Educated to Participate:
Interaction and Imagination in Three Alternative High Schools in Contemporary Japan

by

Kunisuke Hirano

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Doctoral Committee:

        Associate Professor Allison Alexy, Chair
        Associate Professor Takeshi Hamano, University of Kitakyushu
        Associate Professor Christopher Hill
        Professor Donald Peurach
        Associate Professor Akiko Takeyama, University of Kansas

Kunisuke Hirano

hiranok@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-0765-7895

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how people desire better educational experiences in contemporary Japan to understand the way individuals perceive social problems and possible solutions. I conducted ethnographic research in three alternative high schools to examine how choosing non-mainstream schools enables some individuals to seek what they imagine to be a better way of learning. In Japan, secondary education, with its rigorous academic curricula and authoritative school behavioral norms, is the most crucial for one's future. However, a minority of secondary schools do not cater to dominant social values and diverge in noticeable ways. My target schools show various ways to be alternative, refusing to prepare students for the college entrance examination, and instead emphasizing the concept of "freedom," teaching the Korean language as mandatory, or conducting significant parts of education online.

I consider students who attend alternative schools as education minorities. Given the outsized importance of secondary education in contemporary Japan, choosing these alternative schools potentially risk being marginalized in society. The fact that such students do not share the mainstream Japanese school culture might harm their transition to work. Although it is students who experience alternative education, parents guide their children's educational choices, especially those who enroll for alternative education from junior high school. As for those who enter the school from high school, the combination of students' decisions and parents' guidance show more complicated intersectionalities. Those from junior high school tend to be the more central figures of the school culture. Even if alternative schools attempt to refuse traditional mainstream educational pedagogies, each school establishes its own cultural ideology. While

students enjoy greater freedom than in a mainstream school, they need to adjust themselves to the school environment.

I argue that Japanese alternative education is better characterized by its close, non-authoritative relationships, rather than the uniqueness of its curricula. People in these schools imagine a better education in terms of participation—how students could build close-knit communities and in-depth interactions with others for their personal development and self-realization. Students and teachers spend most of their time talking and thinking about interpersonal relationships, rather than where their education takes them in the future. Based on my findings, I argue that people regard participation as the most crucial learning factor. In the alternative education movement, human interactions, whether being mediated by technologies or not, matter more than the curriculum itself. These schools teach and facilitate the communication required for such relationships in diverse settings. They also create and maintain the school as a safe space for many, if not all, students. Alternative education in Japan is characterized by people's desire for close relationships in a safe space.

Chapter 1 **Introduction**

After a month of starting my fieldwork at the Forest of Freedom School, an "alternative"

private school in Saitama, I was hanging out with a few students sitting on the hallway after

class. We were talking about K-pop groups and my life in the United States. Then one girl

surprised me by casually sharing her thoughts on the school and how she felt before joining it:

> "Everyone is nice here, like, we have many unself-conscious child-like candid
> children. But actually, each one of them has their own story. I was depressed and
> in bed for two years (when I was a junior high school student). It's like miracle
> that I am coming to school now."
> 「みんな優しいんですよね。子どもらしい素直な子が多いっていうか。で
> もねー、実は皆いろいろ抱えてここに来てるんですよー。私だって鬱で２
> 年ずっとベッドから出られなかったし。今学校に来ている、ってことが奇
> 跡って感じ。」

Her identification of "child-like children" and her openness about her hardships in mainstream

school somehow shocked me. With fashionable clothes and makeup, she looked like a regular

high school student who likes K-pop and dreams about living in the United States. But her story

of traumatic experiences at mainstream school is, to some extent, commonly shared by those

who refuse being in the mainstream schools and seek an alternative education in contemporary

Japan. Those who were incompatible with mainstream education, to some degree or another, turn

to alternative education. Distancing themselves from the mainstream social norms embodied by

mainstream curriculum and school culture, students, parents, and teachers try to configure better

place for learning and interaction.

This dissertation investigates how people imagine a better way of education in contemporary Japan in order to understand how people perceive social problems and solutions to them through educational choices. I conducted ethnographic research in three high schools to examine how choosing non-mainstream schools enables some individuals to seek a better way of living. In Japan, secondary education is the most crucial for one's future, and therefore tend to offer rigorous academic curricula and strict restrictions on behavioral norms at school. However, a minority of secondary schools do not cater to these dominant social values and diverge in noticeable ways. For example, unlike mainstream high schools, my target schools refuse to prepare students for the college entrance examination and instead emphasize the concept of "freedom," teach the Korean language as mandatory, or conduct significant parts of education online. Given the outsized importance of secondary education in contemporary Japan—for future job and college placement—those who go to these alternative schools risk becoming marginalized.

Rather than definitively defining "alternative education" in Japan, this dissertation focuses on how people imagine what might be a better way for, or better form of, education depending on precisely what element(s) they think are problematic in mainstream education. Generally speaking, alternative education broadly indicates "different approaches to teaching and learning other than state provided education" (Sliwka 2008, 95). Internationally, there are some major alternative education groups such as Summerhill, Steiner, Escuelas Nuevas, but in Japan, there has yet to be no major "established" group of alternative school groups.[1] Some students in these schools have failed to thrive in mainstream schools, because they refuse to go to school due to bullying or harassment from teachers [登校拒否]. Students might be bullied for any number

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[1] For more about the wholistic view on alternative education in the world, see Nagata (2008). In Japan, there are some reports on Steiner education such as Yoshida (2009).

of reasons, some related to their family background (for instance, being of Korean descent, or mixed-race), personal identities (being LGBTQ), or learning disabilities. Others actively refused to be part of mainstream educational institutions, reacting against curricular requirements, such as everybody learning the same things at the same time regardless of each student' interests. Many are negative about military-style pedagogy forced at some schools. Refusing mainstream educational norms and curriculums produces diverse options for pedagogies and curricula, depending on how they refuse the mainstream education. Therefore, no singular definition of "alternative" education can capture the diverse forms of education that have sprung up in relation to mainstream schools.

Overall, I found that at the schools where I did research, being "alternative" refers primarily to people trying to create alternative modes of *relationships* at school, rather than *curricula*. Although schools are explicitly focused on what students learn through the curriculum, alternative schools give significant attention to the relationships school tries to cultivate, and specifically understand these as different from relationships common in mainstream schools, be they between students, teachers, parents, or some combination thereof. Generally, in Japanese mainstream schools, teacher-centered pedagogy and hierarchies among students called "in-class (school) caste" [教室内（スクール）カースト] makes the classroom as "war-zone" [戦場]—students do not feel safe in these tense and hostile environments (Suzuki 2012, Honda 2011). To escape from these tensions, alternative schools friendly and safe atmosphere for students.

Based on this gap between mainstream and alternative school cultures in Japan, this dissertation argues that people imagine a better education in terms of participation—how they could build close-knit communities and interactions with others for their self-development and

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self-realization. Alternative schools promote themselves as having unique curricula and classes, but at those schools, people spend most of their time talking and thinking about interpersonal relationships. Based on my findings, I argue that participation is imagined to be the most crucial learning factor—in the alternative education movement in contemporary Japan, human interactions matter more than the curriculum itself. Schools of different types try to teach and facilitate the communication required for such relationships, while also creating and maintaining the school as a safe space for all students.

This dissertation also poses a hypothesis that when the future is uncertain, people seek connections. In the past, social contracts might not be as secure as people imagine now. But people think it was. Now people think it is not guaranteed. Therefore, people try to value relationships—especially being liked and connected with others. Of course, some people try to stick to old systems—one teacher at cram school told me that parents and students feel that securing admission to a good school does not always promise a stable future, but they try to ensure "at least" the access to good schools. In contemporary Japan, people know that educational credential is not enough to survive in society. When puzzled by the elusive term "communication ability," people try to communicate with others to secure connections. In order to do so, they need to be liked by others. This argument is based on Khan's finding in an elite U.S. boarding high school where students learn how to "feel at ease" in every situation with anybody, which is a great asset to be liked by others and go up the social ladder in the society (Khan 2010).

While the field of this dissertation is school and education, in the course of my research and writing, I realized this project is exploring minority identities and social change by analyzing people's educational choices. I consider people who choose non-mainstream schools as an

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educational minority. They emerge as entities within a different cultural setting compared to the rest of the society, in those alternative spaces. Being a minority is not only base one's gender, race, and sexual orientation. Especially in Japan, where people tend to look similar[2] compared to the United States, being a minority could also be defined though a way of thinking that is different from mainstream ones. In other words, if peer pressure is intense, being different from others matters significantly in various situations in one's life. The slight difference means more when the society shows more sense of uniformity.

This project argues that although alternative schools challenge mainstream educational norms and curricula in a variety of ways, the most crucial part of alternative schools in makes everyone participate in everyday lives. Each school starts by resisting mainstream educational norms but ultimately all create their kinds of ideologies that often come to resemble mainstream educational values and discourses. Yet the persistent and vital difference is how these schools place real emphasis on teaching, supporting, and enabling alternative modes of communications. In daily lives at school, teachers and teaching assistants spend a significant amount of time and energy on interpersonal management. Students who were formerly school refusers are required to show up in the space and participate in human interactions at school, to access resources for learning. In this thinking, all students need to participate in the shared space to which they belong even if the school's rhetoric or ideology suggests they have the freedom of not doing so. To facilitate this regular participation, teachers and school staff pay extra attention to create safe spaces where students can feel comfortable to express themselves. Such safe spaces of comfort and possibility become vital within all three alternative schools were I conducted research.

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[2] This does not mean that Japan is monoethnic country. There is a long history of ethnic Koreans and recently, children with foreign roots are increasing. In 2018, there were 93,133 students of foreign national in Japanese schools (from elementary to high school) (MEXT 2019).

Changing Japanese Society, Education, Labor, and Hope

Although mainstream education in Japan still maintains a powerful role in creating

dominant social norms in contemporary Japan, its loss of economic superpower has shaken

citizens' trust in the nation itself, and this doubt spread to the domain of education. For a long

time, achieving excellence in mainstream schools was believed to guaranteed stable lives for

Japanese citizens. Education credentials were once believed to form the basis of a meritocratic

society, due to strong correlations between specific school names, particular majors, and job

opportunities (Slater 2013). For individuals, going to a good school meant getting a good job in a

big company [大企業] where you could work until retirement. But in recent decades, changes in

economic security and loss of confidence in the competence of the state have promoted

collective feelings of ennui and anxiety, especially regarding the future (Roland and Alexy 2011,

11). These disruptions have increased since the 1990s: Japanese society has suffered from the

collapse of the bubble economy, bankruptcies of major economic sectors, heinous youth crimes,

fragmenting political regimes, declining relationships with the U.S., and a lack of competent

leadership followed by the environmental disaster caused by 3/11 (Yoda 2006, 2).[3] In the wake

of all this upheaval, the government hid information about the Fukushima disasters, which

increased distrust among citizens. At the same time, people are unsure of what kind of alternative

capacities they should pursue for success and stability; the term "communication ability [コミュ

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[3] Since 1955, under the label the "1955 system [55 年体制]," Japan maintained a stable political structure and economic development under the dominance of Liberal Democratic Party. However, after the Oil Shock in 1973, the constant economic development ended, and the 1955 system collapsed in 1993 when Liberal Democratic Party fell out of power and did not dominate the cabinet. Especially since that time, a discourse of anxiety and hope started looming in Japan.

ニケーション能力]"—which is continuously promoted as an important skill by companies and in public discourse—confuses younger generations (Honda 2006).

Similarly, scholarly interests in Japan have shifted over time. When the Japanese economy was booming, scholars and journalists tried to discover Japanese education's "secret" to producing highly capable workers (often represented as salarymen). English-language research on Japanese education has investigated Japanese education's typical characteristics, and this scholarship was often based on comparative perspectives with U.S. counterparts or the researcher's home country (White 1988, Hoffman 1999, 2000). Those white-collar workers were fundamental to Japan's postwar "miraculous" economic development, especially in the '80s and early '90s, epitomized by a Japanese company's purchase of Rockefeller Center in New York City. The current economically-sinking nation and its education system became less appealing and vital as an aspirational study object while some new research trends have also emerged, such as focusing on popular culture (Freedman and Slade 2018, Lukacus 2010, Yano 2013) and precarity prompted by a restructured labor market (Allison 2013). Given this shift in scholarly attention away from education toward popular culture or a general society-wide sense of anxiety, what are the stakes of researching Japanese education today?

I answer that it is still worth doing research on Japanese education in order to understand how individuals, especially minorities, are challenging and negotiating dominant social norms by reconstructing the mode of relationships. Scholars admit that Japan is changing, and marginalized populations are the great catalyst to embody the "transforming family nation" (Kelly and White 2006). The image of husbands working full-time in the same company until retirement, supported by housewives, has not matched the typical household since the mid-1990's, when households where both husband and wife worked outnumbered those where only

husbands worked.[4] Due to changes like these, research on Japanese society, in both English and Japanese, shifted to consider hope and anxiety in various social settings.

In Japan, both scholars and public discourse started to discuss hope and anxiety in the early 2000s.[5] Hope [希望] emerged as a new key term for framing individual aspirations and anxieties in a changing Japanese society. Especially following the publication of *A Hope Divided Society* [希望格差社会] by Yamada (2004), scholars began to study hope as part of a new trend in sociological/anthropological methodology and research objects. One notable example is the Social Science of Hope project. Social scientists, mainly based at the University of Tokyo, established this interdisciplinary research project of hope [希望学] in 2005. According to sociologist Yuji Genda, who leads the Social Science of Hope project, "Long ago, hope was a presupposition of the (Japanese) society" [かつて希望は社会の前提だった]." In other words, hope was something that was once taken for granted in Japan, but no longer. Economic stagnation, neoliberal social norms, and an exploitative labor structure have all reshaped youths' aspirations for the future (Furuichi 2010).

In this Social Science of Hope project, researchers applied the concept of hope in multifaced ways in their own research. Rather than forming a consensus regarding what "hope" is, hope was used as an analytic lens among social science researchers such as to analyze the process of reviving local economies (Nakamura 2009) or the acceptance of aging bodies (Kasuga 2009). Scholars who participated in the *kibogaku* project defined hope (in English) as "[A] wish

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[4] Since mid-1990's households in which both spouses work have surpassed the households where only husband works (The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training).

