which is what I intend to discuss now. The included figure gives a graphical representation of how discussions from these different disciplines can be grouped into several main categories, each with relationships to the others. The "translator discourses" referred to are those which attempt to provide an interpretation and overview of the others, which is then communicated to the more general public and the media, giving broader society an idea of the arguments within the specific disciplines (Toivonen 20).

Interpretations of *futōkō* can be even further generalized as belonging to one of two "conflicting ideologies, which view non-attenders in either a negative or a positive light" (Shimizu 166). Those who argue from a negative perspective cast *futōkō* as a result of the "children's personal qualities of laziness or selfishness, parents' indulgence in encouraging such qualities, or children's psychopathology, requiring special treatment" (Shimizu 166). Yet within this, there are differing opinions among psychiatrists as to what extent children ought to be "classified" and what kind of treatment ought to be pursued as a result (Shimizu 166). On the other

hand, discourses which actually argue from a positive perspective, most of which developed later in the span of academic consideration (from the mid-1980s onward), claim that *futōkō* should be viewed as "resistance to the current school system, a sign of healthy growth expressed in 'periods of rebelliousness'" or else is a symptom of "the school system's defects" (Shimizu 166).

In keeping with the efforts of such entities to categorize and classify children, individuals actually suffering from the experience are forced to begin to view themselves under one of these headings, implying the faults denoted by the arguments therein. In general, Japanese children are taught to consider themselves as "a good child" or a "normal student" in line with the expectations that society holds for them, but in this case they are instead labeled as perhaps a "school and social drop-out" child, or a mentally ill, lazy, or physically ill child (Yoneyama 91). Given the importance of the group with which one identifies within Japanese society, as explained before, this takes the uncertain causes that drove the child away from school in the first place, and compounds them with a barrage of accused faults and shortcomings from the adult discourses regarding the issue (Brinton 3). "Whether through negating them as 'social failure,' 'social victim' or 'social resister', the point is that each type of adult discourse can be taken as an imposition, which demands either acceptance or rejection," which children must then find a way to "liberate themselves from" in order to develop a sense of independent self-worth and find the confidence to return to society on their own terms (Yoneyama 92). Even the modern pressure for discourses to utilize the relatively neutral *futōkō* term has not

eroded the tenacity of the judgments applied within discussions behind this heading (Shimizu 166).

Until 1992, Japan's MEXT itself "regarded *futōkō* as a type of illness," carrying on the perception established in the early 1960s when *futōkō* children were considered to have a mental disorder (Nakayama 109). It was not until 1997 that the terminology applied in the statistical records on the subject, the "white papers," was revised to utilize the *futōkō* term in place of *tōkōkyohi* (Nakayama 109). Scholars argue that this reflected the prevalence of negative views on the topic from the ministry until the change, at which point more positive perspectives had gradually gained support nearly equivalent to that for the negative conceptualizations (Shimizu 166, Borovoy 555).

1.4 Data and the Importation of Psychology

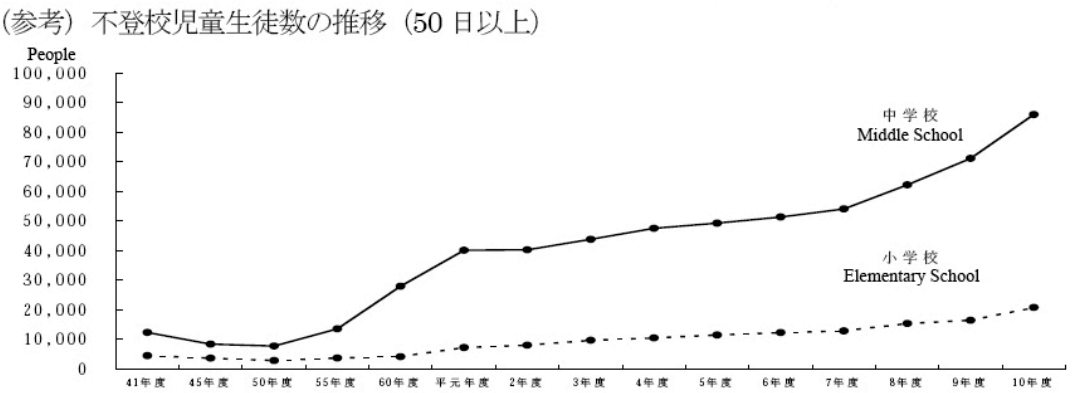
The outlook held by the ministry itself aside, the data collected by that entity plays an important role in justifying the relevance of *futōkō* as a social problem for Japanese society over the recent decades. Yoneyama claims that "*tōkōkyohi* (school phobia/refusal) has been steadily increasing in Japan since the 1980s" (77), and Nakayama concurs with this conclusion, describing how the MEXT data from 2001 indicates that "one out of every 35 junior high school students is a *futōkō* student," and therefore "given that the average size of junior high school classes is 32.4 students, almost every class has one *futōkō* student" (111). The included table and figure directly from the MEXT report of 2002 confirms this, and displays in detail the recorded rates of *futōkō* in Japanese society from 1966 until 1998. The table makes it possible to compare the number of enrolled elementary and middle school

Table 1 *Futōkō* Children and Students (Absentees, 50 Days or More) Rate of Change

（参考）不登校児童生徒（50 日以上欠席者）数の推移

	区分	Elementary School 小学校				Middle School 中学校				不登校児童生徒数の合計（人）
	Division	(A) 全児童数（人） Children	(B) 不登校児童数（人） Futōkō	不登校児童数の増▲減率(%) Increase ▲Decrease	B/A × 100 (%)	(A) 全生徒数（人） Students	(B) 不登校生徒数（人） Futōkō	不登校生徒数の増▲減率(%) Increase ▲Decrease	B/A×100 (%)	Futōkō Total
1966	41年度	9,584,061	4,430	−	0.05	5,555,762	12,286	−	0.22	16,716
1967	42年度	9,452,071	4,111	▲ 7.2	0.04	5,270,854	11,255	▲ 8.4	0.21	15,366
1968	43年度	9,383,182	3,875	▲ 5.7	0.04	5,043,069	9,631	▲ 14.4	0.19	13,506
1969	44年度	9,403,193	3,807	▲ 1.8	0.04	4,865,196	9,239	▲ 4.1	0.19	13,046
1970	45年度	9,493,485	3,626	▲ 4.8	0.04	4,716,833	8,357	▲ 9.5	0.18	11,983
1971	46年度	9,595,021	3,292	▲ 9.2	0.03	4,694,250	7,522	▲ 10.0	0.16	10,814
1972	47年度	9,696,133	2,958	▲ 10.1	0.03	4,688,444	7,066	▲ 6.1	0.15	10,024
1973	48年度	9,816,536	3,017	2.0	0.03	4,779,593	7,880	11.5	0.16	10,897
1974	49年度	10,088,776	2,651	▲ 12.1	0.03	4,735,705	7,310	▲ 7.2	0.15	9,961
1975	50年度	10,364,846	2,830	6.8	0.03	4,762,442	7,704	5.4	0.16	10,534
1976	51年度	10,609,985	2,951	4.3	0.03	4,833,902	8,362	8.5	0.17	11,313
1977	52年度	10,819,651	2,965	0.5	0.03	4,977,119	9,808	17.3	0.20	12,773
1978	53年度	11,146,874	3,211	8.3	0.03	5,048,296	10,429	6.3	0.21	13,640
1979	54年度	11,629,110	3,434	6.9	0.03	4,966,972	12,002	15.1	0.24	15,436
1980	55年度	11,826,573	3,679	7.1	0.03	5,094,402	13,536	12.8	0.27	17,215
1981	56年度	11,924,653	3,625	▲ 1.5	0.03	5,299,282	15,912	17.6	0.30	19,537
1982	57年度	11,901,520	3,624	▲ 0.0	0.03	5,623,975	20,165	26.7	0.36	23,789
1983	58年度	11,739,452	3,840	6.0	0.03	5,706,810	24,059	19.3	0.42	27,899
1984	59年度	11,464,221	3,976	3.5	0.03	5,828,867	26,215	9.0	0.45	30,191
1985	60年度	11,095,372	4,071	2.4	0.04	5,990,183	27,926	6.5	0.47	31,997
1986	61年度	10,665,404	4,407	8.3	0.04	6,105,749	29,673	6.3	0.49	34,080
1987	62年度	10,226,323	5,293	20.1	0.05	6,081,330	32,748	10.4	0.54	38,041
1988	63年度	9,872,520	6,291	18.9	0.06	5,896,080	36,110	10.3	0.61	42,401
1989	元年度	9,606,627	7,179	14.1	0.07	5,619,297	40,087	11.0	0.71	47,266
1990	２年度	9,373,295	8,014	11.6	0.09	5,369,162	40,223	0.3	0.75	48,237
1991	３年度	9,157,429	9,652	20.4	0.11	5,188,314	43,796	8.9	0.84	53,448
1992	４年度	8,947,226	10,449	8.3	0.12	5,036,840	47,526	8.5	0.94	57,975
1993	５年度	8,768,881	11,469	9.8	0.13	4,850,137	49,212	3.5	1.01	60,681
1994	６年度	8,582,871	12,240	6.7	0.14	4,681,166	51,365	4.4	1.10	63,605
1995	７年度	8,370,246	12,782	4.4	0.15	4,570,390	54,092	5.3	1.18	66,874
1996	８年度	8,105,629	15,314	19.8	0.19	4,527,400	62,228	15.0	1.37	77,542
1997	９年度	7,855,387	16,383	7.0	0.21	4,481,480	71,127	14.3	1.59	87,510
1998	10年度	7,663,533	20,724	26.5	0.27	4,380,604	85,942	20.8	1.96	106,666

Source: Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Statistics Bureau (総務省 統計局), 児童生徒の問題行動等生徒指導上の諸問題に関する調査, 2011, Web, Table 5-1.



	1966	1970	1975	1980	1985	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Elem.	4,430	3,626	2,830	3,679	4,071	7,179	8,014	9,652	10,449	11,469	12,240	12,782	15,314	16,383	20,724
Middle	12,286	8,357	7,704	13,536	27,926	40,087	40,223	43,796	47,526	49,212	51,365	54,092	62,228	71,127	85,942
Total	16,716	11,983	10,534	17,215	31,997	47,266	48,237	53,448	57,975	60,681	63,605	66,874	77,542	87,510	106,666

Figure 3. *Futōkō* Children and Students Rate of Change (50 Days or More)
Source: Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Statistics Bureau (総務省 統計局), 児童生徒の問題行動等生徒指導上の諸問題に関する調査, 2011, Web, Table 5-1.

students with the number of *futōkō* students from that same category for each year (see table 1). The graph takes the data from the table and arranges it in a way more easily interpreted by the eye to show the overall increasing trend *futōkō* has undergone in these roughly thirty years (see figure 3).

As the MEXT's data shows, the percentage of *futōkō* students in relation to the overall number of students underwent a significant increase during the period after 1996, and the continuing data for the years through 2001 continues this trend, though not included above ("児童生徒の問題行動等生徒指導上の諸問題に関する調査"). Nakayama admits that "the reason for this is unknown, but the Aichi Prefectural Board of Education (2001) assumes that this trend may be due to a burgeoning perception among many parents that it is not necessary for their children to attend school" underlying the very recent growth of institutions such as

the ones I visited while conducting my interviews in Tokyo intended to offer *futōkō* children an alternate means of education (111).

Yet Toivonen draws attention to the fact that data is subject to many potential flaws, based on the way it is defined, gathered, and organized. He describes the "various 'micro-strategies'" that can be employed in order to manipulate youth categories to reflect the intent of the surveyor, introducing potential bias. One such strategy would be a practice in which "definitions are revised to generate high total numbers of 'problem youth' in category X," in this case, *futōkō* (Toivonen 22). It may be noted that in the statistics above, *futōkō* youth are defined to be those with absences greater than 50 days out of a given school year, however this threshold was raised from 30 days in previous data sets complied by the MEXT, reducing the apparent number of non-attending students, and minimizing the appearance of the problem from a statistical standpoint. Potential reasons behind such changes will be discussed in the chapter concerning the relationship between the *futōkō* issue and the governmental structures, but it suffices for now to recognize that data, while providing a rough idea of the presence of the issue, cannot be taken as a completely *objective* indicator of the prevalence of the problem, one way or the other.

Borovoy also notes that, "in the spheres of education and mental health care itself, there is what might be described as a kind of "antipsychology" or "antipsychiatry" bias in Japan, which provides one potential reason for downplaying the presence of *futōkō* within society (554). It is not that the Japanese perspective (to speak generally) holds opposition to the field of psychiatry in itself, but rather a

refusal against "pathologizing the individual" within Japanese society (Borovoy 554). Instead, ideas based on the Japanese conceptualization of "Japaneseness" itself, known as *nihonjinron* (日本人論), leads them to prefer the "view that a vast array of human differences and distress" are "manageable and containable through reliance on self-discipline, coping and support from the family" (Borovoy 555). Where western psychology would proscribe drugs and illness, the Japanese worldview would instead encourage one to bear on with life, and seek a way to cope with one's struggles without turning to medication (Borovoy 555). From the standpoint of those who would argue that America's youth, for example, are over-diagnosed with an army of abbreviations including ADD, ADHD, and so on, this may be viewed as a healthier outlook (Sciutto and Eisenberg 106). Yet, in other regards, a tendency to resist recognizing psychological problems on a basis of principle may also result in those who need help and could be aided by medicine going unattended and unprovided for by society in general.

Cases of *futōkō* are sometimes accompanied by mild instances of learning disorders such as Asperger's, I was informed by one of the educators I interviewed, which makes it difficult for the child to keep up with the academic aspects of school. However, in such cases the disorder is not pronounced enough for it to be noticed by teachers or parents and actually addressed, leaving the child instead to merely withdraw from the social environment which poses a difficulty for them. I was told that such children often come to academies like the one I visited seeking an alternate educational route. The parents, though, are completely unaware that their

child is struggling with a learning disability until it is recognized by the staff at these alternate school and support institutions, according to my interviewee.

Nakayama observes that though *futōkō* children are often found to be anxious, and fearful of their environment, "this could be the result of either emotion-related disorders or simply the lack of training in age-appropriate behaviors and/or self-determination abilities," necessitating the consideration of such conclusions on a case by case basis (113). Children may be targeted by bullies at school for a wide range of different reasons, and so "physically fragile, developmentally delayed or emotionally removed" children are especially at risk, and such factors may lead them to be bullied as school, which may, in turn, cause them to become *futōkō* students (Borovoy 554). In contrast with the school environment and the potential to be bullied for their differences, whether for developmental or just purely personality reasons, "if children are alone, they can do whatever they like without being evaluated, interrupted, or punished" explaining why children who do not initially fit the mold expected in Japanese schools and society may prefer seclusion to school (Nakayama 113).

Those who do react to the friction between their own personality and what is expected of them in this way and withdraw from society entirely are referred to as *hikikomori* and constitute another social problem category widely recognized in Japan. But as Borovoy points out, such social issues are often related, to the degree that "many *hikikomori* cases start out as 'school refusal syndrome' (*tōkōkyohi* or *futōkō*), where children gradually fail to thrive in school and eventually refuse to attend," later refusing to engage any part of society at all, even refusing to speak to

their own parents (553). The causes and symptoms, then, of these distinct social problems are often closely related. These and other "seemingly dissimilar social problems surrounding youth are, in an empirically demonstrable sense, systematically related through highly similar and predictable processes," Toivonen claims, based in large part on the fact that they are precipitated by the same society (2).

All of the prominent youth issues considered in Japan take place within the same broader social environment, of course, and so naturally share some factors given that "youth problems are not reducible objective conditions, politically neutral 'facts' or static 'truths', but are products of open-ended social interaction" (Toivonen 16). In addition to confirming the variety and complexity of the *futōkō* issue as discussed above, this observation places *futōkō* and other social issues on a common ground that enables them to be comparatively considered and recognized as common products of a set of particular social factors. Kurita expresses this same idea, writing that "school phobia is one symptom of the problems riddling our society, our homes, and our schools…and the state of society at large is a significant factor" (302).

It tends to be the case with such social issues that a period of recognition and concern from society will occur at a given point in time, and then attention will subside until another period of concern breaks, which Toivonen denotes as recurring periods of "moral panic" (18). Furthermore, a common tendency during such times is "the creation of associations between a given incident and pre-existing social categories," so that society's new conceptualization of an issue is in fact just a

re-adaptation of an old one to suit a slightly different, new set of perceived 'problem youth' (Toivonen 18). A progression can be traced from "school-refusers" to "moratorium beings" (an alternate label for an earlier conceptualization of *hikikomori*) to *hikikomori* as presently defined, with "key themes of previous debates about youth resurfac[ing] in new forms" so that a kind of "pedigree" of youth issues can be formulated, "where the meanings of successive categories have become closely intertwined, and where seemingly disparate youth types can be mapped onto the same canvas which has a consistent underlying 'moral vocabulary'" (Toivonen 21). The accompanying table of youth categories over the years attempts to give an indication of how such a 'canvas' would appear.

This tendency for past problem categories to be relied on in understanding new ones contributes to a situation where "certain newer categories seem to be, to a large extent, 'remixes' of two or more older ones, with *hikikomori*, for instance, revisiting many of the features of 'moratorium humans' (1970s), the *otaku* (1980s) and adult children (1990s)" (Toivonen 21). For *futōkō* (and preceding categories on which it may have been based) this brings a special significance to the progression of terms used to refer to the phenomenon from the 1950s onward, highlighting the way in which the shift in vocabulary (and gradual reformulation of the category) served as a marker for an accompanying shift in thought regarding the demographic under this heading and the degree of responsibility attributed to them.

Furthermore this formulation itself is influenced not only by academics and social critics, interpreting today's current problems through the glass of yesterday's, but also by interested parties who compose what is referred to as the related

Table 2 Notable Japanese Problem Youth Categories, 1970s to 2000s
(Dominant meanings at key points in the 'career' of these problems)

Time Period	*Social Category (Label)*	*Initial Meaning*
1970s	*Tōkōkyohi*	Children who refuse to attend school and are therefore deviant (surfaced already in the 1950s, but became prominent in the 1970s); also, the phenomenon of school refusal
	Kikokushijo	Returnee children said to suffer from various cultural and educational deficiencies upon returning to Japan
	Moratorium Ningen	'Moratorium humans' who postpone important transitions, especially into university and jobs
1980s	*Dokushin kizoku*	'Single nobility': wealthy single young adults who live alone in a *manshon* (apartment) while postponing marriage
	Otaku	Obsessive subculture consumers and creators; originally perceived as mentally ill
1990s	*Adult Children*	Immature young adults who continue to live with their dysfunctional parental families
	Freeters	Originally perceived to be freelancing youth who avoid company drudgery to pursue their dreams; in the 2000s, involuntary young part-time workers (the term was invented in the 1980s)
	Parasite Singles	Affluent (mainly female) youth to whom work is a 'hobby' and who consume luxury items while living at home with their parents
2000s	*Hikikomori*	Socially withdrawn and isolated youth who are not only immature but also mentally ill (the term first appeared in the 1990s)
	NEETs (niito)	Lazy and immature jobless youth who intentionally avoid work and live off their parents
	Sōshokukei-danshi	'Herbivorous' men who are more interested in style and their hobbies than in meeting women and achieving career success

Source: Tuukka Toivonen, "Making Sense of Youth Problems," *A Sociology of Japanese Youth* (New York: Routledge, 2012) 21. Print

"industry." To explain, all the analysts, counselors, and institutions aimed at serving such troubled youth make up a particular "industry" that revolves around these problems and their related discourses. As with the categories themselves, "there is much ground for viewing the emergence of youth problem 'industries' not as entirely new entities, but as re-groupings of existing organizations, actors, and interests, both public and private," which gives such parties motivation for influencing the development of public perception on these issues, whether due to their sympathies and beliefs, or simply to their economic interests (Toivonen 19). Nakayama traces one such progression through "well-known private youth support institutions, such as Kudou Sadatsugu's Youth Independence Support Centre (Tokyo) and K2 International (Yokohama)" which began as support centers aimed at *tōkōkyohi* during the 1980s, but then turned to focusing on *hikikomori* in the 1990s, and later "NEETs" (youth who are Not in Education, Employment or Training), in the mid-2000s (19).