[5] Talking about hope is not limited to academic discourses; it also occurs in public discourses. The phrase "hope is lost" is also popular generally in Japanese society, occurring domains such as novels (Murakami 2000), qualitative sociology/documentaries (Furuichi 2011), and the political arena, such as with "the party of hope [希望の党]" of Yuriko Koike in 2017.

for something to come true by action" (Genda and Uno 2009: xvi). Based on this definition, my project analyzes "action"—embodied in the act of educational choices and daily interactions at school. Unfortunately, the Social Science of Hope project at the University of Tokyo did not receive funding from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science [日本学術振興会]. But those scholars continued working on the project, and the concept of hope—and anxiety— affected the direction of social science research about Japan both in Japanese-speaking and English-speaking academia since the mid-2000s.[6]

In the field of ethnography, hope among individuals is mainly analyzed a tool to justify the exploitative labor structure. Future-oriented hope drives working-class men to choose physically and mentally deteriorating jobs. Abe (2005) analyzes hope among motorbike delivery men [バイク便ライダー] in order to understand how incentive-based rewards and cheap compensations are justified under the narrative of the hope of becoming a successful "million rider," a rider who earns one million Japanese yen (similar to USD 9000) in a month. As many riders enjoy motorbikes as their hobby, the management company takes advantage of their self-realization to force a dangerous work environment and cheap compensation, and those riders are not unionized—unskilled riders and those who have traffic accident are responsible for themselves.[7] Additionally, English-language work by Takeyama (2016) illustrates why people aspire to be *hosts* (male sex workers in Japan) even if the possibility of success is slim and the requisite sacrifices are huge.[8] Similar to motorbike riders, male hosts dreams about becoming

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[6] Hirokazu Miyazaki is one of the few anthropologists who publishes about hope in both English and Japanese.
[7] In the U.S., a similar example is provided by Uber drivers who are not covered by company-provided insurance.
[8] "Host Club [ホストクラブ]" is a somewhat special occupation for men. Hosts work in bar-like settings and cater to female clients by drinking with them. The main job for these men is to entertain their female customers by talking and serving them extremely high-priced drinks; it does not always include having sex with clients. For more about this occupation, see *The Great Happiness Space: Tale of an Osaka Love Thief* (Clennell 2006).

successful, mentioning that they do not want to be hired by somebody such as office workers. However, the possibility to earn stable salary in a long period is slim—the heavy drinking required at work is physically deteriorating. Soliciting female customers to use more money is sometimes mentally challenging, too. Both motorbike riders and hosts are exploited by the labor structure, yet many individuals are allured to be in the industry under the name of being independent workers. Miyazaki's work (2013) on hope in the finance industry was conducted among more privileged workers; despite their privilege, he found that these workers also negotiate their hope according to their financial situations, work prospects, and the national economy, all of which contribute multiple possibilities of futurity. These individual narratives of hope and anxiety embody the greater structure of unstable labor market in contemporary Japan where people are allured to be independent, but end up with being exploited and not having sustainable way of living.

Simply speaking, the discourse of hope and anxiety in contemporary Japan mainly stems from the fragmentation of the promised life course. Statistically speaking, Japan obverted the rapid increase of contingent workers [非正規雇用者] in these thirty years. From 1984 to 2014, the ratio of contingent workers increased from 15.3% to 37.4%, and remains 38.3% in 2019 (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare 2020). These contingent workers earn 30-50 percent less than permanently hired workers [正社員] even if they work same amount of hours, with high risk of being laid off. On the other hand, more and more people receive college education.

After the 1990s, the Japanese economy experienced a huge downturn and has yet to recover fully. Today, increasing numbers of young people cannot get a full-time job and thus remain in poverty. Given gendered divisions of labor in Japan, men have trouble getting married without full-time jobs. The percentage of people going to university is increasing, too. As a

result, more and more women get jobs, postpone marriage, or choose not to marry. The total fertility rate has been below 2.0 percent since 1975, and in 2005 it recorded its lowest level at 1.26 percent. The National Institute of Population and Social Security Research estimates that in 2050, almost 40 percent of the total population in Japan will be over 60 years old, and the total population will be 86.7 million by 2060 (currently 126.3 million). Furthermore, Japan is no exception to global trends. There are about 2.2 million foreigners in Japan. In addition to the long-term Korean residents, there is an increasing number of non-Japanese residents such as Japanese Brazilians, Chinese, Philippines, Vietnamese, and Nepalese. The demography of Japan is changing, so to the society itself.[9]

The collapse of a stable hiring system and working environment affects one's economic situation, life prospectus, and human interactions, including within one's family. More and more people proceed to tertiary education, but even if one attends a good school, lifetime employment in a big, stable company is no longer guaranteed. Japan's economic downturn affects the job opportunities of younger generations more severely than older generations. The corporate laws of Japan make it almost impossible to lay off senior full-time workers, making it therefore extremely difficult for younger generations to get full-time positions. As a result, more people accept part-time positions even if they hope to obtain full-time ones.[10] The difference of salary between full-time workers and part-time laborers produce economic gaps [格差] among individuals. Once people slip into marginalized part-time jobs, such as working at convenience stores or daily-contract labor, they risk becoming "internet café refugees [ネットカフェ難民]." Some people stay in internet cafés for several months due to their inability to pay rent. Typical

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[9] For more about students of foreign-roots in Japanese schools, see Tokunagawa (2021).
[10] In 2017, 57,0000 people of age 25-37 wish to be permanently hired but reluctantly being part-time or contract workers (MHLF 2018).

cases of these internet refugees are men working as day laborers and women working in sex industries.

Hope and anxiety have also been explored in relation to marginalized men in sex-work industries (although this work does not always include physical intercourse). Takeyama's work on male hosts, introduced above, reveals that although marginalized men do not need money to obtain work as hosts, once they enter the workplace, those men are destined to be physically and mentally exhausted. Nevertheless, this circle of exploitation of the human mind and body still seems attractive to lower class Japanese youth, remaining an embodiment of hope and success. For them, their hope is the same as "bubble (water) business [水商売]." All in all, the hardships of living in contemporary Japan are represented by terms such as economic "precarity" (Allison 2015) and the Japanese term "the difficulty of living comfortably [生きづらさ]" (Abe 2011). The discourse of hope and anxiety demonstrates that Japan fails to offer the goal of its future figure—after achieving economic success through postwar developments, Japan lost its sense of direction for the next goal.[11]

In this situation, meritocracy does not seem to be functioning as rigorously as before. Although traditional paths to meritocratic advancement are less certain, people do not know what kinds of alternative abilities they should pursue for advancement instead. Honda, a leading Japanese sociologist who studies youth and labor, distinguishes between a meritocracy and what he calls a "hyper-meritocracy [ハイパーメリトクラシー]" (her neologism). She finds that college students feel that merely studying hard to enter prestigious universities is not enough to

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[11] After teaching at some Japanese universities, I found that compared to ten years ago Japanese liberal arts education focuses significantly on SDGS (Sustainable Development Goals) advocated by United Nations. I speculate this trend might be because of Japan's trying to find the next core of its direction.

secure success. Other factors, like the somewhat elusive concept of "communication ability [コ ミュニケーション能力]," have become important capacity in various situations.[12] Honda states that a meritocracy based on exam scores could distance itself from the complicated and diverse aspects of society and thus be regarded as a fair game.[13] Regardless of one's familial and social background, students could show their ability in standardized paper tests by studying hard.

On the other hand, the advent of this hyper-meritocracy era made realities complicated. In the world of hyper-meritocracy, we must keep producing value by using all of our abilities, not only test scores. This sense of hyper-meritocracy confuses students (and their parents) because it does not clearly indicate how to gauge one's abilities: the metrics for success are obscured. For example, "communication ability" is widely included as an essential skill for employment in both government statements and other public discourses. One who fails to obtain this ability is described as "communication handicapped [コミュ障]," and the term is often used jokingly among youth in their daily lives. The problem is that no one can clearly define what this essential ability is. Given such undefinable metrics for success, I ask what kind of abilities do people in alternative schools perceive as important at the most crucial moments of one's educational trajectories? I argue that the key factor for learning at school is participation—how students are engaged with ongoing events and human interactions at school—rather than the school curriculum itself.

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[12] Honda explains the difference between "modern type ability [近代型能力] and "post-modern type ability [ポスト 近代型能力]. Japanese society is characterized by an extreme meritocracy, which is governed and controlled by people who have the ability (opposite to the aristocracy) (Honda 2007, 11).
[13] Of course, test scores and students' class backgrounds are strongly correlated (Kariya 2001, Park and Lee 2013). But the system was at least believed to be fair.

Why Secondary Education?

Recent research on Japanese education in English and Japanese tend to focus on how class, family, and educational outcomes affect each other. Scholarship suggests that education is a powerful lens through which to analyze people's strategic responses to social change in contemporary Japan. Sociologists in Japan, who mainly publish in Japanese, have been examining the intersections of youth, class, and education with both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Kariya 2008, Whang 1998, Honda 2006, 2011). Their general consensus is that cultural capital and financial support from parents play a bigger role in children's academic performance than before. After the government reduced the total hours of class time in 2002 (elementary school and junior high school) and 2003 (high school) under relaxed education [ゆとり教育], this tendency was even more intensified (Park and Lee 2016). As research on education and social life developed, the focus of Japanese academia shifted from sociological class analysis to a more nuanced anthropological perspective analyzing individual meaning-making especially for and by marginalized individuals. Recent research explores Korean Schools [朝鮮学校] in Japan (Song 2016), open spaces for those refuse to go to school (Kido 2000), students who identify as sexual minorities, e.g. LGBTQ+ (Shojima 2010),[14] and newcomer immigrant children at school (Tokunaga 2017), to name a few.[15] These shifts with research in Japanese education represents new interest aboutt the "diversity within" the Japanese society (Tsuneyoshi 2015). However, they mainly focus on how marginalized individuals are treated in mainstream education, or those students' experiences at alternative schools. Analyzing

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[14] This topic is ripe for more scholarly analysis. As of this writing, most attention comes from journalists and activist groups. For instance there are some articles about queer students and bullying published by Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch 2016).
[15] I discuss more about these minority groups later in this chapter.

alternative schools reflect how mainstream education is functioning. It is because people imagine alternative education based on their perceptions and images to mainstream education. But we also need more in-depth research on how individuals are perceiving alternative education vis-à-vis mainstream education. This dissertation aims to locate alternative schools in broader contexts of Japanese social changes and individual agencies to deal with it.

Especially English research suggest that secondary education is the most intense in Japanese education. Traditionally, secondary education functioned as a pipeline to connect the school with students' future placement in society. Compared to primary education, which nurtures students' "whole" personhood (Fukuzawa 1994), secondary education entails an abrupt change, characterized as very authoritative, test-oriented, and stressful (Yoneyama 1999). This structure is designed to make students gain admission to prestigious colleges and become ideal citizens. (Rohlen 1983, White 1988, Lewis 1994, Benjamin 1996). In junior high school, tracking starts depending on which high school (regular high school, vocational school, correspondence school, etc.) students will be recommended for under the guidance of teachers [進路指導] (Cave 2016). That guidance also often to places low-achieving students in vocational high schools, that works as a strong mechanism of social class tracking and reproduction (Park 2008). In 2020, more than 90% of students went to high school, and approximately 59% of students went to college, either a four-year school (54%) or "junior college" for women (4%) (MEXT 2020). Such a moment is another crucial point of tracing and social class sorting (Slater 2013). Whether one goes to college, or which college one graduate matters for job placements, but secondary education where those sorting starts.

Therefore, secondary education, especially post-secondary education offers a rich field to analyze how individuals become conscious about their positions in society and make choices

about how they want that future to be constrcuted. Based on literature on education in general and in Japan, this dissertation analyzes secondary education, with more focus on high school, in order to understand how individuals imagine, practice, and negotiate their ideal form of education.

My Fieldsites

The first school where I conducted research, Forest of Freedom School [自由の森学園 *jiyû no mori gakuen*], was established in 1985 when Japan's mainstream secondary education was likely to use corporal punishment and test-oriented pedagogy. Intentionally rejecting those norms, this school was designed to respect students' autonomy, and has no grades and no standardized requirements. The school has about 250 students in junior high school and 530 students in high school, across six grades. It costs about $10,000 to attend per year. But depending on the family income, students could receive subsidization from their prefecture. It is located in Hanno city in Saitama prefecture, about 60 minutes train ride from the terminal train station in Tokyo. From the nearest train station, students take a school bus for 15 minutes, and then walk for 10 minutes to their classrooms. There are some dormitories for boys and girls, and more students apply for dormitories than they actually can accept.

The second school, "Korea International School" [KIS: コリア国際学園　코리아 국제학원 *koria kokusai gakuen*] was founded in 2006 to challenge both English-centric international schools in Japan and old-style Korean schools [朝鮮学校] designed for ethnic Korean [在日コリアン] students in Japan. The school attempts to produce trans-border citizens [越境人 *ekkyôjin*] by refusing to present any national identity and making English, Japanese, and Korean all mandatory languages. The school has about 30 students in junior high school and 60

students in high school (fluctuating per year), across six grades. It also costs about $10,000 to attend per year. It is located in Ibaraki-city in Osaka, about 15 minutes train ride from the Shin-Osaka station where the bullet-train [新幹線] stops. From the nearest train station, students take a public bus for 20 minutes, and walk for 10 minutes to the school building. Some students rent a bicycle from the station. They have one dormitory.

The third school, C High School challenges the concept of schooling itself by being an online high school begun in 2016 by two private companies. Traditionally, online high schools in Japan were for those who could not enter full-time school due to several reasons and were rather stigmatized (Tejima 2017). But C High School is expanding and building several school buildings to offer some in-person classes, offering most classes online. They present themselves as a cutting-edge internet high school that nurtures diverse abilities of individual students. The school has about 15,000 students in high school. It costs about $8,000 to attend per year if you choose to commute to school five days in a week, it becomes cheaper if you reduce the schooling days per week. For example, it becomes $6,000 for three days per week, and $3,600 for one day per week. The cheapest option is to make it completely online, which costs only $2,000 for three years in total. It has several schooling buildings in major cities in Japan, and I worked one of the main buildings in central Tokyo which had more than hundreds of students depending on the day. The building was about ten minutes' walk from one of the biggest terminal stations in Tokyo, and sometimes students had to go to different office buildings to take classes. There are several dormitories in each city for those who actually want to commute to school.

I conducted my research from April to July 2019 at KIS, September to December at the Forest of Freedom School, and June-July 2018 at C High School in addition to several visits

during summers in 2014-2018. A more detailed description of each school and my daily routines are written later in this introduction.

Ethnographic Methods in Classroom

In every country, the government designs education in order to produce ideal citizens. While education powerfully shapes individual mindsets and behavioral norms, individuals are not always docile bodies that simply internalize and reproduce what the system tries to inscribe on them. There is always bottom-up resistance by students, parents, and teachers to the dominant pedagogical philosophies embedded in all educational systems (Luykxn 1999, Yoneyama 1999). Individuals, such as students, parents, and teachers, all actively make sense of education and schooling in their everyday lives—it is a dialectic process of top-down instruction and bottom-up resistance that negotiate each other relentlessly.

Ethnographic studies of schools are especially useful for investigating how education produces inequality and excludes certain categories of the population under (supposedly) equal instruction. First, ethnographic studies of schooling demonstrate that classroom interactions embody larger social and cultural structures (McDermott and Raley 2011, Tobin, Yeh, Karasawa 2009). If students achieve excellence at school, they are rewarded with more possibilities for social mobility, but social circumstances beyond school, such as job opportunities, shape students' motivations and evaluations of education. For example, a study in Papua New Guinea shows how girls' motivations and expectations about education change over time as they learn how limited job opportunities outside their village are (Demerath 1999). In a different study in Central India, girls use schooling to postpone marriage even as they realize that secondary education does not produce more job opportunities for them (Froerer 2012). Freshmen in U.S.

colleges do not grant much significance to their classes because they have too many activities to choose from, all competing for their attention, and they place more priority on their social life (Nathan 2005).

At the same time, the process of achieving excellence at school itself is itself already advantaged and/or disadvantaged according to one's background. While success in mainstream schools enables one to climb the social ladder, education also reproduces inequality, not giving a chance to working-class or disadvantaged populations. Classroom diversity and state control reshape the imagined figure of minorities in class and society (Tsuneyoshi 2011). Depending on how a particular group of students are treated and how the curriculum teaches about minorities, the state could shape people's mindset toward certain minority groups. For example, how Belgian schools force Muslim youth to observe Belgian values means the nation's stance on integration occurs under the name of "concern." Rather than allowing immigrants to retain culture, students need to internalize the dominant culture of their host society (Jaffe-Walter 2016). Furthermore, schools control individual aspirations under the name of guidance. Teachers guide the decision-making of disadvantaged students, such as students with disabilities and students of disadvantaged social class, to convince them to choose certain tracks like getting jobs for handicapped people (Mehan, Hertweck and Meihis 1986) or low-paid jobs which do not need any skills (Park 2011), respectively.