So to discuss one social issue without reference to the others in an environment where the perception of one is a thing inherited from the discourses of the others – of previous social problems – would be to conduct an incomplete study of the topic. Each of the social issues facing Japan now has its roots in the issues that preceded it, and the same can be said of the industries that develop to address these problems. To draw worthwhile conclusions regarding any one of these issues, therefore, requires a more careful consideration of the wider Japanese social, educational, and governmental environment in which they arise, which is exactly what I intend to pursue in the following chapters.

Beyond this, *futōkō* in particular has had a reaching impact on society itself, opening up questions regarding the educational system and contributing to the realization that school as it presently stands may not be "the only forum where education takes place" (Nakayama 107). Alternative educational systems have begun to have a greater presence in Japan and to become more seriously considered as an aid or solution for children who do not or cannot conform to the role handed to them by the public system (Nakayama 107). This change is an instance of the way in which "on many levels, symbols such as problem youth categories act as 'triggers of social action,' as they make it possible to act on issues that could not be articulated before, and because they are open to manipulation by actors who spearhead the kind of 'industries' we described above" (Toivonen 21). The next chapter will address such actors and the discourses they have developed with regards to *futōkō*.

CHAPTER TWO

Recognition of *Futōkō*

2.1 Society's Relationship with the Media

According to sociologist Tuukka Toivonen, "a long-term examination of a social problem discourse enables us to see the relationships between political interest, historical events, and the representation of reality" (9). It is with this perspective and an emphasis on the last part, the representation of reality, that I intend to consider the relationship between *futōkō* as a problem in Japanese society and the media by which it has been presented. The continued presence of the *futoko* problem has been represented differently by four main competing discourses since the 1950s, and was identified by the alternate term *tōkōkyohi* until the mid-1990s. Throughout this time the voice of the media, through papers such as the *Yomiuri* and the *Asahi,* has had a significant presence in the development and shift of thought on the topic (Fujita 46). In this paper, I will consider each of the four primary discourses: the *psychiatric, behavioral, citizen's,* and *socio-medical* perspectives, along with the role the media has played in influencing the way each of these were perceived at a given point in time. As I discuss these topics, I will also question the function of the media, the way it has influenced public opinion on these issues, and whose interests were principally reflected at a given time.

To begin, as a sociological topic, *futōkō* must be considered through a given *lens*. In this case, I will be using the "social constructionist" approach, which "views

social problems as being constructed by interested human actors, and argues that 'problems' cannot exist independently of their claims-making actions" (Toivonen 7). In consequence, this means that parties including affected individuals, those within the educational and governmental systems, and the media itself are directly responsible for constructing *futōkō* as a social issue. While the occurrence itself (non-attendance) might happen regardless, the definition of *futōkō* as a problem and the discourse surrounding it is dependent on the aforementioned "claims-makers" (Toivonen 8). With that in mind, there are four main arguments regarding the explanation of *futōkō* and the appropriate response to it.

The first discourse to recognize *futōkō* as a social issue, and to bring it into public awareness, was the psychiatric discourse, which held prominence from the 1950s until the beginning of the 1970s. This perspective considered *futōkō* to be the expression of a psychiatric disorder with the child: something that had a biological cause within the individual, and needed to be "fixed." Some proponents, such as Inamura Hiroshi, went so far as to claim that "their foundation as human beings must be rebuilt, so that they can learn to adjust to society" (Wong 11). As this quote makes apparent, the blame for *futōkō* in this case was placed entirely on the student, and attributed to errors or shortcomings in their very personhood.

In agreement with the psychiatric discourse, the first appearance of the term *tōkōkyohi* in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* occurred in 1965, in an article which depicted the problem as merely a case of separation anxiety by unadjusted children ("出産と子育て"). The cause, from this perspective as well, had to do with children lacking social elements it is implied they ought to have. No real accompanying criticism of the

educational system was to be seen at this stage, and given the unsympathetic view the psychiatric perspective takes, it would seem that raising awareness of *futōkō* in this way most served the interests of the educational system itself. By labeling *futōkō* cases as simply mental illness, without scrutinizing other contributing factors, it became more accepted for "problem children" to be sent away to mental institutions, where they would cause no more disruption within the school environment ("登校拒否の子ども" 25). Once realized, however, the frequency with which children were being confined to institutions with minimal reasoning did cause a degree of outrage, which I will discuss after introducing the related behavioral discourse.

From around 1970 until the mid-1980s, the behavioral discourse came to prominence due in part to several serialized articles published in the *Yomiuri* from 1968 to 1972. These articles described the *futōkō* student as being corrupted by a home and family life that was altogether "too sweet and warm," making them unable to cope with the supposedly reasonable demands of school and social life ("出産と子育て"). The "necessary" solution called for in these articles was a more strict approach by fathers, and an end to "indulgent, overprotective" parenting ("出産と子育て"). Likewise, the behavioral discourse that formed around this time made the claim that *futōkō* was the product of "socially deviant behaviors and laziness" to which society should answer with "more stringent discipline and punishment to 'correct' the behavior of *futōkō* students" (Wong 13). This particular discourse had the support of both educational representatives and of Japan's Ministry of Education

itself (Wong 13). As with the psychiatric discourse, it bears noting that responsibility in this case was placed completely on the student, and on shortcomings of the individual (even if due to a fault of the parents), with no criticism directed towards the system, which was itself promoting this interpretation.

In the mid-1980s, however, the media began drawing attention to the lack of balance surrounding *futōkō* matters. As noted before, there was an article in the *Asahi Shimbun* that served as an outcry against relegating students to a confined life in a mental institution merely because of troubles at school; the author here described the situation as "unthinkable" and questioned how society could accept this condemnation of Japan's youth ("登校拒否の子ども" 23). An article was also published notifying the public that the Ministry of Health and Welfare intended to instate a psychology test for children alongside the existing physical exams, to begin from the age of 1.5 years old ("心理テスト" 1). It described the claim that even at such an age, signs of the child's mental health can be understood, and with the benefit of youth, the cause of any "problems" can be easily "removed" ("心理テスト" 1). This discussion has once again very swiftly returned to a question of "fixing" people, which is for many reasons a dangerous course to pursue (not least of which is the question of whose ideal people ought to be "fixed" into alignment with).

Furthermore, a number of reformatories, acting in accordance with the call for greater discipline to re-condition children into obedient, socially acceptable behavior had come to be during this time (Yoneyama 83). These institutions acted as "a subsystem of formal education, often endorsed and recommended by local

school authorities" (Yoneyama 83). Once again, this represents an instance in which the system was actively promoting discourses that channeled blame to the student, and then continued to remove the identified "problem child" from the system, preventing any reciprocal criticism from the most immediate opponent in this discussion. Conditions at these reformatories, while technically regulated by the Ministry of Education, were very much questionable; the discipline used included acts that would undoubtedly be considered abuse in other societies, and it is known that several children died in these institutions (Yoneyama 83). In 1987 an article was published in the *Mainichi Shimbun* that brought attention to the case of a student considered to have *futōkō* related mental problems who was lynched at one such private institution. According to the article, confessions were received claiming that the principal had ordered the other students to beat one particular student, which was followed by his death as previously noted ("埼玉県の民間の情緒障害者更生塾" 27). That particular principal was arrested for suspicion of criminal activity, but the occurrence of incidents like this underscores the degree to which *futōkō* children were treated as faulty members of society, who needed to be forcefully reformed in order to be properly "socialized" and in accordance with society's expectations (Wong 2). For society to have reached such an extreme as this demands a critical look at the values that were driving the most influential parties behind these events, which I will consider more closely in the chapter on the goals of education.

Articles such as those described above, and the awareness demanded by the media, finally evoked a response from society. Even as these events were being

publicized, some outlets persisted in defining *futōkō* and the related problems as merely an illness of the individual. The titles of several articles in the *Yomiuri* actually contain instances of the phrase "登校拒否症", or "*tokokyohi-sho*", in which a character representing illness has been directly joined to the term for school-refusal, identifying these concepts as necessarily related entities ("登校拒否症" 12). Considering that the *Yomiuri* is one of Japan's more conservative papers, one might question the potential for the interests of the government ministries to have had some influence in depicting it this way. Yet, articles which continued to describe *futōkō* as an illness were present in other papers including the *Asahi* as well (Yoneyama 84).

As a necessary reaction to the conflict between the concurrent outrage articles and persisting minimization of *futōkō* causes, independent parties including parents, counselors, teachers, students, and some psychiatrists and pediatricians formed citizen's groups to discuss the issue and air their opinions (Yoneyama 84). Numerous committees and organizations to debate and consider the causes and suitable responses to *futōkō* as a social problem were formed, and from these functions developed the citizen's discourse (Wong 14). The 1984 "Association to Think About Tokokyohi" (登校拒否を考える会) was "the first key *futōkō* movement organization" (Wong 14). The most important assertion of this discourse was the argument that *tōkōkyohi* is in no way an illness of the child, but instead an indicator that schools and society are "sick and in need of change" (Wong 14). *Futōkō* in this case was seen as a "normal response of normal students" who were facing "life threatening situations" (Wong 14) in the form of an educational system that gave no

respect to their individuality and was intentionally dehumanizing in an effort to mold future citizens with a high degree of conformity to the existing society (Yoneyama 81). The citizen's discourse embraced complete acceptance of the student as an individual who was no more inherently "wrong" because of their *futōkō* experience than any other member of society (Wong 14).

The socio-medical discourse, which arose concurrently with the previous discussion, likewise placed no blame on the student, and held a very critical outlook towards the education and social system. However it also considered the symptoms evidenced by *futōkō* children to be an actual medical condition that ought to be recognized (Yoneyama 86). This discourse describes the condition as a "systematic disorder" caused by a "disruption of the biological rhythm" brought on by "excessive school-associated demands" (Yoneyama 86). Researchers Miike and Tomoda, who wrote extensively on the medical aspects of *futōkō* and the biological details that accompanied cases, brought into question the use of the traditionally Japanese "*ganbaru*" attitude, which represents an imperative to the student to always work harder, and to persevere despite difficulty (Wong 15). This phrase is notably different from the corresponding English exclamation of "good luck!" in that it calls for the recipient to apply him or herself even more, and places responsibility for the outcome on the individual. This concept, then, contributes to the pressure placed on students, and reaffirms the idea that they are responsible for their own academic and social performance, when a share of the responsibility perhaps rests also with the others involved, including the system itself (Wong 15).

While the representations of *futōkō* found in the media prior to the 1980s cannot be said to be balanced, given that they did not present the perspective of the student alongside that of the institutions, they nonetheless served a very important role in provoking the citizen's and socio-medical discourses, which represent just the kind of opposing view that had been lacking (Shimizu 168). A balanced representation earlier on would have provided a more accurate depiction of the actual situation, but perhaps in spite of a lack of concern for this truth to reality, the awareness that the media caused for *futōkō* cases and the arguments surrounding them did act as a catalyst for a more balanced discussion outside of the papers, in society itself. This influence, and the result of opening up a critical debate on the topic throughout society serves as a very positive effect of the media presence in relation to this issue. The impact of this change – of the resultant call to action of members of society – had an effect that reached beyond the issue of *futōkō* alone: it represented the creation of a "social and discursive space" in which people could critically address society's issues which provided a model for also approaching other topics (Wong 1).

During this time, the discussion of *futōkō* topics began to include a focus on human rights, encouraged in part by the Tokyo Legal Association, which had ads for "resistance recommendation" pamphlets directed at middle school children published in the newspapers ("中学生らに反逆のススメ" 30). Articles reflecting the arguments of the citizen's groups also began to surface, including ones that cited the rise of violence in schools as a sign that the system must change, even if it meant breaking with convention ("校内暴力克服に" 1).

Furthermore, the overall image of *futōkō* children themselves as expressed by the media began to include a new depiction: one of the child as a victim of unjust external forces, rather than merely as a "broken" individual, as had earlier been the case ("鹿川君をいじめた集団に" 30). One article presented the reports of school nurses on the situation of children who would spend their days in the school infirmary in an effort to cope with the high stress they were subjected to, using this retreat as a middle-ground between complete refusal and regular participation ("保健室に「安心」求める子" 16). Another discussed the case of a student who had been driven from school by the amount of bullying he experienced, commenting that the school itself seemed to be unable to take any action on the matter ("鹿川君をいじめた集団に" 30). Contributions by members of society who were leading groups to try to offer children alternative, self-paced schooling options were also published, one of which emphasized the phrase "I will live in my own way" as the embodiment of some *futōkō* children's attitude towards society ("フリースクールの子供たち"). The comprehensive image of *futōkō* that was being presented to society through these publications was very much different from that of the 1960s and 1970s, in which they were consistently described as mentally flawed, emotionally under-developed, or simply spoiled. Instead of an illness itself, *futōkō* was now being presented as a symptom of problems in *society*, and it gradually came to be perceived as a potential life choice that a child ought to have the right to make, rather than necessarily being a problem (Wong 15).

As a result of this shift in thought, during which the media acted to magnify the voices of individuals as in the cases above, a more sympathetic outlook towards the situation of *futōkō* children took hold in Japan. Rather than a passive account of events, or even a commentary regarding the status of the system, some articles began to make an outright call for change from society, including one for which the title plainly asked, "why is there not public support?" for independent, alternative schools ("フリースクールで居場所見つけた").

Now that this changed interpretation of *futōkō* had become established via the citizen's and the socio-medical discourses, the Ministry of Education itself took note and "from 1998 onwards, replaced the category of 'disliking school' with *'futōkō'* to neutralize the term as well as to reflect the wide use of *'futōkō'* in the media and popular discourse" (Shimizu 165). In this case, then, awareness of the range of *futōkō* cases and a representation of not only the problem but also of the people involved with it, as made possible by media attention, represents an instance of the resultant social criticism causing change within the policy-making institutions, rather than the other way around. The terminology change mentioned refers to the use of the word *futōkō* rather than the previously used term, *tōkōkyohi,* in the government's annual statistical reports. The earlier term, written 登校拒否 in Japanese was composed of the word *tōkō*, which means attendance, and *kyohi*, which means refusal, and indicated a willful act by the child. The term used presently, *futōkō*, which is 不登校 in Japanese, literally means non-attendance, since the first character (*hu*~) is simply a negation. The decision to use this phrase reflected recognition of the disagreement regarding the definition of the *futōkō* issue,

and removed the potential implication that the child was responsible based on their assumed agency in the matter (Wong 3).

The social movement that was taking place at this time was further encouraged by media images which extended the perceived identity of *futōkō* children to include "good kids" from ordinary families. This addition served to universalize the issue, and opened it up as a topic of critical thought that potentially encompassed all of society (Wong 13). As of the 1990s, *futōkō* has been "framed and constructed as a critical appraisal of Japanese society that has broad implications for many different aspects of the everyday life of its citizens," impacting such fields as education, the medical system, the media, and also social perception of questions regarding human rights, personal identity, and social values (Wong 2).

The impact of the issue of *futōkō* and its interpretation contributed to society taking a more skeptical position with relation to the existing systems. Media played a pivotal role in this development particularly with regards to the formation of a people-based discourse that provided previously missing opposition to arguments that were condemning children as the root of the problem and not properly scrutinizing the surrounding factors. This claim that the effect of the media resulted in the rise of active debate and critical consideration of pressing social issues in Japan is one that represents a very positive role with regards to the function of the media in this society. Whether that positive effect is in fact due to a proper role performed by the media, and whether coverage is as accurate and representative as it should be, is not as easily concluded. The presentation of *futōkō* prior to the 1980s was mostly in line with the image being promoted by the educational system

and the government, which both have a clear bias on the issue. It seems the topic was not presented in a balanced way at this time, and that the situation of actual students and families was not well represented. However, simply by sparking the kind of response that took place through the citizen's and socio-medical discourses, and by raising awareness, the media's presence was positive whether or not the perspectives held within it were so. Media attention on issues raises public awareness, and if, as in this case, unbalanced media presentation is met with challenges from members of the public who are aware of the distortion, then the interaction between the media and public overall represents a positive force in society for discussing problems that hold importance for the future of that society. Furthermore, *futōkō* as a recurring point of focus within the discussion of social problems in Japan has proven to be the instance that opened up questions of what "socialization" ought to mean to debate by the general public. Previously these questions represented a topic limited to consideration by the educational and governmental institutions alone, as will be considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

The Governmental and Educational Institutions

This chapter will discuss the role that the Japanese government has played in influencing the educational system as perspectives on the objective of education have shifted over the years. It will also discuss the way the educational system and those within it have responded to these perspectives, in an attempt to develop an image of the nature of the discourses surrounding education itself in Japan, and the way this relates to the discussion of *futōkō*. I will begin by giving a brief description of the basic details of how the system is structured, and continue by highlighting some of the social perspectives that have been influential in its development since World War II to the present. Next I will address the way Japan's Ministry of Education (abbreviated MEXT or MoE depending on the source) has framed the *futōkō* issue via statistical representations in its effort to create a profile of the nation's children attending school at a given point in time.

3.1 Educational System Structure and Grade Pressure

To begin with, according to the "Fundamental Law of Education" which was legislated in 1947 basic education in Japan consists of six years of elementary school and three years of lower-secondary education (Nakayama 107), the total nine years of which are compulsory and free (Fujita 43). While not compulsory, most students nonetheless continue through high school and post-secondary education, giving Japan one of the highest attendance rates internationally, with "about 97 percent of

the age cohort enrolled at three-year senior high schools" and continuing beyond the initial compulsory education (Fujita 43). These early compulsory years are the primary focus of most literature on *futōkō,* however, and tend to be the setting in which such problems are most represented (Fujita 46). Kurita, an editorial writer for the *Asahi Shimbun* who has addressed several of Japan's pressing social issues, explains that public education is considered so fundamentally essential that "nonattendance is not an option recognized by society, although some strong souls do opt for home schooling or other educational avenues" which although present, are not widely perceived as a solution to issues like *futōkō*, but rather a temporary step through which to reintroduce the child to the standard public system (298).

In contrast to the typical case in Western countries, where "elementary and junior high school classes are usually limited to between 25 and 30 students, Japan's schools…average more than 40 per class" which some scholars suggest contributes to a lack of individualized attention, and so contributes to some children's feelings of alienation and disconnect from the school environment (Kurita 303). Furthermore, "despite the affluence of the country there is still no call for smaller classes," and discourses regarding school issues rarely make class sizes a prominent topic (Kurita 303). Also a factor in the lack of student engagement is the fact that until the 1990s, "classroom teaching was lecture based and non-participatory…textbooks, which featured little cultural diversity, were compiled and authorized by the state, and students had to memorize the texts" (Asano 108). This strictly memorization-based learning approach is part of the system promoted by critics whom Motani refers to as "traditionalists," given their belief in the importance of a "traditional…emphasis

on memorization of information" as the most important aspect of enabling students to 'make the grade' (319). This perspective, combined with the assertion that "Japan is an education-conscious society" in which "students are measured largely by academic achievement" creates an environment that places an exaggerated degree of importance on grades, adding stress to the impersonality of school as noted before, while placing the student "under tremendous pressure to succeed academically" (Nakayama 113). It is in this context that such social issues as *futōkō* and *tōkōkyohi* have arisen, and continue to be growing problems for the system.

Nonetheless, "Japan boasts the highest rate of school attendance in the world" (Kurita 302) with "daily attendance rates of elementary and secondary schools above 95 percent" (Fujita 43). *Futōkō* issues remain only a small percentage of the overall student demographic, given that "Japanese society as a whole accepts the school system as an essential institution to the extent that the freedom of nonattendance is not recognized" (Kurita 302). This complete acceptance and insistence on one educational institution, which has been centrally and uniformly controlled for most of Japan's modern history, leaves that minority who do not fit the expected roles unprovided for, with no obvious means of re-joining society in present or future unless they conform to expectation, which explains why "most parents are devastated by their offspring's refusal to attend school" (Kurita 298). This conclusion is confirmed by the results of the first MEXT survey to include non-attendance as a category, which took place in 1966, revealing 4,430 elementary and 12,286 junior-high long-term absentees. Despite these figures, which "must certainly have included pupils suffering from what we now call school phobia,"

Kurita claims, "the adults of the day did not question the validity of the school system and were therefore unlikely to delve deeply into their children's problems at school" in keeping with initial perception of *futōkō* as a problem of the child and not of the system or environment (300).

In recent times, potential causes for such problems have been "variously diagnosed" with criticism often aimed at "the Japanese education system itself for being allegedly too uniform and rigid, too focused on the goal of university entrance examinations, and too concerned with inculcating knowledge at the expense of self-motivated enquiry and creative thought," which aligns with the objectives openly promoted by "traditionalists" as noted above (Cave 175). While it may enable the system to produce consistently high exam scores, "this alleged rigidity, uniformity, and exam-centeredness is claimed to suppress creativity and individuality, while the pressures supposedly resulting are seen as linked to bullying, school refusal, and other problems," tying together the discourses regarding educational approach and Japan's social problems (Cave 175). Motani echoes these thoughts, remarking that "in this context, it is no wonder that most schools failed to encourage children to discover the joy of learning," being instead "a place where they had to hide their true sense of self and conform" (311).

Such classroom problems can be taken to indicate systemic issues within the educational structure and this is just how Makoto Asano, a professor of education at Chukyo University, interprets the situation, claiming that problems including "*are* (violence), *kire* (angry outbursts), *ijime* (bullying), and *futōkō"* are signs of "unhealthy student-teacher relationships, and an unnatural aura of passivity in the

classroom" (104). Taken from this perspective, the presence of such problems represents a call to consider whether there is a degree of truth in the accusations that Japan's educational conformity suppresses individuality to the point where children are unable to cope. Although some critics "might dispute such a view as simplistic, it has nonetheless achieved the status of common sense among the general public," and "appears in public statements of not only the Ministry of Education, but also the Japan Teachers' Union (*Nikkyōso*) and the smaller and more left-wing all Japan Teachers' and Staffs' Union (*Zenkyō*)," each of which represent different interests within the broader realm of educational discourse (Cave 175).

The intense degree of pressure students are under to produce good grades is serious enough to warrant a short discussion of its own. Although "school is a place of academic learning as well as social skills development" Nakayama points out that "Japanese schools are focusing on academic success, exam-oriented curricula, and demand conformity" to the detriment of all other aspects (113). *Zenkyō* official Masashi Baba draws attention to the fact that "competition in education has been so accelerated that new words, i.e. 'examination hell' and 'school failure' have been coined" reflecting a situation that results in "a great many school refusers and high school drop-outs…bullying and consequent suicides" which have "sharply increased" in recent times (Cave 176). In addition to *futōkō*, bullying has been a national concern in Japan since the 1980s, when attention turned to the startling number of "victims who found suicide the only way out" and who represented a definite problem within the educational environment indicating how aggressive relationships between students had come to be accepted as commonplace (Motani

314). Though it is true that various factors come into play in explaining such occurrences, scholars argue that "these 'pathological phenomena' at school indicate too much stress is put on children" in the course of "pressuring them to succeed at exams, get into good high schools and universities" and excel academically in order to have any chance at a successful future (Motani 315).

While the importance of academic achievement in the form of test scores is disproportionately stressed, other potential measures of a student's dedication and ability are often disregarded. Kurita explains this situation and its effect by describing how "the Japanese school system places an inordinate emphasis on examination scores while tending to ignore less easily measured accomplishments, such as volunteer work and extracurricular activities. Reduced to a composite of test scores, the student who does not score well finds less and less to enjoy at school even if he has positive attributes working in his favor" (301). Furthermore, because it is so common for students to attend special cram schools after normal school sessions have ended, school represents a far greater portion of the Japanese student's life than it does for the average Western student. Feeling out of place at school given that "school-age children do not have the time nor the freedom of mind to play with their peers" in other environments leaves the child with little peer support to turn to (Nakayama 113). "This lack of peer relationships is one of the reasons that some children find difficulties in attending school," and even when such relationships do exist, the highly competitive, stressful environment tends to turn them into rather tentative friendships of utility – not the earnest and youthful image one might prefer to imagine for elementary school-age children (Nakayama 113). It

is in fact partly due to such a high percentage of Japanese schoolchildren continuing to high school and college that competition to enter such institutions is so intense. In 1990 an estimated one million university applicants failed entrance exams, on which society tells them any hope of a successful future rests, explaining the mindset in high school and junior high that "schoolmates are thus rivals in the race for entry into the institution at the next level" (Kurita 301). Friendships, therefore, are often based on "competitive or dominant-submissive types of relationships, rather than on equality," leaving the student who performs poorly on exams with little social motivation to continue struggling in such a harsh environment (Asano 106).

3.2 History and Ideals

Before discussing reforms, it is necessary to consider the background against which these debates take place, in the form of ideological developments over time. As Cave states, "educational reform in Japan during the 1990s displays its own rationale, and can be understood only in the context of the country's particular political situation and educational history" (187). The Final Report of the 21st Century Vision Committee of the *Nikkyōso* Japanese Teachers' Union, which is known to hold progressive views, claims that "the conventional Japanese education system…has forced 'mass-production' educational methods…on children or people who by nature have diverse personalities and abilities to grow differently," and it is from this long-standing tradition of imposing a uniform system on people of various natures that many of the current problems facing Japanese society and education seem to stem (Cave 175). During the elementary and early secondary educational

stages, in which the *futōkō* problem primarily rests, tests show that "the scholastic ability of Japanese children is reportedly high with regard to international standards," and yet "their ability to think and create, however, is open to question" (Cave 175). Meanwhile, though competition in terms of exam scores is heated, economist Nakatani Iwao of Hitotsubashi University "argues that Japanese public schools discourage competition and initiative" in terms of originality and creative development, "holding back self-starters in order to enforce an artificial egalitarianism" (Cave 176). In view of this claim, it would seem that in addition to fostering a score-based competition that precludes friendships and imposing uniformity to the detriment of creativity, Japanese schools also take an active role in 'constructing' equality between students by discouraging those who might pull ahead through their own initiative, which implies that the Japanese saying "the nail which sticks out gets hammered down" rings true.

Since the 1870s, it has been the case that Japanese elementary and secondary schools played "a strong role in developing absolute obedience to the imperialistic nation," so that "the relationship between teachers and students was of the dominant-submissive type," and while this historical situation is very different from the present one, it represents the backdrop against which the modern system has developed, and in which some of the persisting ideals have their roots (Asano 105). "For a long time," Asano explains, "public education authorities suppressed the development of student participation (106), and though the establishment of a more modern educational system during the Meiji Restoration (1868 – 1912) is considered to have "transformed the forms of social life and that of learning and the

growth of children from the traditional to the modern and rational" (Fujita 43), it was still the case that "multicultural education, with its implicit acceptance of differences, was never given priority by educators" (Asano 105).

The term "individuality" itself has undergone a shift in perception alongside the shifts in the educational system, initially used "simply to mean 'difference from others' (either positive or negative)," with usage spreading during the first decade of 1900, "linked to a psychological interest in educational efficiency, IQ tests, and eugenics" (Cave 183). During the period from 1910 to 1930 its usage continued to increase, during "the heyday of the Taishō Free Education movement," though at this time interpretations branched into two different types, with those who "seem to have understood 'individuality' as meaning 'uniqueness' and being unequivocally positive" and those for whom "it retained its older, ambivalent meaning" (Cave 183). The very fact that 'individuality' had a decisively positive interpretation is noteworthy given the common perception that a tendency to favor conformity characterizes much of Japanese social history. Yet this period is seen to have been short lived, and the perception of a conformist tendency is given credence by the "Ministry of Education's notorious ultranationalist directive, the *Kokutai no Hongi* (Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan) of 1937" which stated that "education that devotes itself to the cultivation of individual creativity and the development of individuality (*kosei no kaihatsu*) was condemned as alien to Japanese education" (Cave 183).

Just a few years later, in 1940, "educationalist Ishiyama Shihei was distinguishing between mistaken 'individualism' (*kojinshugi,* 個人主義), which

'makes the individual its object and ignores the totality' and approved 'individuality-ism' (*koseishugi,* 個性主義), which 'makes the totality its object and gives play to individuality in its service" (Cave 183). While it almost sounds like a kind of compromise, giving a nod to the importance of the individual while maintaining the priority of the group, this perspective still only tentatively accepts individuality as long as it is useful in service of the "totality" of society as a whole (based on the social objectives of those in power, it is to be assumed). Rather than a recognition of the intrinsic value of the individual as a person, then, this argument is more a recognition of the fact that difference can be useful, which is to say the least a perspective motivated more by utility than humanistic sympathies.

Following World War II, the driving ideals of Japanese education changed drastically, given the influences of the Allied occupation. Japanese history was actually prohibited, while social studies was used to foster democracy, "heavily influenced by the American tradition of pragmatism" (Motani 322), and the new constitution along with "The Fundamental Education Law" was intended to overhaul the Japanese system through "the implementation of education for democracy and peace education" (Asano 105). However, in 1952 the General Headquarters of the Allied Forces was removed in accordance with the San Francisco Treaty, and "the trend perceiving social studies as a means to promote democracy was discouraged, reflecting the changing international environment (Korean War and the Cold War)" as the direct influence of the United States disappeared and tense East-West relationships motivated Japan to take a more

middle stance, moving away from the "education for democracy" of before (Motani 322).

During the late 1970s, a course referred to as "Contemporary Society" was added within the Social Studies category in Japanese high schools, in which "problem-solving and decision-making were once again vigorously promoted," as they had been in the Allied run educational system, and "many innovative lessons were created that encouraged active learning as citizens of Japan and beyond" (Motani 322). However, in the 1980s the course was changed to an elective, and "its impact on youth became much more limited" given that only a fraction of students now took the course, reducing its reach. Throughout the post-war period, "citizenship/civic education has not been consistently developed…meaning that even though many progressive educators are dedicated to educating children to become active citizens who can contribute to building a more civil Japan…they cannot build on the past resources of citizenship/civic education" since such resources do not exist (Motani 321). Instead, a winding path of variously conformist/nationalist tradition with sudden intermittent periods of active learning/individualism forms the background of present educational reform efforts.

There is one other course within the social studies domain that focuses on what is considered "citizenship/civic education" in Western schools, "but it is called *'komin,'* meaning 'public people,' as if to avoid the use of the terms 'citizens' or 'citizenship'" both of which imply a more actively political role, with the potential for a critical regard towards national policy or government; in keeping with this, "in *'komin,'* vital roles of citizens in democratic society are rarely emphasized and civic

participation of students is generally not encouraged" (Motani 321). Although it is certainly difficult in any society to develop a system of education that, while necessarily instructive, also encourages a spirit of critical engagement with the world, it is also "certainly true that Japanese education lacks the tradition of encouraging critical thinking, in particular in social studies" which makes it especially difficult in this case to develop courses with the goal of encouraging independent thinking, and have such courses accepted by society in general and also those responsible for policy and regulation (Motani 322). It is clear, then, that the present sense of uniformity that informs the school environment, placing students who do not fit the expected mold at odds with the system, as in the case of *futōkō* children, has a long and well-established basis in the history of Japanese education.

In addition to changing the subject matter, the "Fundamental Education Law and School Education Law" passed in 1947 during the Allied occupation also initiated important changes with regards to the structure of the school system, "reorganiz[ing] the system into the single-track 6-3-3-4 school system with the first nine years compulsory" which is still used in the present (Fujita 43). To clarify, this represents an educational flow with six years of elementary school, three of junior high, three years of high school, and four years of college study. Within this system, any junior high graduate "would be eligible for senior high school if they could pass the entrance examination for the school of their choice," indicating the start of the exam-controlled system responsible for the high level of grade pressure prevalent in schools currently (Fujita 43). Likewise, "senior high school graduates could, in turn, go on to the college or university of their choice by passing entrance examinations,"

which was intended to create "an open, egalitarian, single-track system" in which all students would stand on even ground with regards to educational access (Fujita 43). Fittingly, the "key words" within educational discourses during this period of time were "ability (*nōryoku,* 能力) and aptitude (*tekisei,* 適性)" which reflected the growing sense of competition within educational circles (Cave 183).

Nonetheless, it is through this system that Japan has "achieved one of the highest levels of quality of schooling" often well-perceived by other countries, and ranking highly in comparisons "by such measures as enrollment ratio, retention or graduation rates, daily attendance, equality of opportunity and academic performance" (Fujita 43). These kinds of reports contribute to the sense that the Japanese system succeeds academically, reinforcing belief in the uniform, memorization-focused approach, and resulting for many years in the neglect of the relative few for whom the system did not work – the children who could not meet the demands of the system or the abrasive social environment noted before, with bullying commonplace, and merely disappeared from the public eye, either by withdrawing socially or committing suicide (a topic that often accompanies discussion of grade pressure in Japan).

It is the case that since the late 1950s, Japan's educational system has functioned with a national school curriculum, where the "courses of study that lay down curricula [before] were given binding force in place of their previous status as guidelines," and though it provides detailed instructions for the teaching approach of each subject, "the curriculum is revised roughly once every 10 years, coming into effect about 3 years after publication" (Cave 178). As of the 1970s, the effects of

globalization, which have had a similar impact on several nations including "Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand," introduced an economic influence into educational discourses, given that education is considered to be "key to international economic competition" (Cave 173). In relation to Japan, this influence has been termed "Japanese business administration" or "Japanese collectivism," which Asano explains "meant that people were expected to conform to group norms and standards, while the needs of the individual were suppressed" in the interest of creating members who could contribute to society (and Japan's economic competitiveness) as efficiently as possible (105). It was with this objective that students were required to "adhere to the over-strict *kōsoku* (校則), or school rules, and were not allowed to participate in decision making (Asano 105). Essentially, students were being initiated into corporate culture through school, and this "collectivism" that such training implied "repressed the idea of cooperation with diversity (i.e., utilizing the strengths of different backgrounds to create something fruitful)" and further contributed to a practice of uniformity (Asano 106). Put somewhat quaintly, "the Japanese school system required students to be 'worker bees' and to be prepared to maintain the corporate culture. Students were expected to follow demanding timetables, and the taking of any formal recess was considered unproductive, and therefore discouraged" meaning that school was entirely composed of study, a student's worth lay in their scores, and these two factors composed the primary focus of a school-age child's life (Asano 106).

Additionally, corporate culture itself represented a "regime of assimilation and hierarchical competition" which "only reinforced the tendency to exclude

heterogeneity" as people competed not to stand out, but to be the best candidate for the narrow role society prescribed for their position (Asano 106). Also important is the Japanese perception that acting as a competent "member of society" (社会人) is defined by one's status as a company employee (会社員), implying that those not suited for such a role were likewise not able to fully participate in society either. In keeping with this perspective, "those who could not adjust to this culture were labeled as 'different'" and were simply excluded from society, to which "students reacted with truancy, neurosis, and other physical and psychological problems," returning the discussion to the social issues that drive our present consideration of these topics (Asano 106).

It is on these grounds that "education critics and the media as well as policy makers who are seriously concerned about school maladjustment and disorder problems have condemned Japanese schools for strict school management and discipline," and for over-emphasizing uniform, rote learning to the detriment of students' individual qualities, creative and critical abilities (Fujita 50). These social voices also fault the system for the undue amount of pressure placed on children for qualifying exams, which contribute directly to the many "maladjustment problems" that face schools presently (Fujita 50). It is with these complaints and accusations in mind that current reform efforts "which are fueled by these sentiments, have a tendency to shift from the present 'one best system' of public education and centralized educational administration towards a system characterized by diversity in education, freedom of choice and market control," embracing to a degree the economic influence seen in the educational discourses inasmuch as it represents the

chance to bring change and choice to the school environment, which is an underlying goal in many of the reforms efforts to be discussed in the following sections.

3.3 The Problem Cycle and Statistical Implications

Within Japanese society, it tends to be the case that "short-term waves of moral panic" become the motivation for policy change within a given time period, and it is also "not uncommon to witness a particular problem resurfacing at, say, ten-year intervals" (Toivonen 18). In the case of *futōkō*, there have been two primary points of controversy, beginning with the problem's initial recognition and addition as a category on the MEXT's statistical surveys in the 1960s, and recurring with the formation of the citizen's and socio-medical discourses that developed in the 1980s to refute accusations that such problems as school phobia were the fault of the child. Most of Japan's social issues reflect a similar pattern "consisting of: 'discovery' and definition; the collection of statistics that seem to show a sharp increase in incidence; the implementation of measures; and the gradual control and disappearance of the problem" (Toivonen 18). The *futōkō* discourse has certainly undergone at least the first three of these, but the fourth seems to be a bit more elusive.

Hidenori Fujita, Dean of the Graduate School of Education at prestigious Tokyo University, makes the claim that in recent times, "launching reform itself has become a supreme goal and purpose in the current Japanese society," in which a shift in the relationship between the public and the government has led to a desire for change, which often finds expression through debate regarding social problems,

indicating that "crisis and reform have become a legitimate pair for social progress" (46). The media plays a key role as a "useful proxy for tracing societal attention" and making visible these various movements taking place within society, reflecting a common "two-year peak period, during which policy may be made and implemented" for a given youth problem before national focus shifts elsewhere (Toivonen 18). Especially within the field of education, Fujita notes there has occurred a "phenomenon engendered belief" brought about by the many social problems (each with an unclear mix of causes) facing Japan today and contributing to a feeling of "reform-supremacy," in which the 'new way' implemented by policy change is necessarily better than the old, simply because it represents something different (46). Yet, while a more vocal society may be a positive shift for Japan, this approach to chasing reform for the sake of change rather than evaluating the merit of a given proposal is not entirely a desirable tact.

The second item in the problem cycle, the generation of statistics relating to the issue, in the case of education falls within the scope of the MEXT. Statistics are often considered to be the 'objective' part of research, the solid numbers referred to in order to "legitimate and justify policy decisions" and yet "it is seldom acknowledged that such statistics are, to some extent reflections of the preconceptions of those who collect, collate and use them" as is of course also the case for the study of *futōkō* (Shimizu 167). In all human works there are basic assumptions behind what are taken to be "facts" (Toivonen 1), and in the case of the MEXT statistics, there is likewise a "conceptual framework revealed in the choice of research themes and categories" (Shimizu 167). The official statistics, while giving

some impression of the presence of the issue, cannot be comprehensive; in the case of *futōkō* issues, this refers to the fact that "they do not include students who are unable to attend normal classes, but attend instead often facilities such as Child Consultation Centres, Education Centres, school clinics (*hokenshitsu*), the principal's office, or special classes for *tōkōkyohi* to a minimum" thus participating in some way, but being still unable to engage social life as fully as they ought to, and thus forming an unrepresented part of the problem (Yoneyama 79). The statistics gathered by the MEXT "reflect the perception of school officials," and since they are based on information from these individuals and are subject to their assessment of the situation, the numbers "are therefore of questionable accuracy" (Kurita 302). In contrast to these official statistics, "sociological surveys have consistently indicated that there is a large 'reserve army' of students who are on the brink of the official statistics," who are not represented, but whose lives are nonetheless impacted by the same struggles and social pressures that have pushed others just a bit farther, into the 'official' problem categories (Yoneyama 79).