More specifically, ethnographic works illustrate how certain behaviors at school matter for class reproduction. For example, Willis (1981) demonstrates that "cool" practices among working-class boys in England, such as rebelling against teachers and not doing homework, or skipping classes, functions to entice those boys to drop out of school at in early-stage and end up

making them stay in the working class.[16] On the other hand, children of teachers internalize their habitus (Bourdieu 1990)[17] including the importance of being liked by teachers, and those advantages make it easier for them to learn *doxa* in the *field* to play the game well. In a more recent study, Khan (2011) elaborates how elite boarding school students gain the habitus of elites by participating in everyday life at a private boarding school in the United States. The interesting part of his work is that he shows that attendance at school is not equivalent to participation in the life of the school. Not all students, especially minority ones, are able to obtain the habitus of being successful in U.S. society even though they go to the same school. For instance, an African American student tries to take too many classes "to get the most out of" the school, and an Asian student from Hong Kong only think about getting into Harvard and regard the high school only as a steppingstone—and consequently often do not participate in the school's social life. These students do not gain the ability of "feel at ease" in any situation or to be liked by others—which is nurtured by everyday interactions at school—and therefore, cannot gain the habitus of elites in the United States.

<div align="center">Positionality as Method: Toward A Thick Description</div>

Research projects, especially anthropology and qualitative sociology, are hugely influenced by who the researchers are, who their interlocutors are, and who the audience includes. For example, conducting research about Japan in U.S. institutions and writing for an American audience looks significantly different from doing the same project about Japan but directed at a Japanese audience or within a Japanese institution. In U.S. institutions, researchers,

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[16] For more about the reproduction of poverty, see Oscar Lewis (1969, 1998) and Small, Harding, and Lamont (2010)

[17] For more about Bourdieu's class and education, see Khan (2011).

including those from Japan, need to engage a certain amount of previous work written in English, and speak to the English-speaking audience who have different set of knowledge and expectations about research on Japan. In extreme cases, one could write about Japan without speaking/reading Japanese much. On the other hand, scholarly written in Japanese tend to stay in the circle of Japanese academia.

Given this context, I feel sure that I probably would not have come up with this research topic if I stayed in Japan for my doctoral training. I came to the United States after completing my bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Tokyo and working in the Japanese government for a few years. My teaching experiences and daily life in three parts in the United States, together with my past experiences and trainings in Japan, ultimately shaped this project significantly. While teaching Japan-related courses in the U.S. institutions, including courses focused on language, culture, and society, I started to think about education as a powerful tool to mold individual ways of thinking and behavior.

Methodologically speaking, in ethnographic work the researcher as an individual shapes the data collected. Within anthropological methodologies–mainly interviews and participant observation–the researcher's own life affects how people show their interest, answer questions, and ask questions of their own. For example, a researcher's gender, race, sexual orientation, marital status, drinking habits, and overall personality likely affect what kind of data the researcher gets in various contexts. In my case, people asked me why I left Japan after securing a (seemingly desirable) full-time job in Tokyo, and why I am doing research that doesn't create any wealth or profit after graduating from the best university in Japan. Students often thought

that I am an overseas returnee [帰国子女][18] or even not Japanese when they knew my university

affiliation or my English abilities. Depending on the person who asked the questions, my

answers were different when I explained why I left Japan: I might explain that I just wanted to

try living in the U.S., or that U.S. universities give you much better funding packages than

Japanese ones (which is very true). But when I trusted the person, I told the biggest factor of my

move—I am gay and could not imagine a happy way of living if I stayed in the Japanese society

in 2003 when I graduated from college.

In some cases, that answer deepened my relationships with people, and sometimes it

brought awkward silence, followed by few or no interactions after that. Generally, people who

teach English were more accepting because of they studied in the U.S. and U.K. Some students,

especially girls, could guess my sexual orientation and that changed some interpersonal

dynamics. For instance, one day, when I was heading for the classroom to join a class with

students, girls were changing their clothes after P.E. class, and boys were waiting further away.

One girl came to me apologizing, that some were still changing. Then another girl said, "it's

okay, Kuni-chan[19] is a girl" [大丈夫だよ。くにちゃん女の子だから]. Although her phrasing

is potentially problematic—such as confining gender and sexuality into binaries, she somehow

mitigated the tension and it felt like she was trying to include me. That utterance was replied by

"ah, right" [あー、そっかあ] with an convinced face." Some boys came to ask me if I work out

because of my body shape. Looking back, I was literally a queer and liminal person at school—

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[18] This term refers to Japanese people who lived outside of Japan for long periods of time as a result of their father's job transfer. It implies someone who is a Japanese citizen, speaks Japanese natively, but likely did not move through the Japanese education system and might give impression of being a bit odd or unusual, especially in school settings (White 1988).

[19] Here she was using -chan, a deminutive to describe a girl or the younger person in general with whom the speaker has a relatively close relationship.

the odd guy who is not married, speaks English and Korean, graduated from the University of Tokyo, and doing some unknown work that somehow supports his daily expenses but doesn't quite seem like a real job. Some teachers were very interested in me and we became good friends, we exchanged countless LINE text messages and went to the spa or bars together. Others seemed to be more cautious about interactions with a researcher who might write something about themselves. My queer identity affected what kind of interactions I had, and therefore what kind of data I obtained as a result—that is a partial truth of this project and its findings (Clifford 1989).

In other words, this project is based on the perspective of a person who went through mainstream educational institutions in Japan and who is interested in minorities in the society. In terms of intellectual genealogy, this project builds on my earlier research on Japanese Americans and same-sex marriage movements in the U.S., and sexuality and migration from Japan to North America. Throughout these projects, I aim to analyze people's individual agency to seek a better place and space to live. Having been in anthropology Ph.D. programs in Japan and submitting this dissertation to the interdisciplinary area studies department, this dissertation contributes to conversations within the anthropology of Japan, anthropology of education, and Japanese studies in English-language academia.

I describe myself in the fieldsites as a liminal adult. I was neither a student nor a teacher. In each school, my background and affiliations made people curious about myself in different way. At the same time some people were very indifferent. At the Forest of Freedom School, I felt the strongest sense of disinterest and being largely ignored. While I was allowed to sit-in on some classes, both students and teachers seem to be used to having researchers (and random adults in general) at school so usually they did not seem to care. They weren't particularly

interseted in me. Indeed, I was not the only graduate student doing their field research or an internship there. As I kept visiting the school, I came to know some groups of students and teachers, but compared to the other two schools, I had the least sense of being part of the school. At KIS, the small size of the school and my (unintionally) becoming a part-time English teacher gave me more opportunities to build deeper relationships with people there. Students called me differently names such as Kuni, Kuni-chan, Kuni-san, Kunikuni, Kuni-sensei.[20] A male student described me as "An adult who is easy to talk to, and can understand things [話せる大人]" which nicely describes my liminal positions in the space. People also began to know my sexual orientation at KIS which produced another layer of complexity in interpersonal dynamics.[21] One time, in a private conversation, the former school principle said, "I wonder why a smart person like you are doing this kind of thing which earns no money at all [あなたみたいな優秀な人が、どうしてこんなに金にならないことをやるかなあ、と思いますわ]." At C High School, I received attention from teachers because they all shared my CV, which is very usual (a Ph.D. student in the United States in his mid-30's). They had access to it because I was hired as a teaching assistant, a position which is usually held by college students and a few graduate students in their early 20's. A few times, those who were in management positions asked me to give some advice to tailor the curriculum "to create elites" which I politely declined saying that there would no such curriculum. I suspected they asked this of me given my own educational history. Their understanding of education seems to be close to the world culture theorists.[22]

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[20] Just calling me Kuni in Japanese means the speaker is close to me. First, they called me by my first name which signals the distance between speakers. Kuni-san is more formal, and Kuni-sensei is "teacher (Mr.) Kuni." Kunikuni has the funny connotation which implies the speaker is a child.

[21] For more about how being queer affects one's relationships with others in fieldwork settings, see Lewin and Leap (1996).

[22] The world culture theorists aim for "realistic and comprehensive understanding of the transnational forces influencing all societies and education systems" (Arnove 2013, 17). According to Ramirez (2003) and Anderson-Levitt's (2003), world culture theory is based on sociological desire for the generalized theory. Those who believe in

Although my grounded research focus during fieldwork was the same in three schools, the three locations offered different kinds of data. In general, when I entered the field, I focused on how people are navigating themselves vis-à-vis their hopes for and anxiety about the future, and how they imagine a better version of education. I became closest to people at KIS, and not so close to those at the Forest of Freedom School. I held formal working positions at KIS and C High School, which gave me rich information about organizations and granted me access to the information for teachers. Being a teacher let me have the first-hand experiences of being pressured to finish everyday tasks, being evaluated, and interacting with students in a "teacher mode." At the same time, as teaching gots busier, it got harder to keep time and energy aside to use on my goals within *this* project. Outside classrooms, the wealth of publications focused on the three schools supplemented my ethnographic data while also helping me historicize each school. Especially focusing on the Forest of Freedom School, there are many articles and other publications including those by its alumni, parents, and students which includes "Who's Who" about teachers by parents published a few years later after the school's founding in 1985. These materials, especially about the Forest of Freedom School gave me a concrete sense of how people are imagining and challenging the mainstream education, how that has changed over time, and not a few teachers and students left the school because of they were disappointed by the school.

The specific forms of critical pedagogy in each school mainly speak to three points. First, Forest of Freedom School is critical of the standardized education universal in 1985, which also justified corporal punishment. Second, KIS is critical of the concept that to be "international" is to be westernized. Third, C High School is critical of everyone going through the same

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this theory aim to find the best educational models and practices which could be applied without thinking about cultural variations.

standardized curriculum in the same time and space, regardless of difference in students' interests and abilities. Each of these three schools challenges mainstream Japanese educational norms in different forms, yet they all share a clear sense of refusal and resistance to those dominant social norms. Historicizing the foundation of each school tells us what it means alternative at different points in recent history and in response to then-current norms in Japanese society. This is because all institutional formations of these schools embody the refusal of the dominant social norms in contemporary Japan by means of critical pedagogy, depending on the time they were established (1985, 2006, and 2016 respectively).

By comparing three schools that demonstrate different ways to be alternative, this project examines how parents, students, teachers, and others at school participate in the process of making school culture, and how their attempts to imagine and create a better educational path shape their behaviors in daily lives. I aim to connect this seemingly peripheral, emerging alternative education with broader process of people imagining better version of learning and relationships with others.

Research Languages

This project positions itself in a unique place in Japanese studies. Generally, mainstream Japanese studies in the United States tend to focus on close readings of primary sources written in Japanese—such as in the fields of literature, history, or cinema in certain years ago. But this dissertation aims to present individual lives in contemporary Japan with bottom-up perspectives through ethnography. Linguistically, this project is trilingual—it builds on academic works written in English and Japanese and, in addition, uses Korean as the supplementary research language. Linguistic proficiency affects what kind of data a researcher accesses, analyzes, and

digests that, in turn, form the scope of research. As those in an English-speaking institution might already recognize, people from Japan tend to have hard times showing mastery of English proficiency. The opposite is also true.[23]

This project is about Japan, but was conducted in multiple sites and multiple languages. The main language for interacting with people was Japanese in all three schools. In some occasions when I talked with English teachers who are not fluent in Japanese, and a few students who feel more comfortable speaking in English, I used English. At KIS, some students and teachers speak mainly in Korean, or include some Korean words when they are talking in Japanese. Before I learned Korean, I observed that a few teachers switched to Korean when they were talking about some sensitive information about such as about a mother who just visited school to complain about something. After gaining advanced fluency in Korean, I could understand most of the conversations in Korean there. I also read numerous educational magazines, internet articles, and academic articles on education written in Japanese, and most of my field notes were written in Japanese. Most in-depth interviews were conducted in Japanese. Among the fifty total semi-structured interviews, three were in English and the rest were in Japanese. Four people mixed Korean words and expressions in their Japanese conversations.

One of the challenging parts of writing this dissertation has been how much to include academic works written in Japanese, their concepts and arguments. I imagined the readers of this dissertation would mainly be English-speaking scholars. There are many rich documents and scholarly works written in Japanese, such as about Japanese education history, and youth and

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[23] According to the U.S. department of State, Arabic, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Japanese, and Korean are listed as category IV, the hardest languages to obtain proficiency for monolingual English speakers. Simply speaking, learners need to spend nearly four more times longer than learning category I languages such as Spanish and French, to teach the same level of proficiency in reading and speaking (U.S. Department of State).

education in contemporary Japan (especially in the field of qualitative sociology). If readers are interested in more detail-oriented historical aspects of Japanese education, or some sociological research trends such as the impossibility of building a comfortable life in contemporary Japan [生きづらさ], they should refer to historical and sociological works written in Japanese such as Ikuo Amano [天野郁夫] and Masahiro Abe [阿部真大]. In this dissertation, I did my best to combine English and Japanese sources to discuss my main arguments about contemporary Japanese society and education in order to understand what is happening in schools and how individuals are imagining the best educational practices.

How Interviews Were Conducted

In each school, I reached out to students, alumni, teachers, and parents to be interviewed in various ways, such as giving out flyers, talking to parents at school festivals and parents' gathering days, or asking someone who I already know to introduce other parents and alumni (snowball sampling). But the most effective way was asking directly those with whom I personally interacted over the time of my preliminary research and fieldwork. Generally speaking, most of the teachers I met at school were willing to be interviewed, and parents were harder to reach. Alumni of the Forest of Freedom School is one exceptional group who were very willing to be interviewed without introductions. When I was introduced to them via Facebook by one alumni who I have personally known over years, six of them agreed to be interviewed. Although I did not cite the voices of alumni much in this dissertation, their narratives and opinions of the school, especially after they experienced the world outside school [外の世界], helped me understand life after these alternative schools and shaped the research included in this dissertation.

At school, the student interviewees were selected based on 1) the rapport I had with each student, and 2) the ways each student could represent a wider range of interests in learning and education from daily conversations, their opinions during class, and what they write about their future in English and Japanese. I also focused on what Miyazaki calls "bibliographical autobiography" (2013, 50). I paid attention to what parents, students, and alumni read and write about their hopes, goals, and their days at school and beyond. In that sense, the school library was a useful source of information regarding what kind of books are chosen, and what kind of books are read (or not popular) among students. In some occasions, I asked to distribute flyers to ask for interviews to parents, but only one mother at KIS responded to it. For interviews, I recorded, transcribed, and checked the terms that were mentioned frequently. As for C High School, I could not reach out to any parents as my relationship with students was more official and distant because I was hired as a teaching assistant.

Daily interactions and conversations were equally, or even *more*, important than interviews to understand how people are participating in school life and being influenced and influencing the school culture. In a few occasions, I was invited for lunch and dinner with parents (with and without their children). Roughly speaking, the data for this project consists of 90 percent fieldnotes (including conversation notes) and 10 percents are interview transcriptions.