Another assumption suggested by the MEXT's approach to data collection is reflected in the comment that even Japan's Ministry of Education itself did not gather any responses regarding causation of the issue, seeking only to ascertain the number of absentees in the first 1966 survey, which seems to indicate a continuing confidence in the validity of the school system itself, and a lack of interest in responses that might call for change within it (Kurita 300). Moreover, the very figures returned by these surveys are subject to the perspective of the entity enacting the research, since the result depends heavily upon the definition of the

problem applied. The number of days necessary to be considered a "long-term absentee" has been changed over the years, being reduced from fifty days to only thirty during the 1980s, which would have the effect of making the problem appear smaller than before during a time when debate regarding responsibility for the issue was growing heated. Depending on the author and intent, there are many ways data can be made to strike the audience as particularly significant, including presenting it so that "absolute figures, not relative percentage shares are emphasized for maximum impact," in the case of an issue like *futōkō*, where despite the thousands of children impacted, the relevant percentage is rather small (Nakayama 23). This potential for misrepresentation is worth mentioning as something to weigh when considering the arguments made by each party within the educational discourses.

Given the "close connection between public debate and policy reforms" as evidenced by the problem cycle discussions above, it is "therefore useful to consider the youth problems as powerful 'agenda-setting' processes" through which the public engages broader social issues (Nakayama 18). Since the post-World War II era, these broader social issues have been characterized by reform movements focusing on "deregulation, liberalization, marketization, accountability, and privatization," which will each play a role in the following discussion (Asano 46). The presence of these overarching ideals, paired with the immediacy of society's problems, has acted to "accelerate current reform initiatives in a radical manner," while also introducing the "many contradictions and deceptive arguments" that accompany large rhetorical themes (Asano 47). As with any national issue, there exists a range of different voices vying for prominence within the discourse on

reform and the next chapter will consider who these actors are, how they are motivated, and what change they intend to bring to the context developed thus far.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reforms and Motivation for Change

Having provided a sense for how the educational system itself has developed and is perceived by Japan's Ministry of Education (MEXT), I will proceed with a discussion of the various actors involved in influencing Japan's educational reform process, focusing on two primary classifications: those with a "functionalist motivation" and those with a "moralist motivation" (Fujita 46). An assessment of actual change that has occurred, in view of the rhetoric considered just before, will be complemented by a discussion of the controversies surrounding these changes, and how school-related issues including *futōkō* have impacted and motivated these discourses. The discussions surrounding reform, and reform initiatives themselves, represent society's organized response to *futōkō*. It is from this perspective that I will consider the influences present amid Japan's reform discourses, tracing the topics that have been prioritized by reform actors as a result of social pressures. Many of the changes discussed within Japan share a common rhetoric aimed at reducing the stresses on children, in order to alleviate the environmental factors that lead to school issues, but there is a complex network of other motivations that exists beneath this publicly appealing rhetoric. An awareness of the particular voices involved in the reform debate and the priorities they hold is necessary to evaluate whether Japan's reform movements have really had the welfare of children at heart, and if so, whether they have had any success in improving the situation.

This chapter will conclude by addressing the outlook for future change with regard to Japan's educational system in the context developed throughout the chapter.

4.1 Policy Reform Actors

For much of Japan's history, the government had "absolute authority over decisions made about schooling," while actual educators had to comply with the rules, curriculum, and teaching approach provided for by administrators, who in turn followed the procedures established by the state. This left teachers "restricted in what they could develop on their own…allowing few possibilities for schools to develop their own educational ideas and practices" and creating a uniform system of education (Asano 105). Historically, then, the government has had the central role in determining school policy, and it was not until the 1960s that another voice from within Japan began to have a significant influence on the nation's approach to education (Asano 105). This new entrant to the educational discussion came in the form of major corporations which, "at the onset of high-speed economic growth" following World War II, "began to have more influence on the governmental policy" (Asano 105). The discourses they represented took hold during the 1980s, as "a new tide of education reform movements had emerged in many countries including the U.S.A. and Japan," bringing with it a "rise of consumer orientation and national concern over the quality of schooling" that introduced a desire to view school from a market perspective, sparking efforts to deregulate the programs offered with the intent to introduce a variety that would better serve the Japanese economy's need for creative workers, moving the nation away from the previous "one best system" that held a monopoly on public education via governmental regulation (Fujita 42).

The changes proposed by such reform efforts, however, have not been universally accepted in Japan, and Fujita casts a critical eye towards them, asking: "Why does Japan need to carry out these reforms?...Are they really appropriate and effective? What will be the outcomes of these reforms and whose benefits will be realized?" (45). The last question in particular is relevant to the present discussion, as it becomes necessary to consider just what interests motivate corporations to take a hand in educational policy, and whether their efforts will actually be for the benefit of the student, in addition to the economic priorities that primarily drive their actions.

Further reform initiatives that align with the deregulation perspectives of corporations stemmed from a "rising concern with the needs and demands of a postmodern society," for which "the advent of the information age, globalization and internationalization, and a rapidly aging society, all have become major concerns" (Fujita 46). A sense that "education with a global perspective" is necessary in order for Japan to maintain a prosperous position in the global world has come to the forefront of educational discussion, however what is meant by "global perspective" in most cases refers more to "global competitiveness" which serves only to add new kinds of pressure to the existing stresses of academic achievement placed on students, exacerbating the existing problems in the environment that contribute to the continued growth of issues including *futōkō* (Asano 106). Governmental policy-makers, members of the business world, the media, and educational critics all play a part in defining the discourses of this perspective, each with their own particular priorities that influence the interpretation they promote (Fujita 46).

Also under debate is the "effectiveness and efficiency" of the Japanese educational system, in view of the wider range of "various needs of the postmodern society [of Japan] that must continue to enjoy economic affluence and possess the capability to compete in a new information technology and globalizing economy" which economically interested policy actors have convinced the general public of (Fujita 46). Given that it is "generally accepted that old style schools have many problems and often do not function well" (Asano 104), a sense of the urgency of the need for reform in order to protect Japan's future affluence has "become a major incentive to promote reforms toward restructuring the system to be more flexible and diversified and revising the curricula for meeting these new needs" (Fujita 46). Perspectives within the reform wave that are motivated in this way – with economic and efficiency concerns driving their efforts – are considered to be part of a "functionalist" ideology within Japan (Fujita 46). In contrast, those motivated by progressive perspectives are considered to be part of a "moralist" ideology, and will be discussed in more detail later.

However, within the 1990s, as public involvement in the discussion of social issues grew stronger (as noted in chapter two following the formation of the citizens' and socio-medical discourses) parents and students also began organizing to assert their perspectives in the arena of school reforms as well, widening the discussion from its previous domain limited only to educators and politicians (Asano 104). However, "perhaps not surprisingly, there is greater public consensus within Japan about the nature of the country's educational problems than there is about solutions," (which is quite a comment following the chapter one discussions

regarding disagreement on that issue) and "within Japan, the precise nature of dissatisfaction with education differs according to the commentator" (Cave 176). Besides disagreements regarding the actual content of the curriculum to be taught to children, there is also controversy regarding the method of instruction; the appropriate relationship between students, teachers, parents, and the agencies that persist in regulating education; the degree of participation that should be sought from the student; and the organization of the overall school structure itself (Asano 104). These topics will recur throughout the discussion on reform, and represent central points of contention between the various actors within the debate.

From the range of actors on the reform stage come a range of objectives: the previously noted business figures take an interest in promoting "creativity"; those on the political right "want more stress on patriotism, 'Japanese tradition,' and moral education; teachers' unions want smaller class sizes and more resources; and some on the left want the opportunity of high school education for all and the end of high school entrance exams" (Cave 174). The political right mentioned, Japan's conservatives or traditionalists, "include many of the Ministry of Education bureaucrats and the Liberal Democratic Party (hereafter LDP) politicians," though the name of the last may seem conflicting with the category. These parties "share a basic perspective that they have to 'restore' more traditional Japanese values by revising the Constitution and the Fundamental Law of Education" in order to bring Japan back to the historical order described in the previous chapter, and to "'rescue' Japan" from having been "'excessively' democratized and westernized by the occupying authorities" following World War II (Motani 312). There is a sense of

concern in Japan that the Western influence from the post-war period, and the continued fascination with Western culture that persists today, brings with it a dangerous "individualistic perspective" that may undermine the more traditional focus on community priority within Japan, and erode the safety and structure of society overall. While critical literature often attributes Japan's social problems to its conformist tendencies, conventional wisdom within the conservative political circles indicates the opposite – that conformity represents security and strength for Japan's society, and it is individualism which threatens to create problems for society. This belief was demonstrated by the increased pressure by the MEXT to include the pre-war national flag and anthem (both of which have imperialistic connotations) in school ceremonies during the mid-1980s, which was considered necessary to "instill patriotism into children" to counteract the nation's increasing internationalization (Aspinall 81).

In contrast, those categorized as part of the political left in Japan generally consider Western influence as a positive change for the country. Motani explains this by stating "the progressives…think democratization of the occupying authorities was good and seek to promote a more egalitarian democratic educational system" (313). This egalitarianism, however, is also subject to a Japanese interpretation of the concept, and some scholars construe it as just another guise for conformist pressure in which the "Japanese commitment to social equality" results in an effort to suppress individualistic self-motivation to suit an interpretation of equality and same-ness (Borovoy 554). In this way, an egalitarianism that claims Western roots and a "traditionally Japanese" sense of

hierarchy both result in similar conformist influences, despite the opposition of their proponents. Nonetheless, the primary voice speaking from the progressive/leftist perspective is the Japanese Teachers' Union (JTU, or the *Nikkyōso*), and simplifications of the political conflict over education in Japan often reduce the situation to "a struggle between these two ideological perspectives, manifested in the conflict between the Ministry of Education and the JTU" (Motani 313).

One way in which this conflict has been pursued socially is through the establishment of a form of education focusing not on school at all but rather on the lifestyle details of children and "all areas of each student's life outside the non-academic realm of school," known as "guidance education," though which Progressives have made an effort to counteract the intent of the government to discourage democratization via their "authoritarian educational policies" (Motani 318). "Life guidance for students," as the effort is referred to, "is an initiative set forth by the non-governmental educator research group called the National Guidance Educational Research Council" (全国生活指導研究協議会, shortened as *Zenseiken*), established in 1959, which focuses on "civilian morality and children's participation" in society as opposed to the "moral education imposed by the Ministry of Education" (Motani 318). Yet despite such programs, conservative policies have long "dominated educational policy," and though reform movements are often "guided and promoted by progressive, neoliberal arguments" (Fujita 47), it remains the case that "there is no evidence" that the unconventional efforts of the progressive educators in particular "have ever had any influence on the actual

educational policy-making process" (Motani 313). Rather, it remains business leaders and politicians with varying neo-liberal and neo-conservative sympathies who are primarily responsible for the progressive influences seen in recent policy (Motani 310).

Proponents of this description, who favor a progressive outlook, generally promote "individuality, self-realization, self-cultivation, and freedom in learning," arguing against the traditional methods of instruction and memorization, through which "the 'cramming' style of education, standardized curriculum, uniform teaching, and strict school management" have, according to this perspective, worked to "obstruct authentic learning, a stress-free, human life, and the development of individuality and creativity" (Fujita 47). Representing a variation on this theme, neo-liberal critics focus on the importance of "freedom and choice" for students and parents within the education system, claiming the existence of a "state monopoly in education" preventing such choices, which are a necessary "prerequisite for releasing children from the pressure of entrance examinations, for repairing the deteriorating school climate, and for improving the quality of schools and children's lives" (Fujita 47). Neo-conservatives, likewise, take an interest in "stimulat[ing] creative endeavors" in order to improve education and children's lives, but they emphasize the importance of "deregulation and the improvement of education to cope with socioeconomic changes like computerization and globalization" in order to achieve this improvement. Market competition, they argue, would be a more effective means of change than reform within the state-run monopoly, reflecting the

background of such criticism, which is often represented by economists and business leaders (Fujita 47).

All three of these categories have in common a belief that school issues such as bullying, violence, juvenile crime, *futōkō*, and *hikikomori* are in part the result of "too much education and distorted schooling," which is only partially represented by reported statistics that show only "the tip of the iceberg" for how pervasive these problems are in schools today (Fujita 47). The media has magnified the arguments of such critics to claim that the public has a "moral duty to save our children from such a suffocating situation and that radical reforms are urgently called for," illustrating how such social issues are directly turned to act as motivation and generate support for policy reform (Fujita 47). Asano argues that the discussion of "rights and responsibilities" is also "particularly crucial" to the question of reform in Japan, and this connects the reform discussion to that of social issues as well, given that the placement of responsibility for such issues is instrumental in determining *what* should be changed in order to improve the situation (105). The rights society concludes children ought to have directly inform conclusions regarding the way in which schools should be structured, and what degree of choice children ought to have in this matter. Yet, the actual state of children's rights in Japanese schools is in question, and although such rights are "referred to in Japanese schools….they often exist in theory only," in actual practice having been "neglected, sometimes even restricted and oppressed" (Asano 105). As a result, for any of the reforms discussed here to have an actual impact on the social issues discussed before, policy must not only be accepted at a high level, but "changes in personal attitudes and

relationships" between the students, parents, teachers, and administrators themselves must also take place at the individual level (Asano 105).

Nonetheless, the entity with the largest hand in reform proceedings is the Ministry of Education, and as Cave comments, "ultimately, it is the government that sets the educational policy agenda with which all other groups must contend" (176). The MEXT plays an overarching role by "promulgat[ing] all policies affecting the entire educational system" and these policies are based upon its reports, which are issued by councils composed of a range of social representatives, including "famous novelists, poets, athletes, business executives, as well as a variety of educators" (Motani 313). This description makes the governmental proceedings for educational reform seem fairly open, and yet it must be noted that each of these representatives are chosen by the MEXT, allowing it to retain control over the political sympathies in evidence on the councils (Motani 313). As of 1993, the LDP ceased to be the largest single party in Japan, but scholars like Motani argue that (with the exception of the years from 2009 – 2012 when the Democratic Party briefly held greater influence) they "continue to control the current Japanese political system" resulting in a governmental presence that tends to favor more conservative, traditional perspectives amid the complex socio-political process involved in the development of reform initiatives (313).

The broader political climate surrounding Japan also has an impact on this process, as is reflected in the shift in thought that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequently of the USSR as a world power (and a large socialist presence in Eastern Europe) at the end of the 1980s. Following these changes, "ideological

opposition finally came to an end…politicians became more responsive to the public at least in appearance" as ties with the US grew stronger, no longer needing to be as tentative as before, and a "notion of accountability" reflecting Western perspectives on desirable relationships between governments and their people began to spread (Fujita 47). This interest in promoting accountability was also strongly reflected by economically motivated reformers, following the trend for business related critics to be particularly responsive to global outlooks, and the social influence of the importance of US ties economically for Japan. This can be seen in the efforts of the *Zaikai* organization, a "special interest group of business executives" which began working to influence educational policies via the "functionalist motivations" noted before (Motani 313).

The year 1984 marked the beginning of the third major wave of educational reform to take place in Japan, and also the formation of the National Council on Educational Reform (NCER) which was "an ad hoc advisory committee to the Prime Minister" and oversaw much of the change that would take place during the following years (Fujita 43). It is considered to be a "high profile governmental advisory committee," and represents one of the primary sources for understanding what is to be considered "mainstream" within the discussion of education in Japan (Cave 174). This committee published four reports from 1984 to 1987 under Prime Minister Nakasone, which set the agenda for education reform throughout the decade and reflected the growing influence of business voices in Japan via a close alignment with the interests and demands of the *Zaikai* group (Motani 313). Also due to its prominence as a government entity, the NCER plays a significant role with

relation to the public and media perception of the state of education in Japan (Cave 174), and acts as a kind of gate-keeper for deciding which of the wide variety of reform movements described above (traditionalist, progressive, neo-liberal, and neo-conservative) will actually be translated into policy that will impact the school structure (Fujita 43).

4.2 "Functionalist" Reform

Before the 1980s, educational reform was intended to expand the existing "one best system" that was unilaterally designed, controlled, and funded by the government for the entire nation (Fujita 42). This central system was believed to provide all students with "equality of opportunity" because there existed only a single-track, along which all children must progress, beginning with a district-based "neighborhood school system" during elementary and lower-secondary levels, and followed by "meritocratic entrance examinations" for upper-secondary education and university studies (Fujita 43). The quality of education achieved through this system was considered to be very high, as proven through "international comparative studies on student performance in math and science" that were managed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) at three points, during the years 1964, 1978, and 1994 (Fujita 43).

However, it was during this time of high praise for the Japanese system internationally that the third major wave of reform in Japan began to take place; counter-intuitively, while foreign appreciation for Japanese school methods was at its highest, internal discontent was reaching its strongest (Fujita 43). The

"supposed rigidity, uniformity, and exam-centredness" of the Japanese approach to school was held responsible for the growing number of troubled children, and this discontent lent impetus to the reform efforts that gained prominence during the late 1980s and 1990s (Cave 173). Reforms of this period followed the "functionalist" motivation of business influences and operated under "the slogan of 'stress on individuality' (個性重視)" intended to produce creativity by widening the availability of choice within the education system (Cave 173). Meanwhile, the Japanese media began to popularize the impression of Japanese education as "outmoded and in need of a drastic overhaul" which further contributed to the growing atmosphere of change surrounding educational discourses (Fujita 45). "Even as Western countries began to focus on and learn from the merits of Japan's education system, Japan was working toward reform that was intended to eliminate those same elements as being the factors responsible for the educational distortion" considered responsible for youth problems (Fujita 45).

It was during the 1980s, which Motani describes as "the heyday of economic affluence" for Japan, that social awareness of problems such as *futōkō* experienced a peak, and the need for educational reform became more significant as instances of "bullying, violence, and 'classroom collapse' (teachers' loss of control)" grew more frequent (314). Yet, in part because of the strength of the Japanese economy and relative prosperity of society, the political climate was not right for dramatic change, and "radical reform initiatives were not implemented" (Motani 314). With the "burst of the bubble economy" at the end of the 1980s, however, this changed, and "the country went through a series of shocking events that caused almost everyone

in Japan to ask fundamental questions about their values, life goals, and the purpose of education," contributing to growing social pressure for the Ministry of Education to begin to work towards "innovative and concrete proposals for educational change" (Motani 315). The economic crisis of the 1990s and the rising tide of global influence "accelerated this process" compelling the government to "deregulate and restructure" the economy and its administrative structures, which led to changes in the educational system that echoed these alterations (Fujita 47).

The greatest impetus for the policy reforms of the 1980s and 1990s came from Japan's economic changes, and so it is not surprising that business entities played a large role in influencing this shift. As an expression of their deregulation goals, these "business-related commentators" often stressed "the need for more diversity within education, coupled with more freedom of choice for the consumer, and more attention to the different developmental needs of the individual students" (Cave 176). These priorities seem to follow the direction set by neo-liberal policy within the US and UK, and it is noted that in some instances the proposals of business-minded reformers "explicitly advocate looking to American education as a model" (Cave 176). By way of the NCER, acting in accordance with *Zaitai* demands, Prime Minister Nakasone called for "'internationalization' and 'individualization'…to create a more cost-effective, flexible education system through decentralization, deregulation, and privatization, in order to produce more assertive and creative Japanese workers for the economic development of the country in an increasingly competitive world economy" (Motani 313).

Besides this obvious political influence, business representatives had their own organizations as well, and often released independent statements on how education ought to be managed. One report, "titled *From schools to 'the place of integration'*, published by the Japan Association of Corporate Executives" (経済同友会) in 1995 claimed the necessity of "downsizing" public education in order to reduce its influence on children to only the "very basics" and instead shifting the responsibility for education onto "the resources of communities, families, and private sectors" (Motani 313). Another such publication bears the title, "*Developing Japan's creative human resources: an action agenda for reform in education and corporate conduct*" and was published by the Japanese Federation of Economic Organizations (日本経済団体連合会) in 1996. It offers proposals for "the introduction of competition through deregulation…more choices and varieties of curricula; and emphasis on creative thinking and experiential learning" continuing the market based call for a more privatized, consumerist approach to the education system (Motani 314).

Each of these economically influenced voices was contributing to a call to change Japanese education in a way that would allow a situation where "parents can choose schools, schools can develop their own curricula, and talented children can go to university early" so as to widen "freedom of choice" within the system (Cave 177). These goals were partially realized with the Education Act of 1980, which enabled parents and students to select a state school and compelled secondary schools to publish the results of student exams so that parents could better make this decision, with an eye to "remedy the failures of 'monopolistic' public provision

by enhancing consumer choice" (Fujita 51). Furthermore, the Education Act of 1986 was intended to "reduce the power of local education authorities and to increase the representation of parents and local business circles," increasing again parents' ability to influence the course of their children's education (Fujita 51). In 1988, however, a new Education Act moved the balance of power back out of local hands to some degree, establishing a "National Curriculum" and a "system of national testing" in an effort to raise the quality of Japanese schools (Fujita 51).

The two most significant changes of the time were the reduction in curriculum content intended to reduce stress on children by reducing the material covered and the addition of an "Integrated Studies" period, the content of which was left largely up to the local educators (Motani 314). Motani makes clear that although the direction of these reforms may be interpreted as furthering progressive goals, the "origin of these initiatives is not egalitarian or democratic" arising instead from economic influences such as the *Zaikai* (314). There exists a neo-conservative strain of such efforts, in which "market principles and consumer choice are combined with renewed emphasis upon national identity and 'traditional' moral values," and also a neo-liberal party within the discourse that merges "market-led reform and the ideology of choice" with a focus on reducing the state-run monopoly on education (Cave 185). Such movements work towards moving away from the state-mandated model "to create a decentralized, diversified and market-driven system, making 'parental choice' one of the major policy issues and 'accountability' a frame of reference for promoting neo-liberal reform initiatives" (Fujita 42). The influence of such a neo-liberal agenda has also played a noted role

in the development of education in both the US and Britain; the importance of these ideologies in Japan are also in part due to the fact that these Western nations are "two countries whose example attracts particular attention in Japan" (Cave 185). In several of the leading industrialized countries around the world, including the US, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, "educational policy debates are infused with the imagery of 'globalization'" which has lead Japan's debates to do the same (Cave 173). The way in which "education is seen as a key to international economic competition" in these other affluent countries (Cave 173) has also played a role in the rise of economic voices as important influences within Japan's educational reform discussions, demonstrating the influence of East-West relationships (Fujita 45). To be more specific, Japanese critics often denote the government's educational reform efforts as having been "inspired by a combination of neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies resembling those of the Thatcher and Major governments in Britain, and the Reagan and Bush administrations in the United States," indicating a high level of awareness of foreign educational legislation in Western countries, and a close relationship between these measures and those adopted in Japan (Cave 173). Such correlating international educational changes "might be seen as evidence that educational systems across a range of industrial democracies are converging in their ideological underpinnings and institutional arrangements" in a way that is motivated by globalization, a growing interest in human development, and worldwide economic competition (Cave 174). Moreover, these convergences are "made politically possible through the medium of the 'shared reference groups and

assumptive worlds'" that have grown up between these countries as a result of "increasing internationalization" between their respective societies (Cave 174).

Analyses from the business organizations, however, continue to conclude that "Japanese education fails to produce the creative people needed to compete in a new world economy of the information age," maintaining the pressure for further educational reform (Cave 175). Towards the end of the 1990s the policies enacted by the MEXT began to be implemented, and "market principles such as deregulation and restructuring" began to take effect within the school system, "implying a reform of the top-down control model through giving more power to the local educational administration and individual schools" (Asano 109). Despite the apparent direction of these changes, "community residents, parents, students, and teachers are still not allowed to take part in decision making, only to give opinions," which may represent a degree of progress, since their perspectives are at least admitted on a cursory level, but is still a far cry from actually involving the individual parent or child in the process of revising the school system they are subject to (Asano 109). It is noted that progressive educators "have been quite marginalized in the official curriculum since the Second World War" (Motani 310), and "the diffuse desire among the public for more freedom and choice in education" has resulted in reform that revises the curriculum, allowing students or teachers choice with regards to subject matter, rather than institutional reform enabling them to have power with regards to the actual structure of schools and the system itself (Cave 187). While the system "appears to be deregulated," important decisions remain primarily in the hands of administrators, while teachers have "restricted involvement in administrative

issues," maintaining the top-down control that existed prior to the reforms (Asano 109). Government actions promoted "undermining the autonomy of teachers, while, at the same time, increasing the voice of parents and business circles in public education, the regulatory power of the central government, and the control of the market" (Fujita 51).

In 1992, an Education Act established "the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)" as a central department to "regulate and manage the new system of school inspection" in order to ensure high "quality of education and standards of academic achievement," creating another centralized check on school activity (Fujita 51). Though to some degree the policy decisions made by the government "cannot be finalized and implemented if they are largely unacceptable to the external forces, including progressive educators and the public opinion" (Motani 314), the spirit of change created by dissatisfaction with the existing school system and the appearance of successful deregulation contributed to a public willing to accept policy changes without too much scrutiny. People were eager to follow a sense of "reform-supremacy" in which change was desired for the sake of change – for its difference from the prior methods – and "reform itself seemed to be the goal, not a means to improve education" (Fujita 47).

4.3 "Moralist" Reform: The Progressive Overlay

Despite the extensive discussions represented above, "it can plausibly be argued that the Ministry of Education's policy-making continues to be marked by caution and a gradual approach to the introduction of major reforms," marking a difference between talk and action amid reform in Japan (Cave 185). Yet, it may be

due to this caution that progressive voices are also able to make themselves heard against the complex discourses of "functionalist" reform. Also promoting the idea of decentralization, the primary proponent of the progressive movement is the Japanese Teachers' Union (*Nikkyōso*), which leads the discussion on "moralist" reform given its emphasis on improving school conditions for the sake of the children, as opposed to arguing in the interest of Japan's economic competitiveness (Cave 177). This organization reportedly bases its call for increased choice, smaller classes, and less competition on ideals following from the "appeal of the idea of freedom of choice in 1990s Japan" (Cave 177), and the growing notion that "it was more important to allow students more freedom and flexibility …even at the expense of academic standards and educational efficiency" (Fujita 45). A smaller and more politically left-wing organization, the *Zenkyō* (全日本教職員組合), also promoted these ideas, and was responsible for proposing that high school entrance exams in Japan be discontinued entirely (Cave 177).

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a time of pronounced change in the "socio-political landscape surrounding Japan" which contributed to the popularity of progressive education movements, even if their impact on actual reform remained limited (Motani 314). Following this shift in thought, criticism by the media and by society in general for the traditionally informed "uniform education, standardized curriculum, strict school management and disciplinary control" in the Japanese system grew stronger, while a desire for "expanding child-centered education, open school education, diversity in education, and individuality in learning" in answer to Western influences increased (Fujita 50). The topic of discipline in Japanese school

systems and the beliefs regarding the responsibility of the parent versus the educator towards a child is a social issue domain of its own, with just as many arguments and complexities as *futōkō*. The relationship between them, which encompasses the range of other school-related problems as well, served as a significant tension within society adding fuel to the public frustration over Japan's education system. The effect of the media, which drew attention to personal cases, working to "blame individual tragedies involving children on the perceived shortcomings of the educational system," further heightened public sentiment that change was necessary not only in policy itself but also in the guiding ideals that motivated this policy, contributing to the progressive spirit acting as an overlay to the public aspect of reform discussions (Cave 185). The fundamentalist goals of privatization and decentralization "happened to coincide with the increasing interest of progressive citizens' groups and educators," turning public sentiment into a vehicle for gaining support for carefully worded proposals from the business-related actors (Motani 309). The latter half of the 1990s in particular "has seen increasingly vocal dissatisfaction with Japanese education among commentators in Japan, together with educational reform proposals which have often gained impetus from this discontent" (Cave 173).

Motani argues that this increased civil involvement of the people of Japan represents a trend "worth exploring in the context of globalization at the grass-roots level," which is certainly a positive interpretation of events, alluding to the power of the common citizen to influence the direction of his or her government on a national level through active civil participation, a conclusion uncharacteristic of Japan but

promising for *futōkō* children struggling to find a place within what had seemed to be pre-defined social roles (309). This kind of discussion indicates a changing role for members of Japanese society, with the potential to change and criticize the structures they find themselves in, redefining also their part in the community, which could make all the difference for stifled *futōkō* children. Nonetheless, Cave issues a reminder that these are projections based on what remains as of yet only a small beginning, in this context often leading to "an uncritical public enthusiasm for reform for its own sake, with little sober analysis about what particular reforms might contribute to the desired goals of education," highlighting the need for not only encouraging public interaction, but building an informed public to be able to participate (185). Preparing individuals for this kind of citizenship, of course, leads back to the discussion on education and the problems associated with the non-participatory approach to teaching long encouraged by the Ministry of Education.

In 1996, with the policy report from the MEXT's Central Council on Education (中央教育審議会), the variety of problems associated with the current approach to education discussed throughout the chapter above were officially recognized, "authoriz[ing] the mainstream view of the failures of Japanese education and socialization," and concluding that children in Japanese schools were "neither sufficiently well socialized, nor sufficiently creative and self-motivated" (Cave 177). As when the media began portraying *futōkō* children as otherwise "normal" students, universalizing the issue, this official recognition of faults within the school system itself was significant in that it broadened the discussion on reform and legitimized the complaints therein. With regards to the media, members of the press whom I

interviewed during my time in Japan indicated that the statements of the Japanese government bear a much greater importance there than in other countries, given Japan's central press club system that coordinates the actions of media outlets, establishing the government as responsible for defining reality via what is acknowledged and what is ignored. The depiction of the Japanese school system as troubled in these policy reports, then, reflected the seriousness of these problems on a national scale and the strength of the discontent present in society.

Following this governmental recognition, the media continued to present still more shocking cases of school dysfunction, including a complex incident in 1997. Motani writes:

> Japan was shocked to learn that a 14-year-old boy murdered an elementary school boy, as well as another younger girl previously. Even more shocking was that he put the dead boy's head in front of the school gate where he attended, 'trying to disturb' the police. He also sent a letter to the local newspaper, which could be interpreted as justifying his crime because he was a victim of the Japanese educational system. (315)

These dramatic, dark stories grabbed the attention of the public, stirring outrage over the claim that Japanese education could be tied to such shocking crimes and resulting in policymakers "finding themselves being held up in these debates or outcries for radical reforms" (Fujita 46). A report from the Prime Minister, *The frontier within: individual empowerment and better governance in the new millennium*, remarked that the rapid socio-political currents and undeniable presence of serious problems "left people with the impression that core attributes of Japanese society on which they had prided themselves – family, solidarity, the quality of education, and social stability and safety – were crumbling" (Motani 316). The report continues to reflect that perhaps the shock over these issues, and the

problems themselves, were in fact the result of a certain "brittleness and inflexibility of Japan's economy and society that had been building up gradually" throughout the years (Motani 316). It was from such reflections that Japan's social issues came to be constructed on a "moral basis" encouraging the "scientizing" of "the individual and the structure within which he or she is embedded" in order to determine some conceivable solution (Fujita 46).

It is within this social milieu that reform proposals were developed, "at least partly as a result of Japanese citizens' egalitarian hope to use education to reconstruct the country into a more democratic and just society for children" (Motani 316). *Futōkō* children were one point in a field of issues confronting society and driving reform, and it was as a result of these forces that the "need for individuality (個性)" came to the forefront (Cave 173). The MEXT noted, "it cannot be denied that to date in Japan, education has tended to fall into the trap of cramming knowledge into children, while the ability to learn and think for oneself has been neglected" (Cave 175). Yet, the ambiguity of the term *individuality* "allows it to be used to justify a wide range of proposals with very different implications," thus connecting the present discussion with the "functionalist" reform efforts noted before, which were more influential in the actual political process of policy reform in Japan (Cave 173).

Nonetheless, progressive reform voices continued to express "rising concern" over the system on "moralistic" grounds, pointing out that "many pedagogical principles and styles of teaching and school management have been criticized as obsolete and even distorting educational processes and children's life" (Fujita 46),

continuing the strong national concern that the school system held a degree of responsibility for the difficult situations of thousands of *futōkō* and *hikikomori* children, and the horrible crimes of still others. The progressive answer to such problems was considered to be "less pressurized lives for children both inside and outside school," which aligned with the demands within the civic *futōkō* discourses themselves (Cave 178). There is a high level of anticipation for a new set of reforms implemented in 2002 by the Ministry of Education, which "principally focused on a new curriculum" (Asano 104) and was expected to bring "significant changes to public schools throughout Japan" by encouraging a "Zest for Living (生きる力), and Relaxed Education (ゆとり)" (Motani 310). The first of these objectives was defined as "a capacity to identify a problem, learn and think by herself/himself, make judgment assertively, take action, and find better ways to solve a problem, no matter how much the society changes" also imbued with a "rich humanity, that knows his/her boundaries, co-operates with others, whose heart empathizes with others and is moved by various things" (Motani 311). To say the least, this definition of the MEXT's desired "Zest for Living" is highly conceptual, and uncriticizably broad. The second objective, a "relaxed education," is likewise ambiguously defined as "a relaxed, humane state, as opposed to a competitive, stratifying environment" (Motani 311), and completes the progressive theoretical framework intended to direct the changes brought by this prominent set of reforms.

4.4 Actual Change

Regardless of the range or vehemence of reform discourse, there persists a gap between "the grand rhetoric of educational reform and the cautions reality" (Cave 178). As in any country, conflicts within the political system often result in "proposals for educational reform that have never been translated into policy measures," as a result of "divisions between would-be reformers, political attachment to the status quo resulting from long-term dominance by one party (the Liberal Democrats), and the skill of the Ministry of Education in manipulating the policy-making process" (Cave 178). Thus, it is necessary to consider not only the reform discourses, but also the *actual* impact their presence has or has not had on the system.

Following the tumultuous debates chronicled above and the high level of anticipation within Japan for the 2002 reforms, there are only two principal changes to consider since the 1990s: "curricular reform and the introduction of the five-day school week" (Cave 178). The most important aspect of the first was the "new view of academic achievement (新しい学力観)" that moved education towards a focus on the "students' interest and motivation (興味、関心、意欲)" in order to "allow more integrated, experience-based, exploratory learning" (Cave 178). Though the tone of the curriculum may have altered, the only actual structural change took place through the addition of "Integrated Studies" and the "replacement of social studies and science in the first 2 years of primary school by a new subject, Daily Life (生活科)" (Cave 178). In addition, the content of a wide range of courses was

dramatically reduced so as to "allow more hours for elective subjects" and the new "cross-disciplinary subject called Integrated Learning (総合的な学習)" (Fujita 44).

The most radical aspect of this new Integrated Learning course period is noted to be "the fact that only very general guidelines are given about how to teach…in contrast to the very detailed prescriptions for other subjects, which are in line with the traditional curriculum format" (Cave 179). In this way, although the reform measures themselves may not have enacted progressive changes within the education system, they have opened a window for local educators to do so, "giving teachers a great deal of freedom to determine what is to be taught in these new areas, a radical departure in an educational system which has traditionally been regarded as subject to strong central control" (Cave 179). Though teachers have been handed this opportunity, it remains the case that "more radical structural changes are necessary for them to become a strong, steady force for educational change," especially since they are operating in an environment where no prior precedent for this kind of independent teaching and curriculum development exists (Motani 310). Integrated Learning represents a class period "designed to encourage more student-centered pedagogy with no recommended textbooks from the Ministry of Education" which is at once a great opportunity for locally led change, and a great weight upon teachers who have neither been trained to develop their own curriculum nor provided the resources or time to do so (Motani 321).

The second significant change, the introduction of a 5-day school week, instead of the 6-day schedule that had been in place until 1992, represents a more clear-cut reduction of the school system's claim on children's time (Cave 179). The

phased introduction of this new structure has created "one and then two Saturdays per month days off, and finally will make all Saturdays off from the year 2002" (Fujita 44). However, curricular changes were not aligned with the initial phases of this schedule shift, meaning that "since 1992, teachers have been struggling to teach a curriculum designed for more school hours than have been available," placing stress on both teacher and student, and emphasizing the necessity of the content reductions begun through the 2002 reforms (Cave 179).

There has also been discussion in Japan of implementing an alternate six-year school system, offering "combined junior and senior high school education…which will inevitably lead to the transformation of the existing single-track 6-3-3 school system into a partially multitracked one" (Fujita 44). This proposal includes specific statements clarifying that "such schools are not intended to foster an academic elite; rather, they should aim to develop distinctive specialties, such as experiential learning, internationalization, information technology, environmental studies, or traditional culture" so as to allow students who excel at the ordinary elementary educational system to choose a path more suited to their interests and abilities (Cave 181). This structure has actually been implemented in many of Japan's private schools, and it holds the benefit that "students who pass the entrance exam for such schools at age 12 face no entrance exam for high school" since the two structures are combined, removing the usual "exam hell" and grade pressure that plays so prominently into the explanations for social issues (Cave 180).

However, other reform actors argue that this structural change, along with the recent "relaxation of school catchment areas" to allow parents to choose their

children's schools instead of determining this by district (Cave 181), will contribute to "differentiation and segregation" (Fujita 54). Further, it is argued that children's "identity and sense of belongingness" which is primarily credited to their school environment will be "undermined" by these stratifications (Fujita 54). School choice, Fujita argues, would lead to children being "grouped on the bases of both their own and their parents' preferences, which presumably reflect social, cultural and economic capitals of their family," which would result in schools being not only "rank-ordered…but also differentiated and segregated on the bases of social differences of various kinds" (54). In this way, prominent educators within Japan have construed the rise of a market approach to school, that enables parents and students to choose their own schools, as the potential root of serious social classifications that would damage the cohesiveness of Japanese community.