During my fieldwork, I always wrote my daily fieldnotes, and made a summary every month. For fieldnotes, I followed Bernard's (2011) division of a) description, b) analysis, and c) strategies. I spent at least one hour every day after I conducted my participant-observation to write down what happened, what I thought and felt, and what I found. I also wrote down tips to gain further information. I also took some tips from Davies (1997) such as not using the term "difficulties" and instead using "challenges." In Japanese, I avoided using things you do not like

[嫌なこと] and instead, asked about things you would like to change or thing you hope to be changed [変えたいこと、ここが変わったらいいなと思うところ] when discussing struggles at school.

When schools were not busy, I collected and read articles and books about my target schools, and more broadly education in general. Especially during the summer holiday, I analyzed media representations of these schools to understand how they appeal to potential students, parents, and general society through educational magazines, newspapers, and the internet. These materials also contextualized broader discourses around education in contemporary Japan. All this information amplified my analysis about how parents and students imagine a better version of education and the school life, especially by gaining some knowledge or skills through schooling.

Technology also played an important role in conducting this ethnography. For example, some students were constantly uploading their social media stories multiple times in a day, primarily on Instagram. These posts were mainly about their daily lives at school, sometimes secretly recorded during the class, or at their home. They mention each other often, and sometimes set up "close friends" categories to control who can view those stories. As the Story is interactive, we sometimes commented to each other. By carefully observing Instagram, I was able to get more complete a picture of students' daily lives outside school and their interests, or, more specifically, what they are interested in presenting to others.

Outline of This Dissertation

In order to argue that that alternative education in Japan is the process of seeking better options for communication and relationships in safe spaces, rather than being characterized by certain specific curricula, this dissertation is organized through four chapters.

Chapter 1 examines the structure and history of mainstream Japanese secondary education. During the U.S. occupation period (1945-52), the Japanese education system changed drastically. People started to go through mandatory education much longer than had been the case in the prewar period—shifting from five years to nine years. Postsecondary education had not been compulsory, but it became *de facto* mandatory for everyone. Therefore, the majority of Japanese people have more than twelve years of schooling nowadays. That partly contributed to the emergence of the mass middle class. Mainstream education was also supported by cram schools [塾 or 予備校]. This shadow education system used to be a big industry but as Japan has fewer young people, many cram schools are having hard time surviving recently.

On the other hand, contrary to what the U.S. occupational forces and relegations expected, mainstream pedagogy did not change significantly, and continued to be teacher-centered and focusing on entrance examinations. For a long time, Japanese citizens have criticized the Japanese secondary education system since the 1960's. As it became a mass education, more people started to advocate for multiple needs within education as it was no longer only for a small number of elites. As more people took part in secondary education, it became impossible to satisfy everyone. So far, several education reforms by the Japanese government have not successfully met everyone's expectations.

Chapter 2 analyzes how people come to choose alternative education. While schools focus on how to facilitate learning for students, and how to take care of them, it is actually often

parents who decide to send their children to these schools. Generally, if students move into

alternative schools from junior high school, they are doing so mainly because of their parents'

decision. Students who move into alternative school from high school show more degree of their

individual preferences, but parents still affect their decisions explicitly and implicitly.

Furthermore, in my fieldsites, the more parents influence the choice of school, the deeper they

relate to school management which, in turn, means they require accountability from the school—

regarding their curricula and actual practices. While that might generate more conflicts and

tensions, it also facilitates conversations and communications among those who relate school.

When people come to alternative education, it is the combination of parents' guidance and

students' individual decisions.

Chapter 3 discusses how the images of ideal students are narrated among people around

each school. In each school, there are certain educational goals and slogans to express their

pedagogical goals—and sometimes those ideals are vague or hard to achieve. However, that does

not always bring negative consequences. Even though students, teachers, and parents do not

agree with a single definition of the ideal student, these images entice conversations about

school. Each group of people interact with each other to create their image of ideal students.

While teachers and teaching assistants are powerful figures to evaluate and manage students'

interactions at school, their images of ideal student do not always overlap with those held by

students. Students who joined schools from junior high school level (and their parents) tend to be

more powerful than those who started school from high school. Peer-to-peer interactions are

influenced by the school cultures, and at the same time, each generation of students keep

changing cultures where they belong to. The conflicts and tensions in each school present how

people at school make sense of the gaps between their ideal education and ongoing reality, and

how schools are located in the greater Japanese society. These problems illustrate how establishing the perfect model of education is impossible, and how imagined ideals and ongoing realities always dissatisfy some members. As long as these gaps between ideal and reality exit, some people imagine, practice, and create new alternative educations. Creating alternative education is a ceaseless process of imagining better way of learning and living.

Chapter 4 considers the perspectives of technology and learning when people imagine the ideal education. Digital technologies have changed the ways we interact, the subjects we learn, and the spaces where we interact in various ways. The emerging importance of technology made the Japanese government add new technological subjects, like programming, to the category of mandatory education topics. While this curriculum reform did not drastically change overall content and pedagogy in mainstream schools, it enabled some private schools to assert more agency in tailoring their own curricula. Even with sharp differences in curricula from those taught in mainstream schools, the legitimization of technological subjects by the Japanese state meant that students who graduate from C High School, for example, still receive a certification of high school graduation endorsed by the government. While online classes reduced the amount of time students are required to be physically present in the classroom with teachers and classmates, this digital shift did not reduce the importance of interactions. Rather, some of these interactions moved online and gained different rhythms. People maintained the perception that interacting with others, such as through coaching, and experiencing a sense of belonging are important for learning: interactions and communications, even when digital, remain an essential part of how ideal education is imagined.

In the Conclusion, I argue that alternative education in Japan, regardless of schools' diverse variations of philosophy and pedagogy, is the process of seeking better options for

learning and communication. Participating in alternative education represents individual refusals of mainstream Japan. But it is not an abjection from Japan and its culture. Even if one attends alternative schools, one still has to find future jobs and relationships in Japan. Instead, going to alternative schools is part of a never-ending process of seeking better ways of living alongside mainstream Japanese cultural norms.

Chapter 2 **The Making of Mainstream Education**

Introduction

This chapter surveys the development of the development of contemporary mainstream education in Japan. After World War II, secondary education became available to many Japanese citizens; such education was only available to elites before the war. At the same time, Japanese secondary education has always been criticized for being too rigorous and causing too much stress for students. The U.S. occupation force played a significant role in establishing the current mandatory education system in Japan between 1945 and 1952. Educational reforms during this period [戦後教育改革] implemented by the occupation force and some Japanese committee members increased the length of mandatory education from six to nine years: this change made secondary education available to and required for the masses, and subsequently, contributed to the formation of the mass middle class in Japanese society. By 1975, 92 percent of junior high school graduates went to high school, showing a significant increase from 52 percent in 1955.

The extended period of mandatory education, from six years to nine years, produced capable workers who supported the economic miracle of post-war Japan. The economic growth during the post-war period and the popularization of secondary education are strongly intertwined in Japan. After the occupation, especially after 1955 until 1993, the Liberal Democratic Party dominated the political regime. Under the stable political regime, Japan's economy developed into what came to be described as a "miracle." Since the 1970s, most people in Japan think they belong to the middle class. By 1974, 90 percent of Japanese people attended

high school, showing a huge increase from the pre-war period.[24] By focusing on the post-war

education reform during the occupation period (1945-52), this chapter illustrates how

mainstream secondary education in Japan transformed itself from an elite track to mass

education, yet maintained its authoritative school culture.[25] That made some people turn to

alternative education which shows less authoritative pedagogies.

As more people received secondary education, more started criticizing it. The U.S.

intervention did not drastically change the culture of learning at schools in Japan. Facing much

criticism from its citizens that Japanese pedagogies were authoritative, teacher-centered, and

entrance-exam oriented, the Ministry of Education (currently MEXT: Ministry of Education,

Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) conducted several education reforms since the 1960s

to improve the quality of education, including through policies intended to respect students'

individual uniqueness and to nurture their abilities to survive after graduation. These changes

were partly in response to reports of problems in schools such as mass school refusal and

bullying. Newspapers often report student deaths by due to bullying, and yet schools do not

recognize the presence of bullying.[26]

Given disappointment with the curriculum and pedagogy of mainstream education, there

have always been movements for alternative education. Alternative approaches have been more

prominent among private schools rather than public schools because private schools have more

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[24] For example, only 18 percent of elementary school graduates proceeded to junior high school in 1935.

[25] The pedagogy and classroom culture, which has been criticized for a long time, has not changed significantly. Many scholars (Lewis 1994, Fukuzawa 1994, Rohlen 1983, Yoneyama 1999, Cave 2016) illustrate that the teacher-student relationship is not that authoritative in the stage of elementary school, but that this relationship shifts in secondary education. In middle school and high school, students are forced to observe rigorous academic curricula with disciplined lifestyles such as properly wearing school uniform, keeping hair short, and using appropriate speech style to seniors and teachers. Even corporal punishment was legitimized and received public support until the 2000s. Post-war education reforms were the product of hybridity between the U.S. and Japanese, but the actual practices at school have not changed nevertheless. I discuss pedagogy and everyday practices at school more in chapter 3.

[26] In 2020, 329 high school students committed suicide, followed by 136 junior high school students and 14 elementary school students (MEXT 2021).

autonomy and flexibility for school management than public ones. Miscellaneous schools which are not certified by the government [各種学校] also seek new pedagogies and curricula to meet students' needs. Miscellaneous schools, which includes many Steiner schools in Japan, have a great freedom of their curriculum. But their students need to take some extra exams and classes to receive their educational certificate.[27] Students in these school generally cannot receive student benefits such as discounted commuting passes [学割]. Junior high school (7-9th grade) is still under the category of mandatory education[義務教育] which makes it slightly more difficult to conduct something drastically different from mainstream schools. Although high school is not technically mandatory in the Japanese education system, considering the fact that most students go to high school, alternative high schools (and junior high school) offer strong attractions to those who seek for alternative way of learning and living in the Japanese society. In the following sections, I overview how mainstream secondary education in Japan was established.

Education Reform During Occupation

The current Japanese education system was reorganized during the U.S. occupational periods of 1945-52. The process of education reform under the occupation force was very chaotic and convoluted. However, to see a big picture, we can narrow down our scope to two U.S. and two Japanese organizations: the U.S. General Headquarters (GHQ), the U.S. Civil Information and Education Section (CIE), Japanese Ministry of Education, and the Education Reform Committee [ERC 教育刷新委員会] are the most important bodies. Generally speaking, the process of post-war education reform was conducted as follows: the ERC proposed ideas,

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[27] Such as exams for high school graduation certificate [高卒認定試験].

and the CIE checked them. Once permitted by the CIE, the Ministry of Education established

new laws, secured the budget, and enforced it (Yamaguchi 2009, 38).

The CIE was a lower division of the GHQ, and the Japanese Ministry of Education

worked as a middleman between occupational force and local schools. Most importantly, the

Education Reform Committee (ERC) was connected directly to the Japanese prime minister, not

the Ministry of Education, and the ERC acted as a mediator between U.S. occupation force and

the Japanese Ministry of Education. The ERC's independence from the Japanese Ministry of

Education was intended by J.C. Trainor, then an assistant manager at CIE, and Nambara Shigeru

(Yamaguchi 2009, 23-25, Yamazaki 1955, 127), president of the University of Tokyo. The GHQ

first asked the United States Department of the Army to send the delegates to Japan to figure out

how Japanese education should be changed.

Almost all of the important organizations involved in post-war Japanese education reform

were formed in the year 1946. On January 9, the GHQ ordered the Japanese Ministry of

Education to form a committee of people familiar with education in Japan to cooperate with

them. Under this order, the Japanese Ministry of Education chose twenty-nine committee

members who held their first meeting on February 18. The American delegates, comprising

twenty-seven scholars and politicians, visited Japan from March 8 to 24. At the end of their visit,

some of the delegation members, such as George Stoddard, who soon-to-be president of the

University of Illinois, wrote a report for the GHQ. After their report was submitted, this

committee was dissolved. Notably, the GHQ asked the Japanese government not to include

anyone from the government so as "not to be restricted by the opinion of the Japanese

government" (Yamazaki 1955, 127). The Ministry of Education was inactive on education

reform, arguing that they did not have enough funding, personnel, and time because the post-war

Japanese society was still unstable: feeding citizens should come first and education could be discussed later. To facilitate the reform process, the ERC was formed on August 10. In this organization, Nambara Shigetu and Yamazaki Kyôsuke played central roles in establishing the Japanese mandatory education system even after the ERC was reconstituted to become the Central Council for Education [中央教育審議会]. The Central Council for Education still exists as an advisory body to the MEXT.

It is the ERC which founded the 6-3-3-4 system: mandatory six-year primary education and three-year junior high school, followed by optional three-year high school and four-year college. The purpose of this change was to achieve equality of educational opportunity. The previous Japanese education system, before the war, was called the multiple-track model [複線型]. This pre-war model was very complicated and only those who went to specific secondary schools could proceed to prestigious national universities (Figure 8). This is comparable to the system in contemporary Singapore. To change this structure, the ERC agreed to propose a single-track model [単線型], which is much simpler and allows people to proceed easily to university education (Figure 9). This idea of a single-track system was suggested in the Delegation of American Education Report (who visited Japan from March 8 to 24), but the idea itself had already been proposed before the war. In other words, the U.S. occupation force enabled the CIE to carry out some of the plans proposed in Japan even before the war.