4.5 The Ideology of Education

Arguments along these lines, under the heading of egalitarianism, resist educational change in favor of choice and reinforce the educational universalism that contains students in environments in which they are not comfortable. Fujita Hidenori, Dean of the Graduate School of Education at Tokyo University (one of Japan's top three institutions), outlines four primary types of symbiosis, or "co-living": *embracive symbiosis*, in which "people live together with very limited social differentiation and are connected to strong social ties"; *segregated symbiosis*, in which "different groups of people are separated from each other socially, culturally, and sometimes even spatially"; *civic symbiosis*, which he notes "tends to be idealized in modern democratic society" and features "all individuals assumed as being equal,

autonomous and independent, but at the same time as having an orientation to accept different people, ideas and cultures, and to cooperate for improving their welfare"; and lastly, *market-oriented symbiosis*, in which "individuals tend to be self-oriented, concerned with personal benefits, indifferent towards others, and not willing to cooperate in order to improve social benefits" (54). He continues to argue that it is necessary to organize school structures by the same principle as social ones, so that "common neighborhood schools are open to everyone in their respective local communities and which all residents are willing to cooperate to improve" (Fujita 55). "Choice is something good in and of itself," he concedes, with regards to both a market economy and a democratic society, and as a "core value of the modern definition of freedom" (Fujita 55). However, "co-existence and public discussion" he notes, are also "core tenets" of democracy, necessitating "*civic symbiosis* or co-living as crucial for harmony and the persistence of a democratic society" (Fujita 55). Most importantly, he claims that this desired *civic symbiosis cannot* be realized through independent choice, but instead "by accepting/admitting and making commitment" (Fujita 55). His statement ends there (I have not truncated the quote), and it may be the case that he means a commitment to preserving group harmony through the community in which one is placed, in accordance with the accepted roles indicated by whomever has taken the initiative to organize that community and the values that compose it. As school is essential in forming the citizen, his argument indicates, these concepts are just as vital for school organization as they are for society. It is on these grounds that he argues, "choice will undermine [school's] foundation" (Fujita 55).

I agree with the principle that school is essential in forming a person's outlook, and that the interests of society are begun in the classroom, but uniformity, standardization, and conformist education will not result in the civic society which Fujita calls for. This line of thought, rather, takes the notion of egalitarianism and turns it into a sentence of enforced equivalence (not equality) that limits students and confines them to roles, locations, and particular social settings that they may not be suited for. Equal opportunity, which recent Japanese discourse seems concerned with via the frequent usage of the term *egalitarianism*, is agreed to be important on the grounds of democratic thought in Japan and the US alike. However, equal *opportunity* must be differentiated from an artificially imposed necessary *equivalence*. A misapplication of this idea may serve keep those who do not fit (whether for reasons of accelerated or decreased aptitude, personality, or merely non-standard desires and interests) bound to a "one best system" in which they are not allowed to pursue their own goals or to realize their own unique personhood. Equal opportunity *does not* guarantee equal results, which is an absolutely essential clarification. Rather, it represents the chance for any individual to make what they will of the resources before them based on their own resolve and effort, without undue discrimination of a definitional basis (race, gender, etc.).

Is it negative for society if more advanced students gather, becoming removed from the general crowd? Should they be required to stay in a fully represented mix of citizens in order to learn to work with others regardless of ability? This might imbue the kind of well-knit community Fujita posits, in which the strongest are dedicated to helping the weakest, perhaps even out of their own

self-interest, so that the group as a whole can progress (Fujita 55). However it is worth questioning whether this an image of reality and an accurate assessment of human nature, especially when it pertains to children who are held to rigorous expectations and high achievement pressure. If such an idea is represented by the "one best system" in which schools represent the regions in which they are based, rather than student merit or choice, then (assuming the districts themselves represent an "even mix" and none of the social or economic prejudice Fujita fears choice would engender) such an environment should yield students with ideally civic natures. Japan has operated under just such a universal system for decades, and yet, social issues such as bullying, truancy, and "classroom collapse" are as prevalent in Japan as in any country.

Fujita explains that "all individuals are assumed as being equal" in the modern democratic perspective of Japan, and if so, I feel that this represents a point of disagreement between the Japanese and United States' interpretation of democratic perspectives. From my understanding of the Western idea of democracy, all individuals are assumed to have *equal potential* so that their success and merit are based upon their own efforts, along with the impact of fortune, whether for good or bad, upon their lives. Democracy is often paired with capitalism, and the image of success in these contexts is not a universally, painstakingly *equivalent* individual (which in itself seems a paradox), but rather the self-made man who had level ground beneath his feet and his own strength under which to walk forward.

Within Fujita's argument, the ideal individuals produced through the universal system are further assumed to have "an orientation to accept different

people, ideas and cultures, and to cooperate for improving their welfare" (55). Again, the details of this interpretation of human nature perhaps underlie the differences in the conclusions drawn by those in Japan as opposed to those in the US. Bearing in mind the close relationship between democracy and capitalism, I would argue that the general "American perspective" does not really believe individuals to pursue cooperation with different cultures based purely on their assumed belief of the intrinsic goodness of these actions, as *civic symbiosis* seems to require of them. Rather, the American idea of the civic ideals which Fujita describes blends the qualities of this category with another, the *market-oriented symbiosis*, against which Fujita frames the first. It is noted that a course of social studies, "heavily influenced by the American tradition of pragmatism" was implemented in Japan following World War II (Motani 322), and it is exactly this latter aspect – pragmatism – that denotes the difference between the American idea of democratic cooperation and the civic symbiosis described by Fujita. The Oxford American College Dictionary defines "pragmatism" to be "an approach that assesses the truth of meaning of theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application," and it represents perfectly the modified idea of civic interaction held in the US.

Perhaps the aspect of human nature that can be counted on most, regardless of a person's background, is their inclination to act in their own self-interest. It is within the Western conceptualization of human nature to expect one to be concerned with his or her own "personal benefits, indifferent towards others" at least inasmuch as this pertains to critical life and economic decisions. It is at this stage that the idealism discussed within Fujita's civic category meets the realism of a

power-driven world. Fujita is correct to say that people "may cooperate for some common benefits, but mostly…only when it is necessary for their own sake," and the solution implied is to design a system in which the benefits of the individual are synonymous with those of society. The two are not disparate, by any means, but the distinction between them must be recognized for theory to have any bearing on reality.

In view of this refutation of Fujita's argument that structure must be imposed on an "accepting/admitting" individual, whose potential to choose represents the downfall of principled society, to expect regulations forcing all children to attend district schools without regard to choice or merit in order to produce an ideal "civic society" simply because doing so places a potentially discordant variety of children in the same working situation, is to act in a way that is not consistent with human nature or the reality of the societies in which we live, in America or Japan. Adherence to the ideals described by the *civic symbiosis* model Fujita describes is more likely to come about through education which stresses the value of humanity and the importance of respecting one's neighbor – in other words, a focus on substantive reform, not on procedural. Placing children into schools by district and imposing conformist curriculums with discipline and practices aimed at creating obedient citizens without regard to their individuality, as Toivonen indicates education currently does, will not contribute to this image of an ideal society, as the pervasive presence of school and social issues demonstrates. Rather, this approach creates an environment in which conflicts are likely to arise, given the common insensitivity of children to others' differences and the stresses placed upon them by

the system, and renders no special ideological gains for the trouble. The continued presence of "school disorder" as Fujita terms it, in such forms as *ijime* and *futōkō*, and the conflict surrounding these problems, supports this conclusion.

Equal opportunity is essential in a just society, but such a premise does not ensure equal outcomes. To "protect" equal opportunity by establishing a system that limits students to a rigidly equivalent position is to place them within chains of equivalence that deny them the ability to rise just as surely as prejudice and discrimination would. It is no surprise if, in such a system, students grow restless and respond with such social deviations as *futōkō*, *tōkōkyohi*, *hikikomori*, and related responses which are constructed as problems of the student within the current system. Reform discourses have been concerned with improving what children can contribute to society in the future by way of their economic applications (in the case of "functionalist" discourses) and with merely reducing stress by cutting hours within the existing system (in the case of "moralist" discourses). This situation, rather than an effort to address the basic ideologies informing that system and being imposed on children, intensifies the lack of impact such reform efforts have had on the problem.

Shimizu notes that school is of central importance in the formation of society's future citizens, and that it "plays a paramount role in instilling the values of society and culture in children, as well as teaching them essential skills to enable them to function in their environment" (166). It is for this reason that the Japanese public fears so strongly for the future of *futōkō* children who cannot attend school, and that "refusing to go to school, for whatever reason, is regarded as downright

irrational" (Kurita 302). Japanese schools are "geared to fostering the group mentality," and so are viewed as an irreplaceable part of children's path to learning what it means to be a participating member of society, though "participating" has a different meaning in Japanese than in American society, given that "schools do not encourage individuals to form and act on their own ideas" (Kurita 302), instead socializing them to be "sensitive to others' concerns and to avoid self-assertion" (Cave 184). Though such goals related to group harmony may be positive in and of themselves, Cave notes they "sometimes encourages conformism," which drives away students unprepared to relinquish their sense of personal, individual worth (184). The endurance of these foundational ideals, as promoted through Fujita's argument and largely unaddressed by reform, contributes to the continued growth of social issues such as *futōkō*, which threatens the future of the roughly 130,000 students affected by it (as of 2002 according to MEXT statistics), and brings into question the veracity of such educators' assertions.

4.6 The Outlook for Change

In the midst of these rising social difficulties that include *futōkō*, variously motivated reform movements including those with "functionalist" and "moralist" intentions, and disagreements on the very ideology behind the system, Fujita claims that "Japanese education appears to be at a critical crossroads" (45). Yet, whether any real, appreciable structural shift has taken place depends upon the degree to which these discourses impact actual practices in schools throughout the country, and remains to be seen. Such a shift would indicate that Japan has "decided to address the issues of citizenship, democracy, and justice to prepare Japanese

children for an increasingly interdependent, global, and multicultural world through public education" (Motani 310). Motani argues however that shifts do appear to be happening, "indicating that Japan is in transition to promote more citizens' participation in the social and political process," as the formation of the citizen's and socio-medical discourses related to *futōkō* also imply (316).

A significant landmark in this growing social participation is traced back to the "Year of Volunteers," which occurred in 1995 as a result of the slow governmental response to the *Hanshin* Earthquake that year, which necessitated the involvement of society on a large scale (Motani 316). This turn towards social activism in the form of volunteerism, however, was previously considered contrary to the norms of Japanese society, as Motani explains, stating that volunteerism was "once considered as originating from Christianity and not rooted among the Japanese" (316). Though this may seem to the outside observer to be odd, considering Japan's strong emphasis on the community and good of the group, it is nonetheless claimed that as of the events of 1995, volunteerism has gained greater acceptance than it previously had (Motani 316). A few years later, in 1998, the non-profit organization law, referred to as the "Law to promote specified non-profit activities," was promulgated and represented a chance for independent organizations to incorporate without much government interference, which was not previously allowed (Motani 316). This change in policy set the stage for greater public influence by citizens' groups in future policy making, continuing the increasingly active role also represented by the groups related to social issues.

Also important in this discussion is the concept of a "citizen" itself. Prior to the adoption of the non-profit organization law, citizens' groups, though present, were "from the government's point of view…people who are simply opposed to government initiatives," rather than entities potentially acting as a positive critical force for social change and improvement (Motani 316). During this time, the term "citizen" or *shimin* (市民) has gained increasing acceptance among government officials, as opposed to before, when "*shimin* meant a group of people simply protesting whatever *okami* (御上, the authoritative central government) is doing" (Motani 316). Language use reflects tendencies of perspective, and as such, the use of the word "citizen" as opposed to merely referring to society as "Japanese nationals" implies a difference in the sense of status and ability to assert reasonable criticism on the government ascribed to the individual. Also of interest is the fact that a citizen may be a person of any ethnicity, once naturalized, whereas the phrase "Japanese national" suggests more strongly that a Japanese citizen may be only of Japanese descent. Susan Pharr of the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies notes that "there is no question that civil society in Japan is expanding and becoming more pluralistic," as the effects of globalization and particular incidents like the *Hanshin* Earthquake noted above contribute to a decline of confidence in the national government by the Japanese people (Motani 317). Pharr describes the situation by stating that citizens "have concluded that the state lacks the flexibility and resources to cope with increasingly complex socio-economic issues," resulting in a continuing increase in the degree of activism, as "more and more citizens have responded with their own initiatives" (Motani 317).

The entrance of more voices into the discussion of national policy and reform issues (and the great variety of perspectives they represent) opens the door for these debates to be engaged and solutions to be attempted in ever-increasing ways (Motani 316). To say the least, the shift towards public participation indicates a strong chance that change will continue to take place on these fronts, leaving the direction of that change as the only remaining question. Cave asserts that it is the primary and lower-secondary levels of the Japanese education system which are likely to show the greatest change in the coming decade, with these shifts being "pedagogic, and…driven by the curricular changes introduced from 2002" (186). The introduction of the "Integrated Learning" section of the curriculum, along with the high degree of freedom afforded to local educators on how to implement this course time, represents the most significant platform for change (Cave 186). It provides educators a rare opportunity for "curricular control," allowing them to take a hand directly in bringing change to the system (Cave 186). If, that is, they are able to find the resources to use it effectively given a lack of precedent in managing such courses from which to take direction, due to the "legally binding curricula" in place since 1955 (Cave 186).

Keeping in mind the constant presence of conflict and disagreement within the related discourses and the disparity between rhetoric and action that necessarily results, "those who believe that Japanese education is about to change dramatically are probably premature in their forecasts" (Cave 187). Yet, a positive outlook for increased social participation and opportunities for direct change yielded by policy so far, such as the Integrated Learning hours being implemented,

represent grounds for the expectation that some degree of change will take place. "The changes of the 1990s are significant in introducing new degrees of pedagogical freedom and encouraging exploratory self-directed learning to a degree hitherto unseen in post-war Japan," and these actual changes form a basis from which real future change may continue to be built if an involved public and responsive governmental system continue to take an interest in such educational reforms (Cave 187).

CHAPTER FIVE

Options Available for *Futōkō* Children

This chapter summarizes the outcomes of the discussions of previous chapters, considering the options that have actually been made available to children struggling with *futōkō* and related social issues in light of the surrounding context. In the conceptualizations of the *futōkō* issue reviewed so far, a common thread is found in the belief that the significant pressure under which children today function holds some responsibility for the problem, as "youngsters suffering from school phobia are victims of the stifling school atmosphere" (Kurita 302). Whether through the fault of the student who is unable to cope with this atmosphere, or the fault of the school for imposing it on them, the presence of serious achievement and conformist pressure is agreed to be an important factor. This pressure is noted to be "symbolized" in the wide range of "rules regarding every aspect of a student's life" with the result that "children who cannot tolerate these rules often end up victims of school phobia" (Kurita 301). Even the Ministry of Education, considered to be conservative and generally in defense of the centralized system, has recognized this interpretation of the problem through reforms which offer at least an apparent effort to respond to the issues (Kurita 301). Changes brought by recent policy are "urging schools to ease up on their attempts to regulate and discipline" and introducing measures to encourage diversity and support children who are struggling (Kurita 301). The Integrated Studies hours introduced with the 2002

reforms (discussed before), the presence of school counselors, and alternate school structures referred to as *free-schools* represent the primary responses to *futōkō* that have developed so far. I will focus on the remaining two of these in this chapter.

5.1 Counseling

As of fiscal year 1990, the Ministry of Education in Japan had allotted forty-three million yen (around $300,000 at the time) to implement "school phobia counseling" in twelve municipalities in Japan (Kurita 302). These counseling options were intended to function as an extra class, through which "experienced retired teachers" could provide troubled children with "individual counseling and help students to regain an interest in life," by supposedly encouraging them to be more "self-reliant and cooperative within the group context" (Kurita 302). This seems at once to be moving in two opposite directions – one with an emphasis on independence and the other with a renewed message on the importance of group harmony. Despite the presence of such measures, MEXT statistics continue to show an increase in *futōkō* issues, and in assessing the effectiveness of counseling attempts, the philosophy behind them must also be considered.

Toivonen argues that established society has stressed re-integration with the "group context" for struggling children due to a discomfort with the differences they represent: "no longer 'children,' but not yet 'adults' or 'full members of society,' youth are frequently viewed as a threat to the established order, as unstable agents, and as insufficiently socialized 'semi-citizens' who need further training and moulding in order to play adult roles" (17). Asano further develops this argument by describing the way in which "relationships among students have been affected by

traditional community relationships," representing a sort of microcosm of the larger social system (107). This larger system has been defined in recent decades by the Japanese interpretation of democracy, which "has tended to be understood in relation to systems or organizations" that are nonetheless "often undemocratic and based on a hierarchical order and the exclusion of heterogeneity" (Asano 107). As such, the sense of urgency among conservative voices to re-integrate children into the existing system that will be discussed below, and the effort to blame *futōkō* related issues on the children themselves during the 1960s and 1970s that was discussed in the media chapter, stem perhaps from the threat of change that heterogeneity at the school level presages for the greater social community. Yoneyama points out that issues like *tōkōkyohi* are "causing an exodus of students from schools, thus creating a legitimation crisis of the educational system" which also holds wider potential impacts for society itself (77). This foreshadowing of change can be interpreted as creating a particular note of discomfort among established authorities in Japan, where social hierarchy has for so long been the norm. Toivonen explains that "the liminality of youth," this sense that they are neither merely children nor completely adults, "may arouse even more alarm than in societies where there is less ideological emphasis on conformity," since the refusal to attend central, established school structures that *futōkō* represents implies also an inherent *difference* among the people and future members of society (*shakaijin*) of Japan, which historical Japanese society and entrenched views of "Japaneseness" via *nihonjinron* (日本人論) are unaccustomed to recognizing (17).

One student dealing with junior high school phobia in Japan phrased his situation this way:

> I am tired of being shackled. I know that compulsory education means I'm supposed to go, but I'm tired of the way grown-ups impose their own ideas and feelings on me and ignore my ideas and feelings. Maybe I'm being selfish, but I'm not making any excuses. What I don't like, I don't like. I don't know where I should be. I go home because I have no place else to go. (Kurita 300)

The description given indicates a sense of disparity from the existing social hierarchy, and from social expectations. The student specifically mentioned a suspicion that he may be acting "selfishly," a concept usually expressed with the Japanese word 我が侭 (わがまま), which is alternately translated as "willful." The student's concern and the ambiguity of the translation imply a widespread expectation for individuals to prioritize the community first. To act in accordance with the implications of these characters, the first of which 我 means "self" and the second of which 侭 means "utmost" would be contrary to a basic social sensibility that has existed in Japan for years (Toivonen 17).

Furthermore, "the implicit normative expectation in mainstream media and scholarship has been that young people should smoothly 'transition' into further education and jobs, and play their part in maintaining the established social order" (Toivonen 17). The economic growth from the late 1950s through the 1970s along with the growing relationships between industry and government at the time contributed to the development of a kind of regular "track" on which students would progress directly from compulsory schools, to higher education, into job positions that were determined before they had even reached graduation (Brinton 11). Their identities were largely defined by their association with these life stages, and the

strong sense of security that this certain progression provided represents the foundation of the perspectives from which today's adults and elderly assess Japanese society (Brinton 12). The sense of unease caused by children's resistance to this smooth series of transitions, whether willful or not, is due in part to the perception that it accompanies growing social and economic strife that did not exist in the same way during previous decades of Japan's economic growth – during the childhoods of today's older citizens (Brinton 13). To refuse the school system, then, is to refuse the system through which much of Japan's aging population considers their security to have been achieved, which seems a threat to Japan and to the future welfare of the children themselves (Brinton 13). These perspectives form the background against which many scholars, counselors, and psychologists have concluded that the best response to *futōkō* is re-integration into the established social order, or to *atarimae* (当たり前), simply "the way things are" (Brinton 14).

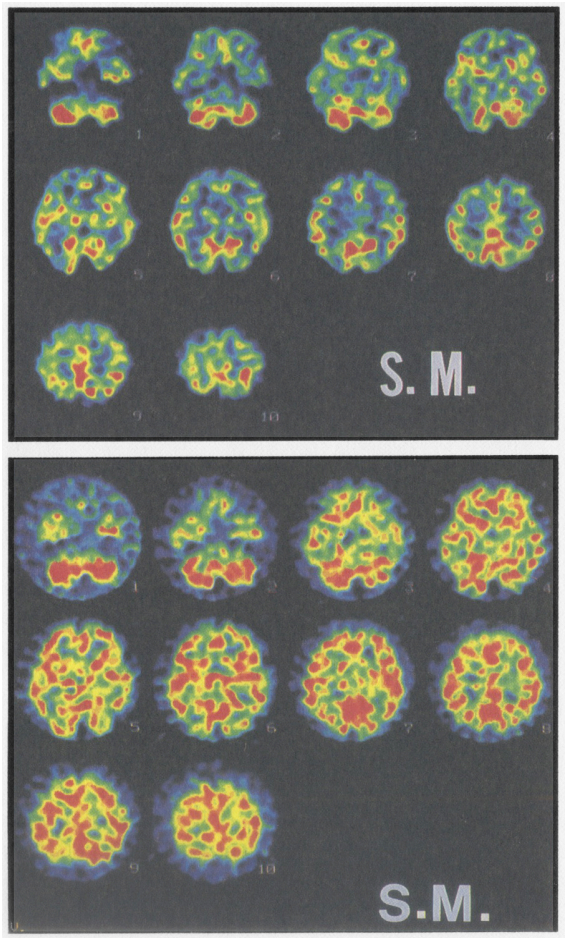
Asano also recognizes the influence of this previously smooth series of social transitions, describing the way in which "under the traditional competitive system, students' future careers were ensured through cumulative success on the selective treadmill from prestigious high school to prestigious university and on to prestigious company," yet the sense of ease offered by this regular progression was indelibly changed by the economic crash of the 1990s (107). Society associates this loss of transitional security with the rise of visibility of school issues, and whether or not entirely founded, the correlation of these problems informs the view that "school non-attendance is detrimental for children and society…and that extended

not attendance, without extenuating circumstances, is perceived as aberrant" (Shimizu 166).

In response to this, "Japan's postwar education and health care have aggressively promoted relative equality and shared social values as a key to a healthy and productive society," working to return Japan to previous decades (socially, at least) via a "heavy emphasis on 'mainstreaming' and the powerful association of health with social integration" (Borovoy 554). Efforts at counseling *futōkō* children rely heavily on perspectives from within the field of Japan's mental health care, which are characterized by a "reluctance to highlight underlying psychological dimensions … and a desire on the part of schools and families to 'mainstream' Japanese children, accommodating as many as possible within standardized public education" (Borovoy 552). This effort is expressed through an approach that "emphasizes the effects of the environment in learning and human development, minimizing the consequences of innate abilities and predispositions," at once ignoring any potential real psychological development issues and suppressing individuality to contribute to the high-stress, high-expectation educational environment that is at once competitive and conformist, as has been described thus far (Borovoy 554). There is an abiding belief that "if the environment is healthful, children will thrive" which influences the desire to avoid categories and labels in psychology, contributing to the effort to view Japanese society as homogeneous and to submit children to the supposedly positive, corrective established structure that provided former generations with prosperity (Borovoy 554).

Certainly, as Nakayama points out, "social communication skills are crucial for life in any society," and so there are some very reasonable grounds for concern regarding the "lack of opportunities to develop social communication skills" for *futōkō* students (113). Yet, there seems for the most part to be no middle ground – no option in which students may pursue education in a self-driven way while also pursuing social involvement – and efforts to respond rest primarily on the goal of "re-entry into mainstream society," while the psychological problem, disability, or even a natural aversion to an abrasive environment "goes unnamed and untreated" (Borovoy 552). Because of the stigma concerning mental illness in Japan, Borovoy claims there are even cases in which psychiatrists avoid certain diagnoses in favor of more euphemistic terms, regardless of the actual situation. "Psychiatrists may refrain from using the term 'depression' or 'depressive illness' (*utsu ubyō*)," he writes, "relying instead on such ambiguous labels as 'depressive state' (*utsu jōtai*) and 'neurosis' (*noirōze*) which imply that the condition is not innate or enduring," and can simply be solved by appropriate socialization and re-integration (Borovoy 556). This denial of actual psychological issues reflects a desire "to see difference as containable through behavior modifications," which perhaps underlies the extensive study and research led by oft referenced Japanese scholars Miike and Tomoda, who thoroughly "scientized" *futōkō* by casting it as a biological irregularity that could potentially be managed through drugs intended to alter one's biorhythm (三池 and 友田). They completed extensive studies on such topics as the perceptions, sleep cycles, and brain activity of those affected by issues that entailed social withdrawal, including *futōkō* and *hikikomori*. In one graph from their book on the issue, the

effect of melatonin can be seen to regularize the sleep pattern of the subject, but arguments about whether this really addresses the issue or merely its symptoms could be held. The included brain scan images (see fig. 4) complement a discussion from the same book on the variation of blood flow to the brain between people of



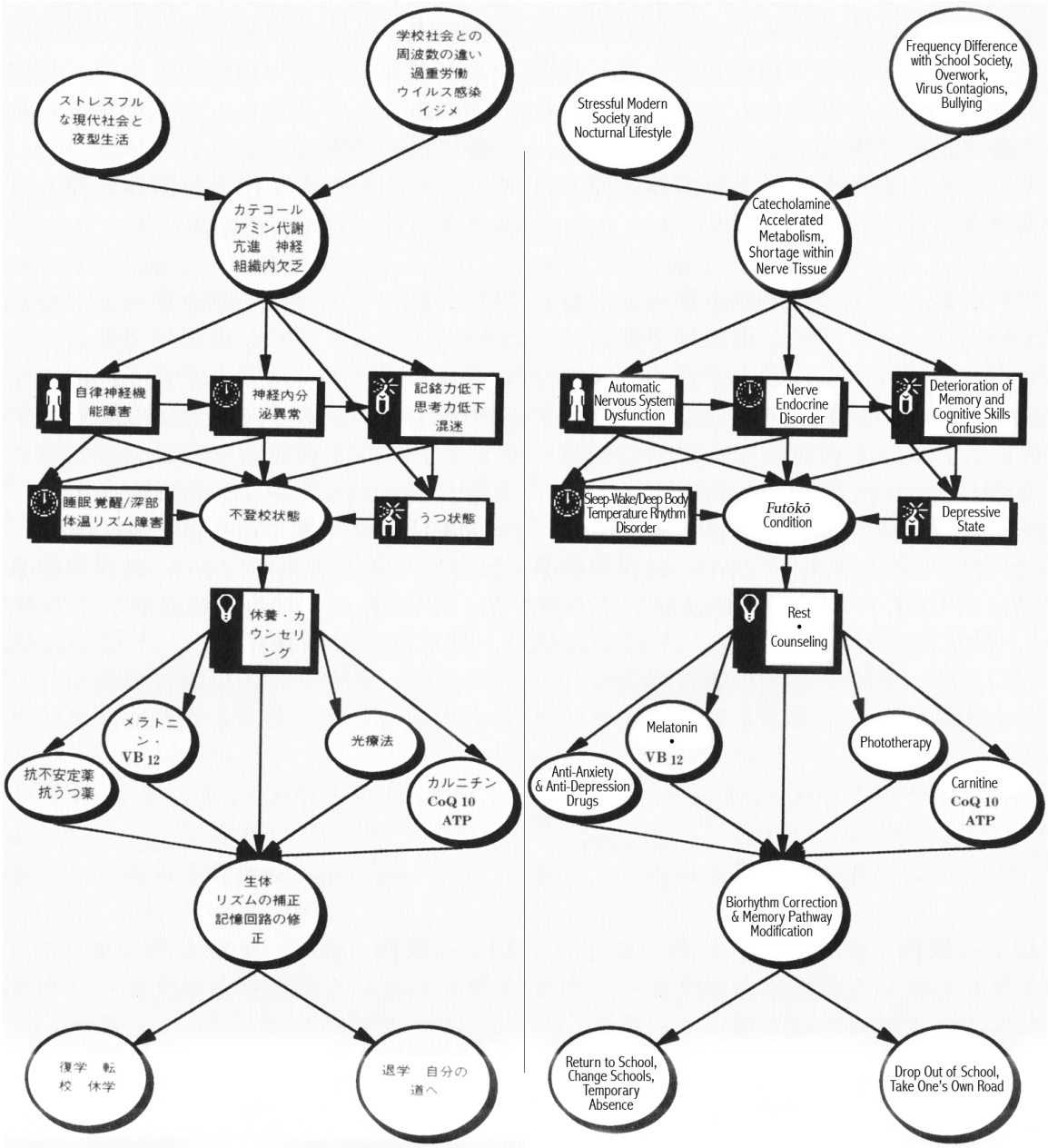
SPECT による脳血流量の検討では，前頭葉や側頭葉を中心にして左右差や血流量の低下がみられるが，時にはこの例のように脳全体の血流低下を示すものもある(A)が，入院安静と治療により回復することが確認される(B)．血流量低下は検査を受けた人たちの 40 % に認められており，この状態が不登校状態の一つの中核であることがうかがえる．

Figure 4. SPECT Imaging of Brain Activity as Represented by Blood Flow
Source: 輝久 三池 and 明美 友田, *学校過労死：不登校状態の子供の身体には何が起こっているか* (千代区丸の内: 診断と治療社, 1994) 58. Print.

various conditions, continuing this biological casting of the problem. Nonetheless, Miike and Tomoda's discussion of the *futōkō* issue holds a significant amount of depth, and the accompanying diagram (see fig. 5) illustrates the connections they drew between school and lifestyle stress; biorhythm disturbance, depression, and *futōkō*; and the vitamin/drug based solutions they proposed. Their arguments represent a culmination of the belief that altering a student's environment to re-integrate them with a socially normal pattern could fix *futōkō* related issues.

Approaches that lead to a re-introduction into the established system contrast with the Western "psychoanalytic paradigm in which the patient aspires to construct his or her own consciousness free of social pressures and constraints," and focus instead on teaching a person to "adjust to a given social situation, however intolerable it may appear" (Borovoy 557). To some degree, mental health is presented as a product of "one's attitude (*ki no mochiyō*), keeping in good spirits and persistence" (Borovoy 556). Borovoy even goes so far as to claim that the Japanese "cultural value attached to being active and participative informs a more diffuse assumption that mental degeneration, whether in the form of mental illness, senility or even suicide, is, at least in some part, voluntary" (556). This somewhat shocking assertion resonates with the not uncommon social perception of *futōkō* children as bad, even hateful individuals who are not upholding their duty to their parents or society (Yoneyama 89).

Asano argues that a commonality between children struggling with issues like *futōkō* and *hikikomori* is "their abnormally low self-esteem," which is no doubt



不登校状態が起こる機構を図にしてみるとこのようになる．現代人の夜型生活は意外に大きい要素と考えられる．テレビ社会，情報社会の見直しと対処の仕方を私たちは学ぶ必要がありそうである．

This graph attempts to plot the mechanisms responsible for the rise of the *futōkō* condition. It is thought that the nocturnal lifestyle of modern day people is a surprisingly large factor. It seems necessary for us to study ways to revise or reconcile the attributes of this "television society" or "information society."

Figure 5. Diagram of *Futōkō* Cause and Effect Relationships
Source: 輝久 三池 and 明美 友田, *学校過労死：不登校状態の子供の身体には何が起こっているか* (千代区丸の内: 診断と治療社, 1994) 101. Print.

in part taught to them by social outlooks like the one above (107). In order to meet the needs of these children, then, and to help enable them to act as valid members of society without merely "moulding" their natural inclinations out of them in the process of producing figures that suit the expectations of society, a "call to revive the educational role of the home and the locality in order to ensure children's healthy moral and socio-emotional development" is perhaps in order, with *free-schools* representing one effort to answer this call (Cave 176).

5.2 Alternate School Structures

Free-schools represent a partial refutation to the previous claim that all existing efforts aim to re-integrate students into the established system. They offer a non-governmental, private form of education that is organized and taught according to the beliefs of the teachers and parents involved in the particular institution in question, but such options remain limited and are still often viewed as temporary solutions. Literature specifically regarding *free-schools* is also limited, but during my year living in Tokyo, Japan, I visited two such schools and had the chance to observe their approach to teaching and discuss the philosophies that inform these efforts with the school directors and faculty.

One of these, *Free-School Keiyū Gakuen* (フリースクール恵友学園) was established within the building of one of Tokyo's few Christian churches, with a small wing dedicated to its offices and classrooms. It offers a range of classes including typical subjects like math, history, language, and science along with artistic and active class hours, taught with a goal of involving the student and

progressing at his or her pace. The instructor I spoke with was herself a returnee to Japan, having lived for six years during childhood in Houston, Texas, in America. Besides teaching English and philosophy at the school, she also worked as "English Manager" for the organization, handling any English contacts they made and overseeing their website. Like most *free-schools*, however, the regularly enrolled number of students was quite small, with only five full-time attendees.

One of the most striking results of our discussion was the contrast between the view of *futōkō* children provided by the discourses, central school institutions, and governmental structures compared to the regard held by those in this private *free-school* (so termed because of its independence from the state-regulated policy and curricula requirements). Another faculty member present commented that he never directly considered school as a child, accepting it instead as simply a part of life. But children who withdraw from the public system, he sympathized, "probably felt and noticed something which I could not feel and notice," at once providing recognition for the diversity of human perception (which conformity attempts to overlook) and also demonstrating acceptance of refusal as a result of diversity as something natural.

The further goals and perspectives of *Keiyū*'s approach to education continue to demonstrate this acceptance of the child and his or her response as natural, and attempt to find ways to suit education to the needs of the child. My primary interviewee confirmed that the children who attend *Keiyū* were "not just often, but always" children who had first experienced *futōkō* and come to the *free-school* as an alternate solution to the public system, though none of them had directly wished to

quit their original schools. "They actually wanted to go," she explained, "but the environment, such as bullying in schools, didn't let them. They had no choice." This description relates to the earlier discussion of *futōkō* as a type of alienation from an environment in which the child is unable to cope, as opposed to a willful resistance to the practices of society. She added that there seemed to be a lack of support for children to help them deal with pressures in the school environment, or to respond to problems like bullying that drive some children away, leaving them with withdrawal as the only option they could enact themselves. The university student who accompanied me and aided in facilitating my interviews commented from his own experience in the Japanese educational system and other research on the topic that he also felt Japanese students appeal to a kind of universalism, in which "those students who feel that they don't match the group will be threatened as a 'weirdo,' to which they don't know how to respond." In this way, he proposed the view that it is not only the system but also the surrounding culture that is responsible for the prevalence of *futōkō* in Japanese schools.

In opposition to the perspectives found in the previously discussed counseling efforts, my interviewee at *Keiyū* asserted that in the perspective of the present school, the goal of recovery from a *futōkō* experience does not consist of re-introducing the student to the public system, but rather enabling them to "explain their experience to others and face the reason they left the group themselves." She explained that "there is no way to go back to before the *futōkō* began, or rather, doing so would be to avoid the problem rather than to solve it. The most important thing," she claimed, "is to let students think about their future and what *they* want to

do, instead of forcing them back into the social mainstream." She continued by remarking that the goal of the school was primarily to give students the opportunity to think about their own intentions, and determine their future and direction with certainty rather than to merely channel them back into the system.

At the same time, she stated firmly that neither she nor the other educators at *Keiyū* consider the *free-school* to be a solution to the *futōkō* issue, but rather a necessary support for those suffering from it while they ascertain their sense of self in relation to society, until the school system changes to cease alienating children in such a way. She maintained that there are many things available in regular public schools that were not present at small *free-schools* like *Keiyū*. "Kids cannot learn the social system," she explained, and are given a somewhat unbalanced sense of normal interaction, since "their opinions and feelings are respected and are given priority," more so than in ordinary social situations. Also, unlike children in alternate school systems in other countries (such as America), students at Japanese *free-schools* do not have many opportunities to engage students of other schools, with fewer organization and activity groups and no ability to participate in the extra-curricular programs offered by the public schools.

The educators I spoke with also discussed the tendency for the children who come to them to have mental disabilities of which their parents are not aware. It is often the case, I was told, that the children at *free-schools*, and *futōkō* children in general, have very light cases of psychological problems such as Asperger's that educators in the public system do not recognize. It is in part because of their undiagnosed struggle that keeping up with the expected educational and social

obligations is particularly difficult, leading them to become discouraged and withdraw from school. A "gap of treatment between light and heavy instances of mental disorders" was cited as a central cause of *futōkō*, for which *free-schools* serve as a place of protection.

The other school that I visited, *Free-School Eimei Juku* (フリースクール英明塾), was sharing premises with a social research group while their own building was under renovation. They also had only a few regular students, but had a much larger series of parent counseling sessions held each week. I spoke with the founder and director who gave me an overview of the development of the *futōkō* issue, including an observation of a conflict between the colloquial wisdom represented by the phrase "the nail that sticks out gets hammered in," and the growing notion from Japanese companies and scholars that it is important to include an emphasis on individuality. Japanese companies, he explained, claim to want people with "unique personalities," yet propagate a culture in which all applicants wear the exact same black suit for an image of perfect conformity familiar to anyone who has ridden the train in Tokyo during rush hour. Children, it can be concluded, find themselves caught in the middle of contradictions from educational and social rhetoric, and do not know how to respond to the tension.

As at *Keiyū*, the goal of *Eimei* was noted to be to create a place in which children can feel comfortable and confident in order to find their "true dream" within themselves, and lead an active life to discover and pursue an independent sense of ambition. The teaching philosophy of *Eimei* is strongly influenced by the *Montessori* system familiar in America and Europe. *Eimei* also prioritizes the child's

will by allowing them to act according to their own interests and desires, and works to suit education to these preferences, so as to foster an appreciation for learning rather than an impression of obligation. The people I spoke with through *Eimei* also confirmed the relevance of mental disorder discussions with regard to *futōkō*, accounting for perhaps half of the cases they have seen.

Other *free-schools* also exist in order to provide support for children struggling with *futōkō* situations, and the objectives and approach of each one depend in large part upon the collective beliefs of the educators who have gathered to make each particular institution work. Among these, perhaps the best known is *Tokyo Shure*, which was one of the leading organizations contributing to discussion of the issue during the 1980s and remains one of the largest presences with relation to alternative education in Japan in recent times.

Taken overall, the presence of *free-schools* in Japan represents a response to *futōkō* that is based on a starkly different perspective than most of the mainstream counseling and central educational initiatives. The educators within, while varied in their perspectives, often hold a much more liberal outlook on education and social roles for children in Japan than the established discourses would indicate. The fact that they are focused on enabling children to find a sense of self-directed ambition – interest in pursing a particular future and living actively – represents a completely different goal than that of the mainstream counseling efforts which aim instead to re-integrate students into the existing social structures. *Free-schools* remain a small presence within Japan's educational scene overall and are regarded with some uncertainty by the general population with respect to educational rigor and ability

to adequately socialize children to behave as future members of society. Nonetheless, there are *free-schools* present in most districts of Japan's largest cities, including Tokyo and Osaka, and they do offer a form of accepting support for children seeking another means of education and another lifestyle than the roles imposed by the state-run system.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

6.1 Futōkō Presence and Treatment Internationally

While the discussion to this point has focused on the very specific Japanese social milieu of *futōkō*, as a necessary endeavor in understanding the particular attributes of the problem as found in that country, the presence of social problems of this kind are by no means limited to Japan. "There can be no dispute that high-profile youth problems are a shared phenomenon across advanced societies with different histories, socio-economic characteristics, cultures and traditions," and while the particulars of those problems may vary, their presence "in a multiplicity of guises and through disparate events" is held in common (Toivonen 1). Amid these social issues, it is accepted that "anxiety disorders are among the most common psychiatric conditions in children and adolescents," suggesting that the presence of *futōkō* in Japan may be a natural occurrence with reference to experiences in other countries around the world (Essau 196). "Recent studies have indicated that between 8 and 19% of the children and adolescents in the general population are estimated to have met the diagnosis of an anxiety disorder sometime in their lives," making the presence of such problems a common experience around the globe (Essau 196). As with any other nation, "Japan is no less replete with social problems involving young people and no less capable of generating hysteria over the fate of its youth than affluent Western societies such as the US or UK," and as this thesis has

demonstrated, the details of those social problems have their own intricate social histories and social responses (Toivonen 2). Yet, while *futōkō* and *tōkōkyohi* represent the primary school refusal responses in Japan, phenomena bearing significantly similar qualities may also "manifest [themselves] as truancy or dropout in other societies," existing in a different setting and under a different name, but arising as a similar reaction by children (Yoneyama 80).