学年　年齢

Age

Grade

College

High School

Junior High

Girl's School

Elementary School (Mandatory)

Kindergarten

大学院　専攻科　研究科　研究科　研究科　専攻科　女子高等師範学校　専攻科　研究補習　研究補習

専門学校（実業専門学校を含む）　高等師範学校　師範学校　実業学校（甲種）　（乙種）実業学校　実業補習学校　徒弟学校　補習科

予科　補習科　二部　師範　補習科　（予科）　（女子）　補習科　予科　予科　東京盲学校　東京聾唖学校

尋常科　中学校　高等女学校（実科高女）　高等小学校

予科　予科

尋　常　小　学　校

幼　稚　園
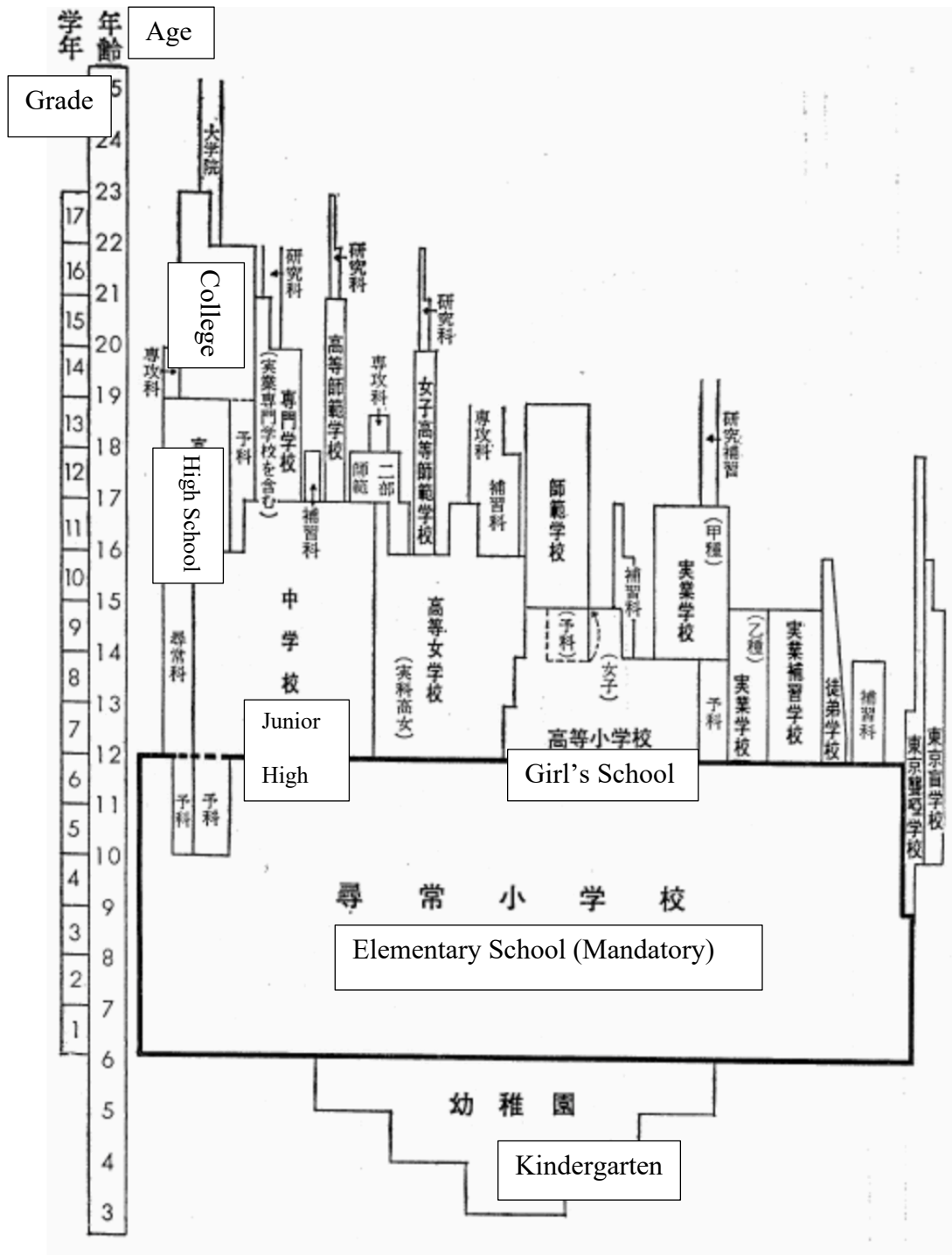
Figure 1: Japanese education system as of 1946.

Cited from The MEXT School System [学校系統図]
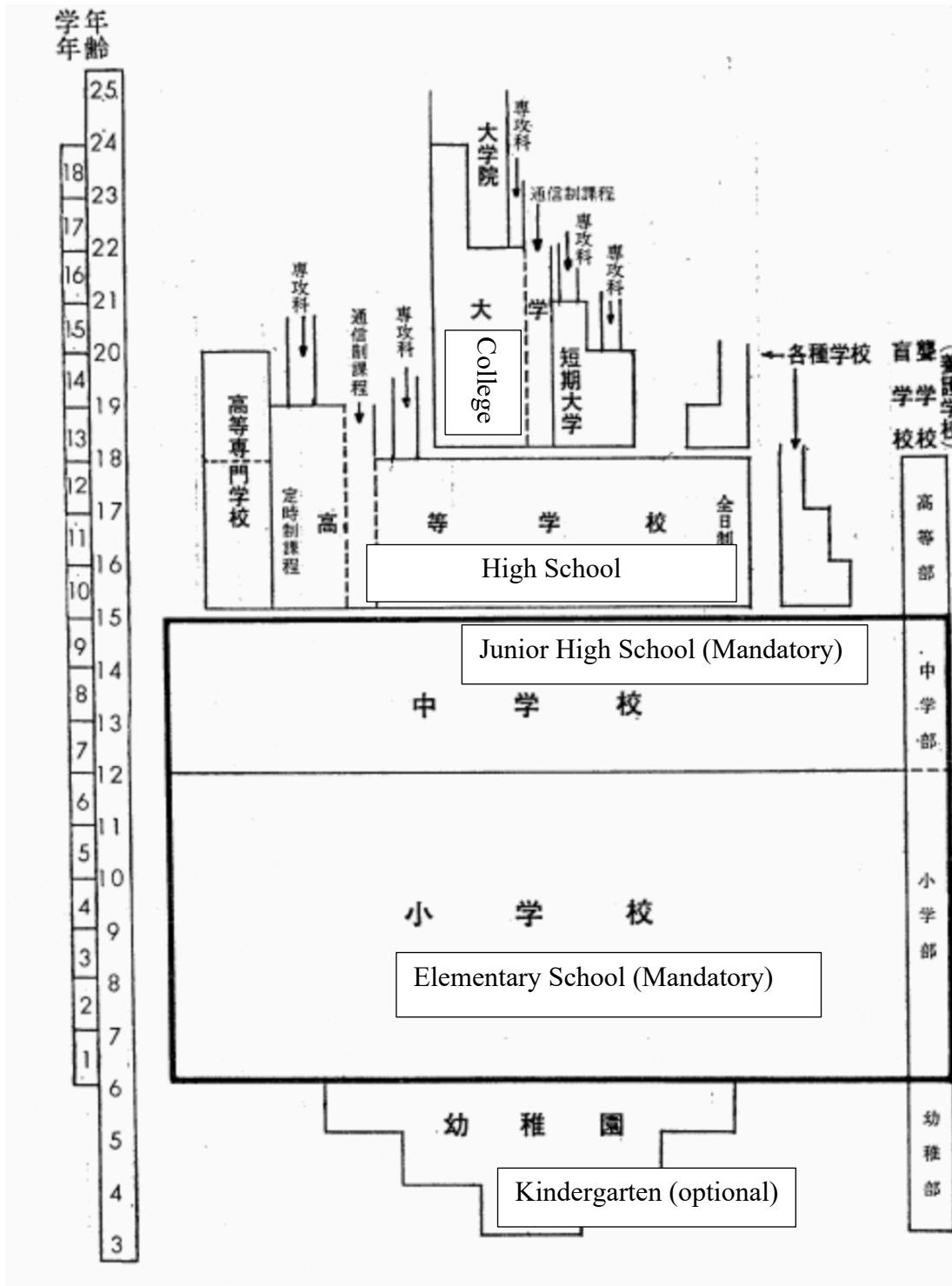
Figure 2 Contemporary Japanese Education System.

Cited from The MEXT School System [学校系統図]

Despite the successful lengthening mandatory education terms, the CIE failed to conduct language reform [国語改革]. Some CIE officers, such as J.C. Trainor and R.K. Hall, tried to abolish Chinese characters [漢字] from the Japanese writing system and Romanize Japanese writing systems. Some American officers thought that the use of Chinese characters inhibited Japanese people from thinking creatively. They even thought it enervates children by just forcing them to memorizing a huge quantity of characters that are not used in their daily communications. Trainor thought the use of Chinese characters meant that there "is no possibility of democracy flourishing in a land with such an outlandish method of speaking and writing" (Trainor 1983, 288-299). However, as Yamazaki describes in his memoir, abolishing Chinese characters from the Japanese writing system was not very realistic and he felt that "being (forced to) change our national characters after being defeated was too much to bear" (Yamazaki 1955, 123). The Ministry of Education decided to reduce the number of Chinese characters covered in school curricula and changed the writing system to unify written and spoken languages.[28] The CIE had the power to command the Japanese bureaucracy, but without understanding Japanese language or culture, their instructions were not effective or reasonable. Sometimes the Ministry of Education and the ERC took advantage of some of the CIE's orders to implement longstanding plans—they implemented their own preexisting plans under cover of following CIE orders. Overall, the CIE had more power than the ERC, but the ERC was able to bring actual changes during the process of postwar education reform.

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[28] In Japan, writing and speaking languages were different. For example, butterfly was written as てふ (*tefu*) but pronounced as ちょう(*cho*). Style wise, there were also gaps between style of written and spoken languages. Since Meiji Era, the movement to unify these two began [言文一致]. For more about this movement in modern Japan, see Lee (1996).

The 6-3-3-4 System and the Importance of Secondary Education

The 6-3-3-4 System drastically changed the character of secondary education for Japanese citizens. Before the war, after the mandatory six years of elementary school [尋常小学校], some elite students went on a university-track, called Old-System High School [旧制高校], others entered a military track, called Boy's School [青年学校], and girls went to Girl's School [女学校]. This system required students to decide their future occupation at the age of twelve, when they graduated from elementary school. After that, changing one's track was costly both financially and culturally.

In order to prevent this tracking at an early age, post-war education reforms aimed to achieve equality of educational opportunity for Japanese citizens. The Old-System High School especially contributed to the production of a small number of elites in society from an early age. Six to seven years at the secondary institute guaranteed admission to the prestigious Former Imperial University [旧帝大]. As the number of graduates from Old-System High School was almost equal to the number of students admitted to Former Imperial Universities in Japan, attending Old-System High School (after graduating from elementary school) enabled a student to secure admission to Former Imperial Universities. Boy's School also produced professional soldiers, as its graduates entered the military. To change this structure, ERC committee members agreed to propose a single-track model, which was much simpler and allowed people to proceed easily to university.

It took a long time to implement the 6-3-3-4 system after it was original proposed. Originally, it was the CIE's idea to conduct this reform, because the idea came from the Delegation of American Education. Nambara proposed it in the ERC. The Ministry of Education, however, continued to ask for more time and funding to implement the change. But in the end,

the idea of the 6-3-3-4 system was was approved by the ERC almost unanimously in December 1946. The CIE urged the Japanese side to implement this system as soon as possible, partly because they did not expect the occupation period to last long, but it was the Ministry of Education and the local government who worked hard as a middleman to put the system in place (Yamazaki 1955, 129-131). Yamazaki observes the power dynamics between the occupation force and the Japanese local governments. He mentions "if the question (whether the local governments support conducting 6-3-3-4 system) is asked by American soldiers in uniform, there is no doubt that all local government officers could say is yes, no matter what their finance is" [殊にそれがアメリカ占領軍の制服を着た軍人からの質問であれば誰も彼も反對をするものはなく…（中略）自分らの地方財政がどうであろうと…(中略)…皆大賛成を表明したことは疑う餘地がない] (Yamazaki 1955, 129). The confusion and upheavals in rural areas were so extreme that some town and village mayors committed suicide (Yamazaki 1955, 131). But in the end, all Japanese schools transitioned into this 6-3-3-4 system, which continues to the present.

The establishment of the 6-3-3-4 system was partly aimed at overcoming a militaristic culture in Japan.29 Among ERC members, Nambara Shigeru, head of the University of Tokyo, was a key figure in carrying out education reforms, including the establishment of the 6-3-3-4

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[29] Before the war, secondary education was designed to produce elite males and tracking started when one graduated from elementary school. In prewar Japan, during 1893-1899, many secondary educational institutions such as junior high school [中学校], girls school [女学校], and boys school [青年学校] were established under the slogan, "Enrich the state, strengthen the military" [富国強兵]. Boy's school was mainly intended to train soldiers, and girl's school was intended to teach girls the idealized gender norms represented in the term "good wife, wise mother [良妻賢母]." Notably, junior high school was only open to boys. Girls could continue receiving secondary education for four to five years, which is equivalent to the period of junior high school, but they could not proceed to the Imperial Universities such as Tokyo Imperial University [東京帝国大学]. Therefore, tertiary education was only open to boys who could go to junior high school. This modernization of the nation dovetails with the successful establishment of new social institutions such as schools and residential registrations [戸籍] to properly collect taxes. During the period of the Sino-Japanese War (1894) and the Russo-Japan War (1904), the Japanese economy grew rapidly.

system. According to Yamaguchi, Nambara thought "gaining independence as human, and establishing humanity [人間の自律と人間性の確立]" was essential for a new democracy in Japan. Since the Meiji era, Japanese education policies were coherently nationalistic, dominated by an emperor-centered, idealized ethnocentric nation-state. While Japan successfully established itself as a modern nation, this mentality also contributed Japan's entries into military conflict, such as the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War (Yamaguchi 2009, 25-58). To put it another way, the Imperial Rescript on Education [教育勅語] made Japan observe its expansionist attitude to neighboring countries before collapsing in World War II. To be free from this military-focused educational path, Nambara thought it was important to offer everyone the opportunity to be educated. He states that up until the war, education met the needs of the small number of people who govern the masses. To his mind, secondary education should be available to a much wider variety of people so that they all could gain a "logical self" and help build up the ideal nation-state (Yamaguchi 2009, 76). At this point, the goal of education was still located in building up "the ideal nation-state," rather than about nurturing individual well-being or citizens who could work globally.

Mass secondary education supported the development of Japanese nation-state after the war.30 Japan's economic success since the postwar period strongly relates to the popularization of secondary education as well as social stability. High school education was originally optional, but enrollment in high school increased drastically as the Japanese economy grew. In the beginning, when Japanese society was in postwar confusion and upheaval, fewer than half of junior high school graduates continued to high school. However, especially after the 1955

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30 According to the Ministry of Education in Japan website, they say "it is remarkable that even before European countries advocated simplifying the school system [統一学校運動; *Einheitsschule; école unique*], secondary education widely prevailed in Japan."

political regime [55 年体制] was implemented by the Liberal Democratic Party, which stabilized the political situation in Japan, high school enrollment numbers kept increasing as the Japanese economy developed. From 1955 until 1993, the Liberal Democratic Party became dominant in the Diet and then focused on economic growth, exemplified by the success of the Income Doubling Plan [所得倍増計画] advocated by the Ikeda cabinet in 1960. In 1961, the rate of people attending high school was 62.3 percent and reached 70 percent in 1965. Then it increased to 82.1 percent in 1970, and finally 90 percent in 1974 (MEXT 2011).

Currently, secondary education is almost universal, as almost 99 percent of students enter high school.[31] Traditionally, more boys than girls attended high school. However, since 1969 more girls started to go to high school than boys. In four-year colleges, there are slightly more boys than girls (43.1 percent in total number) but every year, girls' enrollments are increasing. According to government statistics, more than 90 percent of people have attended high school since the mid-1970s. This is remarkable because only about 50 percent of high school graduates go to college. Tertiary education in Japan has not been significantly popularized compared to South Korea, where about 68 percent of high school graduates go to college.

This postwar education reform, the single-track 6-3-3-4 system, provided more opportunities for Japanese citizens to receive longer periods of education. Although the inequality is increasing in the contemporary Japanese society,32 the images and symbols of the middle-class "mainstream" remain imposing. The development of mass secondary education happened after World War II. The fact that secondary education was available to the masses

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[31] In 2020, 1,074,708 out of 1,087,468 junior high school graduates proceeded to high school. Among them, 36167 students are in corresponding high school (MEXT 2021).
[32] For more about inequality in contemporary Japan, see Sato (2000).

contributed to the overall development of the Japanese economy. However, it also produced more criticism of the secondary education itself.

Failed Reforms and the Impossibility of Perfect Mass Education

To better understand how Japanese people think mainstream education is problematic, I will briefly describe how mainstream education in Japan has been imagined, practiced, and criticized from the 1960s to the present. Criticism of the mainstream mirrors the movement for alternative education. After building up the holistic school systems in the country by the 1950's, the Japanese government began a new wave of education reforms in the 1960s; these should be differentiated from the education reforms of 1945-52 under the U.S. occupation force. These new reforms were implemented in response to problems reported by schools. ~~Until recently,~~ For example, educational reforms has always advocated respecting individual uniqueness among students and nurturing students' ability to survive [生きる力] for these 20 years (MEXT 2005). After secondary education became mass education, many problems emerged, such as mass school refusal and bullying [いじめ], which further caused schools refusals and sometimes suicides among students. In this section, I overview education reforms since the 1960s to describe how those reforms are aimed to establish the better education, and how those reforms are responding to the citizen's perception of mainstream education in Japan. The tricky part is that general perceptions of mainstream secondary education does not always represent reality.

After the occupation period, education policies aimed mainly to support stable economic development under a stable political climate, represented by the 1955-system. In the 1950-1960s, the Japanese government set up education systems for this economic development by establishing colleges of technology [高等専門学校] and subsidizing private universities.

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Roughly speaking, until the 1960's, the government only had to think about completing the education system itself by increasing the number of schools.

The shift occurred in the 1970s when the government started trying to change the quality of education, rather than expanding the school system itself. The government slogan was "qualitative improvement of education under stable (economic) development [安定成長下の教育の質的改善]" because of some problems such as intense competition for entrance examination, cramming-oriented pedagogy, and problematic behaviors among students (Fujita 1997). From this time, the Japanese government conducted several educational reforms to improve its content, rather than expanding the secondary and tertiary education itself in Japan. After the 1980's the changing structure of labor (knowledge intensified industry), globalization, mass school refusal, and bullying were added to the challenges which education needs to respond.

Overall, as secondary and tertiary education became popularized, many people started to describe the college entrance examination [受験] as "traumatic." Consequently, they advocated for the importance of student-centered learning for the sake of students' well-being. In response to these opinions, the Ministry of Education tried to reduce the workload of students through measures such as eliminating school on Saturdays, shortening class times from 50 to 45 minutes, and cutting content from mandatory schooling curricula. Moreover, they started to advocate for the importance of The New Perspective for Academic Achievements [新学力観] in order to counter the criticism that Japanese education was too cramming-oriented, that entrance examinations were too competitive, and that delinquency was more frequent than before. However, this series of reforms did not always work effectively.

First, it turned out to be a myth that students today are studying more than before. In Japanese, there is a famous saying: "Four (hours) win and five (hours) lose [四当五落]." This phrase means if you sleep for four hours per day (and study hard), you will enter your top choice of university. If you sleep for five hours, you will lose. However, Kariya (2002) indicates that, statistically speaking, previous generations of students, such as in the 1980s, were not deprived of sleep. Even just before college entrance examination season, high school students slept for more than seven hours on average. Surprisingly, those students studied more than current students. Not knowing these facts, the government conducted a series of reforms such as reducing class time and learning content at school, and as a result, Japanese students ended up studying less.

Especially it was the 1970's when people perceived Japanese education was problematic. General college examination [共通一次試験] started in 1979 for national and public university's entrance examinations. It was because of the criticism that some universities assign overly difficult, or even strange questions in their individual exam [個別試験], and people worried that it harms high school education (The MEXT 2009). This general college exam was the standardized test using marksheets, similar to SAT or GRE, but everyone needs to take the test on the same day. In the 1980's, school violence to teachers started to be discussed in the field of journalism and academia. According to the MEXT's statistics, one of 7.5 junior high school and one out of 10 high school reported school violence such as attacking teachers, violence among students, and vandalizing school facilities. However, these cases were report to police when school could not deal with them any more. Therefore, the actual number should be much higher (Muroi 1984). People associated these increasing problems at school with the rigorous school curriculum and pedagogy.

To mitigate students' burdens, the government started to reduce the content covered by mandatory education. But on the other hand, the mainstream education started to lose its sense of direction. One of the biggest failures is said to be *yutori* education. *Yutori* could be translated as relaxed, roomy, and comfortable. There are many ways to define when this yutori education started. Basically, since 1977, the government started to reduce the required curricular content in course guidelines [学習指導要領]. In 1987, prime minister Nakasone's cabinet was in power when the government defined the slogan for *yutori* education as "respecting individual uniqueness [個性重視の原則]," "learning through lifelong learning [生涯学習体系への移行]," "responding to changes of technology and globalization [国際化、情報化など変化への対応]." While this policy of yutori education rather indirectly affected the direction of Japanese educational policies in the 1980's and the 1990's, it was after the 2000's when the mainstream curriculum embodies its policy of yutori.

In 2002, the government changed the curriculum for mandatory education drastically. The learning content was reduced by about 30 percent, Saturdays became holidays, and the new subject area of "general studies" [総合的な学習の時間] was added. The aim of *yutori* education was not only to nurture the sense of individuality but also to restore a sense of community and emotional well-being among students. But pedagogically, traditional education did focus on these aspects. According to Cave (2016), teachers traditionally gave more priority to group work and collective development rather than to students expressing individual thoughts so that they could learn to be good human beings in the society, but the government thought "social and emotional competence and wellbeing" (p219) were lost in those few decades since the 1970s. The concept and pedagogy of general studies was not introduced thoroughly to teachers. Therefore, many could not make use of general studies as government aimed. Some just let

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students watch videos, and others used the class time to compensate other subject's make-up [citation].

Propelling yutori education made Japanese mainstream education and widen the gap between those who invest for education and those who do not. Scholars, politicians, and the public all agree that this series of yutori education reforms was a failure. In 2004 and 2007, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicated that scores of Japanese students decreased significantly. Moreover, it showed a wider gap between high-achieving students and low-achieving students. One notable fact is that in the greater Tokyo area, public high schools became less competitive than private ones because public schools could accept candidates only from a limited area. Therefore, middle-class families sent their children to cram schools during 4-5 grades in elementary school in order to secure admission to private junior high schools. Those private high schools usually do not accept new students at the high school level. These practices coincidently resembled the pre-war education system: in this unofficial track system, after graduating from elementary school, some students attend selective 6-year secondary schools [中高一貫校]. Those selective private junior high schools and high schools occupied the list of top 10 schools for entering the University of Tokyo, especially since the mid-2000s. These unofficial patterns echo pre-war educational paths, where Old-System High School alumni who went to former Imperial Universities.

By reducing its contents and focusing more on student-centered pedagogies, this series of educational reforms aimed to improve the quality of mainstream education, but the reforms did not work out as the government planned. First, these top-down orders did not specify how teachers should adjust pedagogical practice in their classroom beyond the reduction in class time and slightly altered mandatory curriculum. Second, even if the discourse about students suffering

from rigorous academic obligations is widespread, contemporary students do not, in fact, study as much as students of several decades ago. Other than the reducing the content covered by the mandatory education, the public did not have a clear image of better, alternative form of mainstream education. As a result, more and more people lost trust in the Japanese government and mainstream education. But many are not sure what kind of alternative education is the right answer for their kids who have to survive in an uncertain future. Some turn to elite alternative choices such as elite private schools and international schools, and others consider non-elite tracks through alternative schools, such as the schools that were my fieldsites.

Educational Credentials: The Importance of Gakureki for Individuals

Throughout the postwar period, education has been a key mechanism for social mobility into the "mainstream" and middle-class. Post-war education reform was instrumental in changing the structure of Japanese education and abolishing its militaristic moral education, and it gave more educational opportunities for Japanese citizens. However, it also produced another system of competition and class-sorting which was unanticipated by the CIE and the ERC. There is a term, Gakureki-Shakai [学歴社会], which is translated as "an educational credential society." Where you went to school—not your transcript, recommendations, or grades—matters the most for job recruitment. Therefore, the entrance examination to enter high school and, especially, university, is very important. Securing admission to "good" schools is the hardest work a student will do, and it is often harder to get into a school than to graduate from it.

Simply speaking, school name is a prophet of one's future. It is believed that going to a good school guarantees a good life. If you go to a good university, you will be hired by a good company and thus have security for the rest of your life. This might sound too simplistic. But due

to Japanese laws, you are rarely fired by the company once you are hired as a full-time worker (Shinohara 2013). Especially for men, this norm, of going to a good university to secure lifetime employment, was dominant. On the other hand, for women, this model was not very applicable. Instead, according to social norms, women were supposed to marry by a certain age, such as the age of twenty-five, and become a housewife even if they are working as full-time.[33] Although these two models were not always applicable to people of varied class backgrounds, they worked as a mainstream norm for Japanese society until its economy collapsed in 2000s.

To achieve that stable life, secondary education essential. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, in Japan, secondary education differs from primary education in many ways. Primary education focuses on nurturing creativity and a sense of cooperation through student-centered pedagogy (Lewis 1994). Although there are some regional variations, at this point, pedagogy is rather harmonious, not strict. The abrupt transition takes place upon entering secondary school. First, pedagogy shifts to be more teacher-centered and is accompanied by strict rules like dress codes and certain behavioral norms (Fukuzawa 1994, Cave 2016). Almost all schools require uniforms, and the curriculum becomes more intense. As a result, students feel more stressed; many problems, such as bullying, delinquency, and refusing to go to school, occur most frequently at this stage (Yoneyama 1999).

At high school, the students become more conscious about their future. Rohlen argues that contrary to many Americans' expectations, Japanese high schools do not offer total equalities for teaching and learning opportunities to all students. He indicates that in elementary school and middle school, Japan achieved "social equality," but in high school, the sorting of students begins. Since almost all Japanese students go to high school, holding only a high school

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[33] For more about the Japanese women working at a company, see Ogasawara (1998).

degree is not very valued in the society. The type of high school one attends and, even more importantly, the name of university one attends are the most important factors on the job market. At the same time, high school rankings accord with rates of delinquency—the lower-ranked schools have more frequency of students' behavioral problems (Rohlen 1983, 308). Some students take an entrance examination to go to private junior high schools, especially in big cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, but many students first encounter school entrance examinations when applying to high schools.

The pressure to take college entrance examinations is much greater than that of high school. Aside from students who go to university-affiliated high schools [大学附属校],34 students must take an entrance examination to enter universities. The system of entrance examination is very complicated but, generally, private universities require two to three subject tests depending on one's major (in many cases, English is mandatory), and national and public universities require two tests, the National Center Test for University Admissions [センター試験] and an individual test arranged by each university.

At the same time, college entrance examinations became less intense compared to old days. The diversification of college admission options relativized the importance of paper tests. Nowadays, due to a decreasing number of students, many private universities and some national universities offer various options for admission other than taking tests. For example, they take recommendations of students [推薦制度 shiteiko suisen seido] from specific high schools, or they conduct an Admission Office Examination [A.O. 入試], which usually requires candidates to submit essays and interviews. These simplified methods of admission allow high school

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34 Those schools are usually located in big cities such as in the Tokyo and Osaka areas. Famous university-attached schools include Waseda, Keio, Meiji, Kwansei-Gakuin, Doshisha, and Ritsumeikan.

students to spend less time for studying but produce different pressures on students to perform appropriately at school (which I illustrate in chapter 3). Students must decide their major when they enter the university, and, compared to the United States, it is hard to change one's major. Therefore, during junior high school and high school, students and teachers often discuss shinro [進路], which translates to "direction." In many cases, shinro means to deciding which university students aim to enter or if they would like to look for jobs.

Curriculum-wise, foreign language education—which is almost equal to teaching English, has not been successful. Even though Japanese secondary school is intense and rigorous, there are some deficiencies. For example, foreign language education, which means English education in many cases, is described as a "disaster" (Cave 2014). This is because English language pedagogies just focus on memorizing grammar and vocabulary, and students do not learn practical uses of English, such as listening and speaking. Furthermore, teacher-centered pedagogy has been criticized for more than half of a century. Recently, partly because of the pressures of globalization, the Japanese government tried to shift to more student-centered pedagogies under the name of "active learning" [アクティブ・ラーニング]. The Ministry of Education in Japan defines active learning as a student-centered pedagogy that includes group discussion, debate, group work, and other research-oriented activities. The government wants to see "how students use their knowledge to relate to society and the world and live better lives [知っていることを使ってどのように社会・世界と関わり、よりよい人生を送るか]." Although actual practices in classrooms are yet to be in-progress, the government tries to shift the mainstream pedagogy to more student-centered learning.

6-3-3-α-4: The Rise and Fall of Shadow Education

Japanese education, more specifically, its rigorous curriculum, has always been supported

by the existence of cram schools. There are several kinds of cram schools, catering to students'

different needs: some are for advanced students who aim for admission to prestigious high

schools and colleges, and others serve students who struggle to catch up with their school

curriculum. Basically, there are two kinds of cram school: *juku* and *yobiko*. Juku is mainly for

elementary school and junior high school students, and yobiko is for high school students

preparing for the college entrance examination, but sometimes they overlap. In English-language

scholarship, Roesgaard's (2006) work is almost the only book which focuses exclusively on

cram schools. In Japanese scholarship, several works examine cram schools' history (Kobubo

2004), how they affect mainstream education (Mizowaki 2019), and their shifting meanings in

society (Iwase 2006). Students go to juku after school, spending a few hours to take classes.

Basically, there are two categories of juku. Some are for those who aim for elite schools [進学

塾]. For students who go to this category of juku, classes at school are too easy. The other

category is for those who have difficulties in catching up classes at school [補習塾]. Whether

students are good or struggling, going to *juku* is a regular option for families especially in urban

area.[35]

The culture of private education has its origins in the Edo period (1603-1867), but juku

started to receive media attention especially from the 1960s and on. Cram school education was

compared as a "Flower in a shadow [日陰の花]"—which merely supports mainstream education

at school.[36] In 1970s, the franchise business model made juku accessible to many students, but it

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[35] In 2007, 81 percent of 9th-grade students utilized *juku* system (MEXT 2008).
[36] During my fieldwork, I interviewed two cram school teachers (in addition to 55 interviews for three schools) who work for the famous cram school for high school entrance examination. Although they did not use this term of

also was critiqued for making students study too intensely (Iwase 2006). In Tokyo and Osaka, it was almost impossible to secure admission to highly-ranked national and private junior high schools and high schools without attending a famous cram school. A mainstream educational path in the greater Tokyo area involved going to a cram school from 4th to 5th grade, entering 6-year a private (and a few national) secondary school [中高一貫校], and attending to a top university. For example, from 1978 until 2018, no public high schools in Tokyo ranked among the top 10 high schools for sending students to the University of Tokyo (Campus Navi Network 2020). To enter the top 10 high schools (which usually do not accept many students entering at the high school level), students must attend cram school in elementary school. But since the late 1990s, with the implementation of yutori education, the MEXT began re-evaluating the role of cram schools, shifting to using cram schools as partners for mainstream education (Iwase 2006, 128). The MEXT did this by inviting cram school teachers to serve on school committees and by spending school budgets to invite cram school teachers to lead after-school study.37

Yobiko is the more specialized version of juku for college entrance examinations. Since the postwar period, Japan has had a long history of ronin [浪人], which refers to those who are spending an extra year or more to prepare to enter college.38 For example, at the University of Tokyo, since 1996, about 30-35 percent of incoming students spent an extra year or more after graduating from high school. Before that, the rate was even higher in other universities, especially Former Imperial Universities [旧帝大]. A magazine article published in 1955 reported

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"flower in a shadow," they admitted that they are "very different from mainstream school teachers" regarding their position in the society.