In all countries, "anxiety disorders are associated with a significant impairment in various life domains such as in academic and social domains" (Essau 196), although it may be difficult to measure the severity of these problems "especially in an international comparative perspective" because of the situational differences and the variety of social perspectives (Cave 175). However, continued study and research on the topic is worthwhile, given that "a better understanding of the etiological mechanisms for childhood and adolescent anxiety" represents the best means of pursuing "enhanced efficacy of anxiety treatment and prevention" (Essau 196). Furthermore, international comparative studies in particular hold value as they may provide a chance to isolate similarities in the causes of anxiety that run deeper than the circumstantial factors visible within a single country alone.

One such study, led by researchers including author Takahiro Kato of the Department of Neuropsychiatry in the Graduate School of Medical Sciences at Kyushu University in Japan, approached this problem by sending two *hikikomori* "case vignettes" to psychiatrists in countries around the world including Australia, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and the US. Participants were asked to rate the prevalence of issues like those found in the examples in their

home country, and to detail the common etiology, diagnosis, suicide risk, and treatment options associated with them (Kato 1061). Within these countries, 247 contacts were approached: 123 from Japan and 124 from other countries, with 239 valid responses overall (Kato 1061). Based on this study, it was concluded that "culture, society and history strongly influence the form of psychiatric diseases," with the "unique cultural background and recent sociocultural changes" playing a particularly large part in the expression of social problems in Japan (Kato 1062). The influence of these sociocultural factors as a primary factor in Japan's case led to debate regarding whether issues like *futōkō* and *hikikomori* are in fact "culture-bound" phenomena limited to Japan (Kato 1062).

Another study, led by Cecilia Essau of the Department of Psychology at Roehampton University in cooperation with Japanese researchers Shin-ichi Ishikawa and Satoko Sasagawa, arrived at similar conclusions. Their efforts involved the profiling of 299 adolescents between the ages of 12-17 years, with 147 youths from England and 152 from Japan (Essau 196). These students were investigated for "associations between early learning experiences and anxiety symptoms," and it was concluded that "the impact of learning experience on an adolescent's anxiety seemed to differ across cultures," which was noted to reflect the significance of cultural factors in the development of social anxiety problems (Essau 196).

At the same time, researchers from the first study began their work with a "hypothesis that the adolescents in Japan [would] score higher than the adolescents in England" in terms of anxiety due to the increased social pressure for conformity

(Essau 201). However this expectation was not supported by the findings, and later consideration by the researchers introduced the potential explanation that "in Japanese culture, an individual is expected to silently tolerate the anxiety experienced instead of complaining verbally" (Essau 202). Continued analysis of the study includes the theory that "girls compared to boys are socialized to be more fearful and are reinforced when reporting their inner worries and fears," though if this is the case, it appears that "such socialization practices seem to be present in both England and Japan" (Essau 202).

Respondents to the Kato study likewise indicated that they "felt the *hikikomori* syndrome is seen in all countries examined and especially in urban areas," suggesting that social manifestations of youth anxiety in the form of educational issues is perhaps tied more closely to the factors of urban life than to the cultural traits of any one society (1061). "Biopsychosocial, cultural, and environmental factors were all listed as probable causes of *hikikomori*" within the frame of each given country, but "differences among countries were not significant" (Kato 1061). To restate, while differences exist between countries, it is not these differences in themselves that contribute to the presence of social problems, but rather the convergence of a set of social factors associated with urban living that precipitates "outbreaks" of social issues, the particular expression of which is colored by the cultural and environmental factors of its unique setting. Understanding and unraveling the appropriate response to each such outbreak requires a careful consideration of the cultural context around it, but it is not this context that gives rise to the problem itself, which is more universal in nature and

takes its roots from the nature of human society, which nations globally hold in common.

Yoneyama remarks that similar percentages of absenteeism are seen in both Japan and Britain, but "this does not imply that the sociological cause of school phobia/refusal is the same in both societies; nor does it indicate that its sociological and biographical significance is the same in these two countries" (80). School violence is another social issue present internationally, and a study led by Motoko Akiba analyzed its presence in 37 nations, concluding that it was "widely prevalent" among all nations considered (846). "School violence rates are related to some social indicator such as absolute deprivation and age distribution," the researchers stated, "but not to others such as income inequality or social integration," the second of which is a topic of debate in Japan in particular (Akiba 846).

This apparent lack of importance of income inequality calls into question the necessity of the Japanese social emphasis on egalitarianism as a kind of imposed social equivalence, at least with regards to the district catchment reform debate. There was found to be a relationship between achievement disparity and school violence, however, which lends credence to another aspect of the egalitarianism argument (Akiba 848). The report includes the statement that, "it is likely that large variation in student achievement, at the national level, means higher percentages of students perceiving themselves as failures relative to other students," providing clear motivation for poor self-esteem, and negative outlooks towards other students and the school environment (Akiba 848). This result reinforces the argument that grade pressure (which is considered to be particularly strong in Japan) contributes

to social issues, but it also highlights a shortcoming of another nature: the need for students to define their worth by comparison to others' success (Motani 315). The strong emphasis in the Japanese education system of the primary importance of *winning* in terms of academic and physical competition, rather than merely participating and performing at one's best, could be argued to be a contributing cause for this unhealthy, exclusive understanding of worth, in which one's success implies another's failure (Motani 315).

In each of the studies, "psychological factors…social and cultural factors were also often noted" as leading factors in the presence of social problems internationally (Kato 1064). While the presence and some aspects of causation may be common between different countries, the conclusion of those nations' psychologists about the appropriate treatment for such cases was not consistent, with "a large difference in election of treatment method found between psychiatrists in Japan and other countries" (Kato 1071). "The patterns of psychopathology in school refusal vary according to the similarities or differences in the cultures compared," and so too do the response to them (Yoneyama 80). Japanese psychiatrists often promoted treatment via outpatient wards, with some responders to the Kato study asserting that psychiatric treatment was not necessary at all (1062). "Psychiatrists in other countries," meanwhile, "opted for more active treatment such as hospitalization," as reflected in the included graphic (see fig. 6) (Kato 1062).

To some degree, the higher level of acceptance of social withdrawal seen in Japan is credited as relating to the concept of *amae* (甘え), which justifies cultural

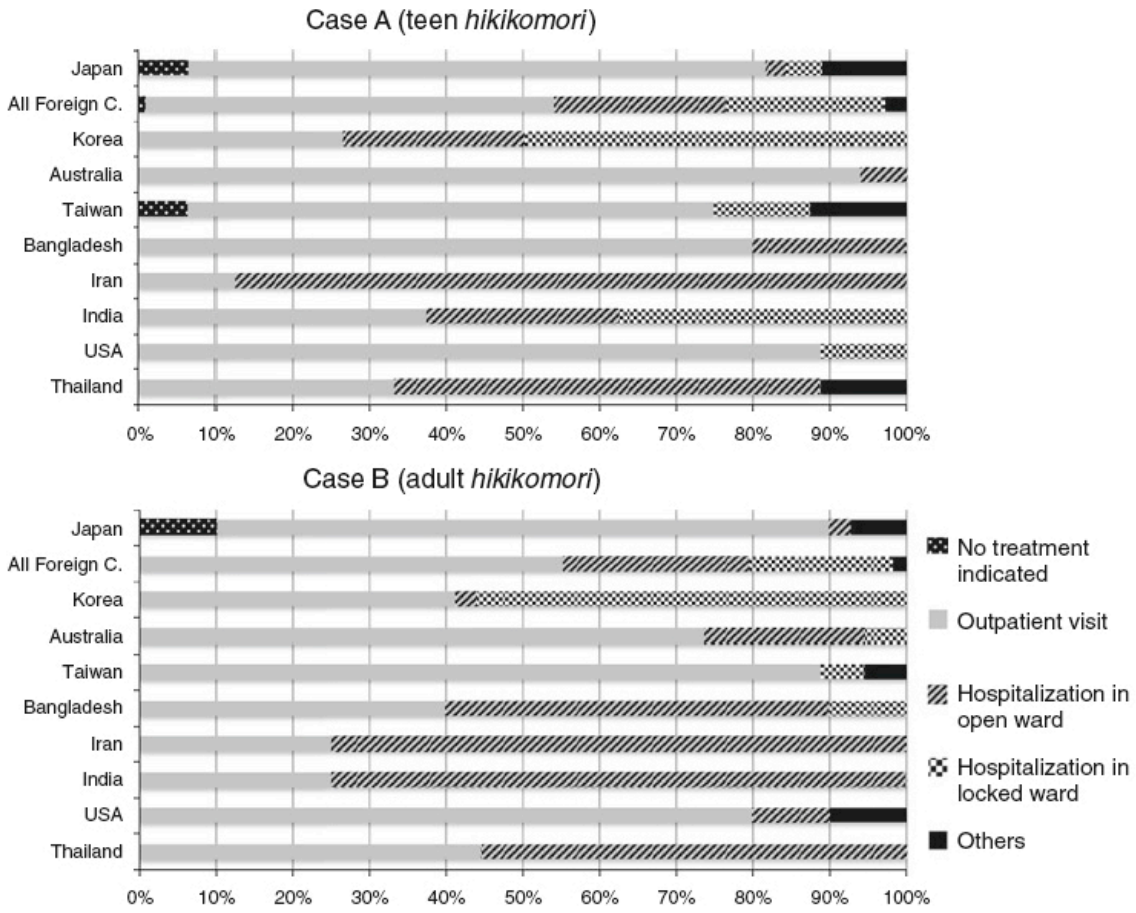


Figure 6. Where should *hikikomori* cases be treated?
Source: Takahiro Kato, "Does the Hikikomori Syndrome of Social Withdrawal Exist Outside Japan? A Preliminary Internal Investigation," *Social Psychiatry Psychiatric Epidemiology* (Springer-Verlag, 2011) 1071. Web.

acceptance of dependent behavior in which "the person who is acting *amae* may beg or plead, or alternatively act selfishly and indulgently, while secure in the knowledge that the caregiver will forgive this" (Kato 1072). The relationship between parent and child is the most common example, and while "child-rearing practices in the Western society seek to stop this kind of dependence in children," this is considered to be different in Japan, where such behavior "persists into adulthood in all kinds of social relationships" (Kato 1072). Though relationships

characterized by such dependence are recognized as occurring in all societies, this concept too was at one point "originally considered to be uniquely Japanese" (Kato 1072).

As in Japan, "the discourse on non-attendance" in Western countries also "tends to take on a strongly negative colouring, labeling absentees either as ill or bad," but from the Western understanding, "truancy is often understood as a behavior problem associated with antisocial tendencies," while the Japanese notion of "school refusal is generally seen as reflecting an emotional or psychological disorder, with prominent anxiety symptoms" (Shimizu 166). With the variance in perspectives comes a variance in response, and Kato's study found that "Japanese psychiatrists tended to choose psychotherapy…pharmacotherapy was preferred by Bangladeshi, Iranian and Korean psychiatrists…psychiatrists from all countries, especially Australia and Japan, recommended environmental interventions" (Kato 1071). Most countries believe that some response is needed, and this conclusion reflects the perception of *futōkō* issues as relevant even within the particular setting of each of the countries.

In conclusion, social issues related to *futōkō* and *hikikomori* are "perceived as occurring across a variety of cultures by psychiatrists in multiple countries," and though this presence does underscore a basic similarity between society itself regardless of the nation in question, the particular expression of such issues *is* in large part dependent upon the cultural factors and unique sociological milieu of the society in which it is found (Kato 1062). "This mirrors a fact that is obvious, but easily forgotten: children reject school in the context of the meaning of education for

them within their own society," which necessitates the consideration of the social particulars of that society in order to complete a well-founded presentation of the issue itself, the factors behind it, and the merit of responses intended to manage its effects (Yoneyama 80). Such social issues are widely present throughout nations around the world, indicating that to isolate one nation's traits as at fault for the existence of issues within would be sociologically inaccurate (Yoneyama 80). At the same time, these cultural traits are vital in attempting to solve the particular expression of the social issue within a nation, since "student-related problems – bullying, school non-attendance, suicide, violence – which are phenomenologically similar across different societies, do not necessarily mean that the causes of such problems are also the same" (Yoneyama 80).

6.2 Conclusions

"The analysis of school non-attendance in a particular society has to begin with the analysis of its school and society itself" (Yoneyama 80), and that is exactly what this paper has attempted to do. By considering the definitions and discourses surrounding the concept of *futōkō,* I provided a canvas of the current and historical social perceptions of *futōkō*. These perceptions show a shift in perceived responsibility for the problem from the children themselves to the institutions they are placed in, as more social actors became involved in the discussion, developing an increasingly critical approach towards evaluating proposed explanations of *futōkō*. By discussing the educational and governmental institutions that are responsible for constructing the school system that children face (and amidst which these problems have arisen), I attempted to construct a historical context for the school

environment itself. The shifting influences behind this system, which underwent rapid ideological changes following World War Two and substantial change again after direct American influence was no longer present, has for most of its historical past been grounded in a practice of molding children into citizens based on traditional concepts of social hierarchy. The discussion of reform movements and their motivations which followed covered efforts for change, the values they pursue, their actual impact on the school environment, and the outlook for future change within this setting. Many of the recent reform efforts have served either a perceived need to produce more globally competitive children by increasing the participatory nature of education (in contrast with the traditional approach noted before), or have responded to social alarm regarding the rising rates of school issues including *futōkō* by attempting to reduce the stress placed on children. Both of these goals to some degree serve the interests of *futōkō* children, with the first contributing to an environment potentially more accepting of diversity and the second reducing the academic expectations that contribute to children's anxiety. Whether the reform actors promoting these discourses actually have the interests of children in mind (or are more economically or politically motivated) is not easily concluded and is not necessarily implied by the benefits the changes themselves may hold for children.

To consider social and educational responses to *futōkō* on a more approachable level, I next discussed the options actually available to students in the present system, including counseling and *free-school* institutions. Counseling options have increased as the industry intending to serve the needs of those facing social issues has grown, but it still faces difficulty based on the tension formed by

society's stigma of mental diagnoses and a psychiatric field which attempts to accommodate this stigma by treating all problems as controllable if the subject is normalized back into society, occasionally overlooking those who require more serious help. *Free-schools* on the other hand are based on an ideology and approach to teaching completely independent from the national school system. Though the attributes of a given institution depend largely on specific directors present, since their curriculum is not regulated, *free-schools* are often founded on a "child-first" approach. They represent an educational environment substantially different from the public system and offer a needed social space for children who cannot follow the expected national track. Lastly, the connection of several recent international education studies with the *futōkō* topics developed thus far was intended to place the whole image in the context of our increasingly global society, and to clarify the role that cultural particulars play with relation to the expression (as opposed to the existence) of social problems within society.

Akiba notes that "with mass education systems institutionalized around the world, it is clear that further investigation into the nature and the correlates of school violence" along with other school issues held in common internationally including *futōkō*, "must be conducted if policymakers are to substantially improve school environments" (846). The *futōkō* issue is both an expression of the Japanese system's imperfections through the difficulties of children struggling to cope with it and a historical entity that served as a call to action for Japanese citizens to take a more active role with relation to their nation and society. It is complex in both etiology and impact, but its greatest significance is as a struggle faced by ordinary

children in Japan and around the world. Its impact on them must not be forgotten amidst other analysis. Just as social problems may be present universally, so too are our most basic human values and desires: a wish to be happy, healthy, and to lead life according to one's own will. The most important goal this study can serve is to contribute to understanding how to address *futōkō* issues and the surrounding environment so as to allow these children to do just that.

What is needed to enable these children to re-enter the social structures they are expected to participate in, represented primarily by the school environment, is an increased atmosphere of *inclusivity*. The accounts directly from children regarding their *futōkō* experiences, seen throughout this paper, cite most clearly as an underlying reason for their *futōkō* a fear of the expectations waiting within the educational environment. The social roles imposed on children and introduced to them as necessary in order to perform as sufficient members of society confine their individuality and contribute to a competition for equivalence that excludes those who do not fit the mold. This is evidenced in the testimony of one youth I spoke with who noted the necessity of matching the culture of universality among students for fear of being threatened as "weird," a real risk considering the frequency of reports regarding group bullying and violence in schools. Furthermore, the intense degree of grade pressure on students and the idea of 'grade supremacy' in Japan – in which one's grades define their ability to lead a successful or even remotely happy life in the future – contributes to a situation in which children believe they must perform academically or else fail their families and lose hope of a respectable place in society.

These factors subject children to a level of anxiety unreasonable for youth to face and are actually fueled by the Japanese interpretation of *egalitarianism,* as described in the literature reviewed, which keeps them contained in such environments through district catchments and adherence to the "one best system" in which the only educational structure available is the uniform, nationally developed curriculum. Widening the course material available (as Integrated Studies intends to do) and reducing the content covered in existing courses in order to lessen the workload placed on children represents potential for positive change, but does not address the *cultural factors* that children so often cite as the cause of their *futōkō*. Fujita describes an ideal in which "all individuals are assumed as being equal, autonomous and independent, but at the same time, as having an orientation to accept different people, ideas and cultures" (Fuijta 54). The pursuit of this image requires that the social culture of the educational environment be altered to focus on inclusivitiy *more than* productivity or an imposed, exclusive sense of equality. Fujita's desired goals are commendable, but the existing practices do not lead to their achievement.

Japan has an entrenched social custom of showing respect towards those of higher authority, and if this respect could be extended to function in both directions – so that it is due to all individuals, as a basic platform upon which other relationships (teaching, working, etc.) can function – then a significant step towards the ideal described would be achieved. It is possible to respectfully disagree, and obedience must not always precede loyalty. One of the observations that arose from the international studies of social phenomena considered before is that they occur

most prominently in urban situations, and this too may relate to the loss of a sense of individuality that dense city life can contribute to. As such, if children were respected as rational, natural members of society (as they are, if the egalitarianism spoken of is to be believed), rather than as candidates who must earn future citizenship by trial of social and academic evaluation, and were taught to respect others in the same way in order to create an inclusive environment, then the central fear and difficulty described by actual *futōkō* children would be eased.

Some *free-schools* have begun to offer such a place to children, by focusing on pairing academic opportunity with recognition of an individual's personal worth, whether or not they comply with mainstream social expectations. Though their reach is limited and the actual practice and ideology present depends heavily on the circumstances at a given institution, a worthwhile concept is found here: *free-schools* demonstrate that learning and valuable social interaction need not be dependent on adherence to a universal mold. Much of Japanese ideology places primary importance on the good of community and of the group, but a group is only composed of its members themselves. To harm those members by placing them under undue stress and subjecting them to expectations they are unable to meet, thereby excluding them, is to harm a part of this selfsame group. Society does not gain significant advancement through the alienation of those who do not conform, but rather discards members who could potentially contribute in unconventional ways and disregards a portion of those it claims to protect. *Futōkō* children are part of the community, and the only way to make consistent a claim to prioritize this community is to develop a culture that is first and foremost *inclusive*, with respect a

prerequisite for interaction, satisfying Fujita's "civic symbiosis" and allowing intrinsic human worth to be appropriately recognized.

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