37 One of the public schools I visited during my preliminary research was employing this style of teaching.

38 This is different from the concept of the "gap year" in the United States, as *ronin* are supposed to devote themselves to studying for the whole year. The term *ronin* comes from the term referring to a warrior who does not have a castle (or a master) to serve. In medieval Japan, when warriors were executed or lost in war, his subordinates lost their jobs: those men were called *ronin*.

that more than 50-60 precents of incoming students at the prestigious national universities experienced being ronin (figure 10). According to the article, about 400,000 students took the college entrance examination, but universities could accept only 11,000 students (note that the number of applicants increased every year in the 1950s). The article describes yobiko as "α (*alfa*) university [アルファ大学], and laments that yobiko have become too common and thus are part of the 6-3-3- α-4 system [六・三・三・アルファ、四と、一つの厳然たる学校制度にまでのし上がつている]. Yobiko became a semi-official mainstream education component.

学生街、東京神田の昨今、〝昭和維新〟という危つかしい言葉が流行している。復古主義をオウ歌しているのではない。ハンランするクホクしているのが豫備校。通稱、「アルファ大學」と呼ぶ。六・三・

三％。浪人とはいまや進學コースに一度はくぐらねばならぬ關門となつているようだ。浪人激增でホ

三・四の新教育制度の中へ割込み、六・三・三・アルファ、四と、一つの厳然たる學校制度にまでのし上つてきているからだ。

アルファ大學といえども一流となれば、講師陣には有名な大學教授クラスをずらりと並べている。この講師、いざ鎌倉の入學試驗のさいはそれぞれ大學側の入試委員にも早變りする面々。講義も何大學部何學科の試驗問題傾向のタネ明しもするキワどさがある。いわば〝實戰〟に當つて大いに役立つ指導だ。豫備校當局もこの點を大いにネラウ。浪人一人を自校に入れれば、翌年その母校から十數人の申込みがあり、商賣繁昌のカギでもある。したがつて、花形豫備校はこれまた大學入試以上の競爭率である。

浪人の悲哀を諷刺しているのだ。浪人仲間には「ストレートはあわて者、浪人二年は怠け者、浪人一年が常人だ」という言葉もできている。ことほど左様に最近の大學入試は苛烈そのもの、高校三年からストップなしで大學へ飛び込むのが難しくなつている。

大學受驗者の數は昭和二十七年二十七萬、二十八年三十一萬、二十九年三十五萬、今年は四十萬近くにハネ上つた。しかし、受入れ側の大學（國立、私立）の定員は約十一萬で、ほとんどふえない。人が溢れ、その日から浪人の苦しみを味わされるわけである。事實、二十九年度一流大學への入學者一覽をみると、ストレート、つまり浪人生活をしないものに比べ、浪人組が壓倒的に多い。一橋大の六十七％を筆頭に、以下東大六十一％東京工大五十八％京大五十

（135）

Figure 3 An article from Bungei Shunju, published in June, 1955.

However, in contemporary Japan, *yobiko* is a shrinking industry. First, the number of students is decreasing due to Japan's low birth-rates. In 1966, the cohort of 18 years old totaled

2,400,000, and it dropped to 1,180,000 in 2014 (MEXT 2018). The rate of students who go to

college increased about five percent from 2007 to 2017 (52.5 percent), and it became easier to

enter college. Second, the culture has shifted. More and more students prefer to enter college

without gap years. Rather than spending one or two extra years to ensure their entrance to better-

ranked colleges, students prefer enrolling anywhere they can secure admission. Colleges

increasingly use a "recommendation system [推薦制度]"—in this system, each high school can

send a certain number of students to specific colleges every year. If you want to enter college via

this recommendation system, you need to improve your GPA, do some extracurricular activities,

or do something to prove your ability other than studying for the exams. The decreasing quantity

of applicants and the diversification of routes to secure college admission means that students

increasingly choose not to become ronin.

Figure 4 The typical class scenery in yobiko (Yoyogi Seminar 2015)

One symbolic incident in the cram school industry occurred when Yoyogi Seminar [代々

木ゼミナール], one of the biggest yobiko groups, reduced the number of its campuses from 27

to 7 in 2015 (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 2014). I visited the Yoyogi area in Tokyo during my fieldwork, and it looked totally different from 2002, when I myself was ronin. Back then, when you got off JR Yamanote-Line at Yoyogi station, you see a street full of Yoyogi Seminar buildings, and many of the people on the street were apparently ronin students. But now you do not see many ronin-like crowds, and most of former Yoyogi Seminar classrooms were turned into other companies' offices. The loss of ronin transformed Yoyogi from a student town to an ordinary office area. In the near future, the experience of ronin and culture of ronin would be narrated as history, not as an ongoing experience.

A new development in cram schools is that they now use many recorded lectures. By doing this, students can take famous lecturers' classes on demand, and the school can reduce the cost of lecturers. C High School uses videos made by those cram school lectures. This also means that cram schools do not need as many teachers as before.

Conclusion

This chapter surveyed the process of post-war education reform and its influence on Japanese society with a specific focus on secondary education. Although Japan experienced the U.S. occupation and conducted education reform during those seven years, it did not just reproduce the U.S. education system. Instead, this hybrid product of American intervention and Japanese agency retained its Confucian mindset. The establishment of the 6-3-3-4 system—six years of elementary school, three years each of junior high school and high school, and 4 years of tertiary education—offered more opportunities for education to a broader set of Japanese citizens, especially compared to the pre-war period. The popularization of secondary education

has been strongly connected with economic development since the Meiji era, when Japanese modernization began.

The several attempts to improve Japanese mainstream education, mainly motivated by the criticism from the public, have not always resulted in how the government expected. The problems of Japanese education have been analyzed by many scholars. While American educations system was imagined as an ideal model that could be achieved through education reform in Japan, the democratic ideal desired during the American occupation has not taken significant root in the culture of Japanese high schools (Rohlen 1983, 317). For example, interpersonal relationships are still rooted in Confucian mindsets, and legacies of the pre-war elite system, represented by Old-System School and Former Imperial Universities, persist in the postwar education system today. Another problem, which is applicable to the education itself, its that always people all agree with the value of "good education." But they do not share the common goals of that good education (Biesta 2011). This explains why several education reforms in Japan went astray.

The rigorous of mainstream education and entrance examinations were paired with the huge industry of shadow education. Cram schools have played important roles in supporting mainstream education. They have been critiqued for driving students to study too much. As they were institutionalized and incorporated into the educational system, the Japanese government tried to take advantage of their skills to help mainstream education. But cramming-oriented study for college was different from what the U.S. occupational force and Japanese committee members imagined during the period of upheaval and confusion immediately after the war.

If people do not know the concrete procedure to change the pedagogy which they were already familiar with, they end up reproducing what they already know. The postwar education

system in Japan observed meritocratic examination structure. As Rohlen (1983) indicates, post-war education reform gave Japanese education more equality of opportunity but not a democratic mindset. Extending the period of learning from six to nine years helped increase the productivity of its citizens and their test scores on international standardized tests; however, pedagogy and classroom culture did not change drastically. This is endorsed by Kariya's (2002) finding that reducing class hours does not increase students' understanding of the content if teachers do not change how they teach. The educational reform series implemented since the 1960s have not changed Japanese education drastically. The government tried to change the direction of education from a cramming-oriented, stressful student life by reducing the number of school days and class hours, as well as advocating for new values such as the new learning ability [新学力] or survival skills [生きる力]. However, without clear instructions to teachers about how to change pedagogy, this set of reforms ended up lowering academic performance, especially since the 1990s. With Japan receiving the lowest TOEFL scores in Asia (equal to Afghanistan) and seemingly failing to react to the "diversity within" (Tsuneyoshi 2011), the impact of the 2020 education reform is yet to be seen.

This chapter concludes that post-war education reform did not change Japanese education drastically. Although it produced a hybridized Japanese education structure that differs from the pre-war system, the pedagogy and general behavioral norms at school did not change enough to create a truly new type of education in Japan. Simultaneously, people do not know what the ideal education is even though many people are talking about better education. Those who refuse to go through this education system turn to alternative education, especially at the stage of secondary education, when pedagogy suddenly changes to be strict. Students with negative experiences in mainstream schools and parents who are distrustful of Japanese education seek alternative

options for better learning experiences and gaining survival skills after graduation that,

ironically, sometimes overlap with government education slogans.

Chapter 3 **Everyday Lives at Three Alternative Schools**

Three Schools, Three Research Goals

This chapter overviews the figure of three schools where I conducted my fieldwork. I introduce each school's basic information, such as their educational policies, pedagogical goals, demographic observation, and how alternative they aimed to be on its foundation. I explain how I encountered these schools and how I conducted my participant observation in each school. While I asked different research questions for each school, I found that all schools place importance on communication, participation, and being a safe space. The variations of these school represent the diversity of alternative education in Japan, and the fact that people do not come to the conclusion of one single figure of the best education.

1) Forest of Freedom School

Figure 5 Entrance of the Forest of Freedom School

During this project, I observed some ups and downs at each school that are caused both by micro and macro-factors. In recent years, the Forest of Freedom School had been once losing popularity, but they secured an increasing number of students by 2019 when I was conducting my fieldwork. At its foundation, the Forest of Freedom School generated huge media attention and many newspapers and educational magazines wrote about the school's particularly famous alumni. However, my preliminary visits in 2015 and 2016 made clear the school was at a bit of a loss in terms of its direction. Due to the decline of student performance and enrollment numbers, teachers shared a sense of disappointment and anxiety for the future of school. At that time, many teachers told me that they worried about the lower quality of recent students compared to, say, 10 to 20 years ago when students had a clearer sense of refusing mainstream education. However, when I returned to do my fulltime fieldwork in 2019, teachers seem to be more optimistic and there were many new faces. Interestingly, I felt indifference and a tiny bit of hostility from teachers this time. Maybe it is partly because the vice president who arranged my previous visit there quit or because teachers do not want researchers anymore. Many of them with whom I talked for a long time did not remember me, which puzzled me a bit.

This school show what being alternative means in specific social contexts. The teachers also worry that after thirty years, their pedagogy is no longer cutting-edge. Long before starting this project, I knew about this school from reading an educational magazine in the public library in Tokyo in the mid-1990s. The magazine, titled ひと *Hito* (translated as human, person, or people), includes many voices from parents and those who are related to the educational industries.[39] The magazine was critical about mainstream schools in Japan, highlighting their test-oriented pedagogy, anti-humanistic attitude toward students, bullying, and violence from

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[39] I will explain how I came to find this magazine later in this chapter.

teachers and among students [校内暴力]. The magazine sometimes had articles about the Forest of Freedom School, written by current teachers, former teachers, students, and parents. When I read those articles for the first time, I was surprised that there was a school without any tests or any rules on students. Later on, I learned that the magazine's editorial board included the founder of school, Hiraku Tôyama [遠山啓], who was a mathematician and educational researcher, when the magazine was launched in 1973. As I had no personal connections with the school, mentioning this background opened up some conversations with teachers. As the magazine ceased publication in 2000, some younger teachers told me that they never read it. This magazine *Hito* was useful to know parents' perspectives and what are the general interest toward education, especially alternative education movements in the 1970s –2000s.

At the Forest of Freedom School, I tried to analyze how students and teachers are dealing with "freedom"—freedom to skip classes, behave as they like, and express what they want to do. I was curious about what kind of unspoken rules and orders are formed, and what kind of abilities were valued in this educational setting because that affected the image of ideal student, and how people think about what might be the best educational practices. Through the fieldwork, I realized that term freedom entices conversations among those who relate to this school. Similar to "good education," people admit the value of freedom, but the definition of freedom and what kind of freedom is ideal, remain elusive. But talking about freedom facilitates interpersonal interactions, and nurtures reflexivity.

One of the biggest challenges to conduct ethnographic research in this school was its location. Located in Han-no, Saitama, the school is deep in the mountains. This geographical restriction affected school life; students who tried to do activities outside school (such as cram school) had to leave the school right after classes, and did not have much time to enjoy

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extracurricular activities. Average time for commuting seemed to be around 90 minutes. It took me two hours and half to commute there from where I lived, and there was not a single rental property nearby. When I went to school at an odd time, such as a bit later in the morning, there are no school buses, and it added an extra thirty minutes to use the public bus and walk from the bus stop.

In some cases, the location tests students' and parents' devotion to coming to school. Although the school has some dormitories, it was far from enough accommodation for the entire student body. Some parents decided to move to the neighborhood area of this school for their children. Also, the Wi-Fi connection was very weak. Sometimes, students jokingly called the school as "Jail in Hanno" [飯能の監獄]. Compared to those at the other two schools, students here did not seem to be interested in social media such as Instagram, partly because of the bad internet connection at school made it very hard to log on.

Curriculum wise, the school designs what to teach somewhat rigorously. Contrary to what people assume under the name of "freedom," curriculum at this school is controlled by team-teaching. What is taught in each semester is well planned in advance, and there are not many variations in content by individual teachers. For about four months, I observed classes in World History, English, Physical Education, Life Science [人間生活科] and Music. I was assigned to the two homeroom classes of the second year high school, but I did not have a particular room or seat while being at school. I ended up staying in English teachers' room— each subject has its own room called "research room" [研究室] or used the random room. Aside from regular classes, I attended their school festival, music festival, and special classes open for public. There is an event called "Public Education Research Workshop" [公開研究会] where visitors can observe various classes and student-led discussions at this school. They invite

university professors, alumni, and others related to the school as a discussant or to talk about what they are doing after graduation. I had an opportunity to attend parents' meetings [保護者会] and meet some mothers and fathers. Analyzing this school was valuable to understand the general history of alternative education movement in Japan, and how the meaning of "alternative" shifts over time.

2) Korea International School

Figure 6 Posters on the wall at KIS.
The title says "The goal of our student figure

Korea International School in Osaka, Japan was founded in 2006 to challenge both

English-centric international schools in Japan and schools designed for ethnic Korean [在日]

students. The school attempts to produce trans-border citizens [越境人 *ekkyôjin*] by refusing to

present any national identity and making English, Japanese, and Korean all mandatory

languages. In this school, I investigated how ethnic minorities, such as ethnic Koreans in Japan,

are using their experiences and perspectives to seek educational opportunities that mainstream

schools do not offer. But I tried not to focus only on their ethnic identities. In English, there is

one prominent book on Koreans in Japan (Ryang 1992) but in Japanese, there are several works

about Korean schools (e.g. Song 2016, Yamamoto 2014, Cho 2013,) and Korean youth in Japan

(Yun 2016, Harajiri 1988, Fukuoka and Kim 1997). My goal is not to present another analysis of

Korean schools in Japan. Rather, I discuss this school within the frame of Japanese alternative

education. Although students are mainly part or full Korean, the school does not seek to nurture

identity of North/South Korean expats in Japan. I focus on how individuals deal with, or make

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use of being minority to create the better education.[40] I came to know this school from a newspaper article in 2014, and started to visit every summer since.

At KIS, I was able to participate more compared to the Forest of Freedom School where I was never officially part of the institution. The size of school was small (about 80 students when I was there) and everyone knew each other's names. In the beginning, I got a seat in teachers' room and went to the classes I was interested in. I took a Korean class as a learner together with students. At the same time, I took some roles of interpreter as there were some English teachers who could not speak Japanese. When I was conducting my fieldwork, almost no one, including teachers, could speak both Japanese and English fluently. Some were completely bilingual in Japanese and Korean. They used to have some trilingual teachers, but no longer.

My position at this school shifted over time. After a month, I started to substitute in some classes of an English teacher who suddenly quit in the middle of the semester. I also had an opportunity to eat dinner at the dormitory and took a Chinese language class taught by the dormitory manager together with other students every week. After school, I often played table tennis with students and sometimes ate out together. I became close to two sisters and their parents who moved back to Japan after spending almost two decades in the U.S. Additionally, I could interview and interact with several alumni based in Osaka and Tokyo.

As I am not ethnic Korean, some were curious about why I am interested in this school. Although the dominant language of interactions were Japanese but they still use some Korean

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[40] One remarkable point of this school is they refuse to present any nation-based identity. In Japanese, the name of school is spelled out as "*koria*" in Katakana (コリア) and "코리아" in Hangul, almost as if they are spelling the English word "Korea" in Japanese script. This is a very unusual way to say or spell the term, which is usually *kankoku* (South Korea) or *kitachosen* (North Korea). Similarly, their Korean language classes are written as コリア語 (Korean language), not as 韓国語 or 朝鮮語. The Katakana sound コリア rejects the dichotomy of North/South Korean nationality that is otherwise immediate in Japanese terminology. Instead, it poses Korea as a singular ethnicity in the Japanese society.

words in the conversation, and some teachers who do not speak Korean at all, confessed to me that they sometimes feel a bit alienated because of their linguistic incapability. Observing many everyday dramas, being in this school enabled me to think about the conflicts among those who have different opinions about their ideal of education, as well as the difficulty of finding alternative educational philosophies related to ethnic identity. Compared to the Forest of Freedom School, KIS was new and still in the process of figuring out what they are, and in what direction they should navigated themselves. But between the three school, I could establish strongest connections with students, parents, and teachers at KIS. This could have been because of the school size, my Korean proficiency, my minority identity, and / or because I became a part-time teacher during the time of my fieldwork.

3) *C High School*

The third school, C High School challenges the concept of physical schooling itself by being an online high school. The school was begun in 2016 by two private companies—a publishing company and one in information technology. Although this is categorized as an correspondence high school [通信制高等学校] under the Japanese law, they have different school buildings in several locations in Japan. In one of their school buildings within greater Tokyo, I worked as a teaching assistant to take care of students, proctor some classes, and lead discussion groups. Even before the pandemic of COVID-19, this school gained popularities and had been featured by media often.

My focus at this school was how technology can affect the learning experiences and create (or fail to create) desirable skills, especially how internet—a new learning platform helps students realize abilities which might not have been recognized in traditional school settings. In

this school, there are not any subject classes, such as math, Japanese, or science that students

take at the same time. They learn through watching recorded lectures by cram school teachers.

Teachers at C High School, on the other hand, do not teach any subjects (except some

specialized ones such as Physical Education). Instead, they coach students regarding what they

want to do in the future and how to set up a plan and schedule to achieve their goals. They also

offer a course to teach programming, which was originally designed for helping students with

extreme social anxiety who refuse to leave their bedrooms and shut down any human interactions

[引きこもり *hikikomori*].[41] Although there are not any statistics to endorse this, one could guess

that not a few former school refusers will also be *hikikomori* after they become adults (Morisaki

2012, Saito 2003).

At this school, I was officially a workforce. Being hired as a teaching assistant gave me

opportunities to be part of the organization and being evaluated as their workforce. As this is a

newly built school, many of teachers and staff were in their twenties, and teaching assistants are

mostly undergraduate students with a few MA students. Until I disclosed my age, they thought I

was not that different from their age which somehow helped me blend in. Although this school is

featured in several internet articles and established newspapers, I also had an opportunity to

attend the closed gathering where one of the executive board members shared more candid

thoughts and opinions on visions and strategies for the school.

One specific cultural trait at school is how people perceive this place as a company, not

school. Teachers sometimes referred to the school as a company and, as would be the case in a

start-up company, I had a first-hand experiences of how new rules and systems are created on a

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[41] Although this project does not exclusively discuss how students are engaging with programming, setting up the programming course was one of the core missions of C High School (for more about Japanese education reforms and programming, see chapter 6).

daily basis. Although they were not at school, teaching assistants needed to check daily logs on communication apps (such as Slack) so that they could catch up when they work next time. This hybrid program of learning happened to be a pioneer of large-scale online education in Japan even before COVID-19. Their educational philosophy to pursue efficiency—trying to get the best results by minimum time and effort—was endorsed by the capitalistic mindset of the start-up company. That in turns, made its employees suffer. Interestingly, however, they devote significant amount of energy for managing interpersonal communication. Technology did not substitute for the importance of human interactions in learning.

Preliminary Research: The Selection Process of Target Schools

The Japanese alternative education is mainly private. My three target schools were chosen based on how they represent being alternative to the mainstream education in different ways, and all of my target schools are private schools. Based on my preliminary research, which I conducted in summers through 2014 to 2018, I found that private alternative secondary schools are a productive lens through which to analyze responses to mainstream educational norms, and how alternative schools problematize those norms for three reasons. First, parents, students, and educators in these schools have refused (or were somewhat forced to turn away from) mainstream education, especially public schools with more standardized structures of pedagogy and evaluation. Secondly, private schools are more flexible in tailoring their curricula than public schools.[42] Third, in Japan, tracking and social class sorting become the most prominent in the

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[42] Although Japanese education is still centrally controlled by the national government (compared to the U.S., for example), private schools have more flexibility to tailor their curriculum than public schools. I noticed that my target schools receive textbooks for free but rarely used them. One teacher described that as a "ritual"–every year, the government sends hundreds of textbooks and most of them are not actually used in the classroom.

stage of secondary education, not during primary or tertiary education. For instance, compared to the U.S. where students can choose their career in professional school (e.g. law school or medical school), Japanese students need to decide their majors when they apply to college. Therefore, choosing a secondary education is particularly important and influential for one's future.

Private alternative secondary schools are productive locations from which to analyze education and social change in contemporary Japan. Although many private high schools do not differ significantly from public counterparts, some show more deviation regarding the school curriculum and culture such as their educational philosophy, school events, and curriculum. These aspects embody the clear sense of resistance to dominant social norms, formed by the school's founders. For example, there is at least one book for each of my target schools about their visions, education policies, and histories, especially focusing on its founder and written by its founder (Endo 1986, 1995, Wakisaka 2015).

Private schools in Japan are diverse depending on their locations and missions. In countryside Japan, private high schools are sometimes for students who could not secure the admission to public high school.[43] But in big cities, many private high schools are harder to get into, and some are prestigious and popular because of their history, success in placing graduates at prestigious universitites [大学合格実績], pedagogies, and curriculum. In other words, choosing private school actively itself is a phenomenon in the big cities such as in Tokyo and Osaka. Some private schools which are described as unique are actually prestigious elite schools. Private schools which send many alumni to top-notch universities such as Tokyo, Waseda, Keio,

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[43] Generally in more rural areas, public education (and public sectors institutions such as prefectural office) tend to be more prestigious than private ones, and people avoid paying expensive tuition at private schools.

or Kyoto are, very roughly speaking, elite schools such as Old System High School,[44] about which I discuss more in chapter 1. These schools, in broad perspective, are not actively challenging the dominant social norms because they still follow the normative values of being competitive to send students to good universities as much as possible. Even if school cultures and curricula are described as unique and odd in public discourses such as in educational magazines and newspapers, by my definition, they are not actively challenging the mainstream educational norms in Japan and therefore not alternative. Instead, I focus on schools famous for their unique pedagogy which sometimes actively challenge the mainstream norms of education—non-elite schools which could attract wide range of students with diverse backgrounds.

Private schools are more responsive to social changes than public ones. It is mainly because, for the school to survive, they must be chosen by their potential customers (parents and students). For all my three target schools, finances are an important measure of if they are doing well or not. The schools were always keenly focused on what society needs, how the school could promote itself, and how they should set their policy and strengths in response to social trends and needs. Of course, public schools could change when the government changes educational laws and orders, especially by several education reforms were conducted since 1960. But that process is much slower and individual private schools can change more quickly on their own.

Therefore, public schools were excluded from my in-depth fieldwork due to the fact that they cannot be drastically alternative. There are some famous public schools that have

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[44] In chapter 1, I introduce the Old System High School [旧制高校] which existed before Wolrd War II. Basically, if a student entered the 6th year of high school after finishing up 5 years of elementary school, they were almost guaranteed to proceed to the Imperial Universties.

reputations of being unique and alternative such as the ones on isolated islands or deep in the mountains. Through my preliminary fieldwork, I discovered that it was a school's immediate environment, rather than pedagogy and curriculum, that made some public high schools famous. When I visited several famous public high schools, I found that some schools with reputations for doing unique education have a few charismatic teachers who happened to be deployed there by the local government. When I spoke with them, at after-school drinking sessions and other moments, these teachers complained to me that other teachers in those schools are not motivated by education at all. This is partly because in Japan, if you teach at schools in inconvenient locations such as in islands or small villages, you receive additional compensation [僻地手当] from the prefectural government. One of the teachers I became close to told me that some of the teachers are in those unique schools only there for this extra salary and avoiding any additional service work. After visiting some famous "unique" public high schools, I decided to exclude them from this project.

Through my preliminary research, I realized that just surrounding environments cannot make public schools drastically alternative. Although miscellaneous factors such as a charismatic teacher or the surrounding environment could affect pedagogy, human interactions, and the general school culture to some degree, those were transient factors. To my eyes, the famous "unique" public schools were not intentionally working to be subversive toward mainstream education itself. Merely working at a public high school did not make teachers try challenging mainstream curriculum and pedagogy. Instead, those teachers do something extra in addition to their regular curriculum to make the schools distinct among public schools.

All public schools are required to rigorously observe the mandatory curriculum set by the government, there are not much room to something instead of it. A student in one of those

"unique" high schools told me that students are just tired of doing extra project studies. He said that 95 percent of what they do every day is the same as other public high schools in that prefecture. Looking at their weekly timetable, I could see that he is correct, as they spent only two hours per week for project studies and the rest was the same as the general public school, following the rules set by the government.

Finally in public schools, it is hard to maintain the certain unique features that are created by some charismatic teachers. Generally, teachers are rotated throughout the assigned districts because they are hired by the prefectural government.[45] In public schools, teachers are rotated in two to five years, resulting in a school culture constantly being in flux.

Based on this exploration of possible schools, I narrowed down my research focus to three schools for my main analysis in this dissertation. In the next section, I will explain how I came to know these schools. The process of me coming to know these schools also suggests how they market themselves, and how parents and students come to know, and choose, these schools.

<p style="text-align:center">Encounters with My Target Schools</p>

My encounter with the Forest of Freedom School was coincidental and personal. I knew the Forest of Freedom school since I was in 5th or 6th grade at the local public library. Back then, I was reading many education-related magazines and books because I did not like going to school that I found to be very authoritative, with classes that were not intellectually stimulating. Some classes were too easy for me and I was reading books without listening to classes, behavior that teachers frequently penalized me for. Then, I found a magazine named *Hito* [ひと] which

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[45] Public school teachers in Japan apply for positions in each prefecture. Therefore, once they are hired in a prefecture, they are rotated within that prefecture until their retirement.

discusses problems of mainstream education in Japan, and various social issues such as Japan's war responsibility in Asia, and sexuality.[46] One time, the magazine had a column about the Forest of Freedom School to introduce its educational style and voices of parents, teachers, and alumni. I was impressed how unique they were, but thought that I would never go to these kinds of "off-success track" school because I was very ambitious and wanted to go to the University of Tokyo. I felt that going to this kind of strange school would mean going off the track to be successful and instead be a path to becoming a loser. Since that time until I started my research, I had not though about this school that much.

Figure 7: Magazine Hito, the volume of December 1993.

This volume includes many voices from the Forest of Freedom School teachers, students, alumni, and parents.

The magazine *Hito* was published by Taro Jiro Company which was established in 1973 by Hiraku Toyama, a famous math educator and who founded the Forest of Freedom School. It was restructured to Taro Jiro Editas in 2003. According to their website, the company specializes

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[46] They also had monologue and interviews of those who are in the adult video industry.

in education, society, and family as well as "Chinese characters [漢字]," "Kana letters [かな文字]," and "Math" teaching materials. The first two possibly relates to the Seikatsu tsuzurikata movements which started in early 20th century and revived after the World War II.[47]

Twenty years passed, and in 2015, I was switching my dissertation topic from minorities and migration to focus on minorities and education. I decided to work on alternative education in Japan to analyze minorities in education in Japan for my dissertation project. When I thought about unique, non-mainstream schools, this school came up to my mind as it was famous among those who were interested in education, and coincidently, I met an alumnus of the Forest of Freedom School in Toronto who now teaches at the famous private university in Canada. He told me about his experiences there and kindly introduced me to other alums. In 2016, while conducting some preliminary research, I was able to interview a politician who graduated from this school. These connections with alumni, who were very enthusiastic to talk about the education they had, made me decide to include this school in my research.

In 2016, as part of my preliminary research, I emailed the school and stayed there for a week to observe classes, and talked with many teachers individually. Back then, the school was suffering from a shrinking number of students and staff were very willing to share their thoughts on education and society. In June 2016, the schools held an official recruitment session [説明会] at school, and my fieldnotes make clear that they did not talk that much about school refusers even if a majority of the Forest of Freedom School students experienced before coming here. Instead, in the presentations, staff emphasized their focus on student-centered pedagogy and how that type of learning will guide students to choose what they want to do after graduation. They

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[47] The Seikatsu tsuzurikata movement (literally: spelling daily life) lets students write how they feel and think about what they encountered in their daily life with a goal of training them to recognize and analyze ongoing reality with others. But there are several definitions and understanding to this movements (Nakauchi 1970).

talked about some examples of students' activities and one of them was about a boy in the

dormitory who bought an expensive bike and rode 60 miles (from Hanno to Hiratsuka, which is

about 100 km) over one weekend.

In general, the school is open to outsiders. In July 2018, I contacted the school again via

email to ask if I could conduct my dissertation research and the new vice-principal replied to me.

I visited the school and discussed my plans. I was assigned to two classes in second-year high

school because the third-year high students and teachers are busy with their preparation for the

next step (college or figuring out what they do after graduation). Those homeroom teachers were

young (23 and 32 years old) and the vice president said they could learn from me. I told the vice

principal that I visited the school in 2016 and observed his class (and chatted with him

afterwards), but he did not remember that. Actually no one remembered me even if I had chatted

with some of them for more than an hour two years before. They told me that there are many

researchers or visitors coming to school so they cannot remember every person. I started coming

to school in September 2019 and attended their school festival in November, music festival in

December (the most important event), and one parents' meeting with one homeroom teacher.

(The other homeroom teacher did not hold the event that semester. It is rather unusual but

teachers at this school could decide when to hold such meetings.) Honestly speaking, being at

this school was challenging. I always felt that I was not that welcomed, and was at a loss because

I was not assigned any room, space, or roles at school. I had to talk to teachers one by one to let

me attend their classes, and I was prohibited to attend some of the class gatherings.

While interpersonal relationships at school were sometimes challenging, I had rich

textual data published about this school such as the magazine articles of *Hito* and the seasonal

magazines published by this school. Moreover, I met a professor at Osaka who graduated from

this school while I was conducting fieldwork at KIS. We visited the school's music festival together in November and he loaned me a booklet about teachers (A Who's Who) made by parents about 30 years ago. Basically, for me it was much easier to interact with alumni rather than current students and teachers; that was totally opposite at KIS.

Figure 8: Entrance of Korea International School

I learned of KIS from an online article in a Japanese newspaper. In summer 2015, I found an article about this school introducing its new direction of Korean education in Japan. While I had been interested in Korean schools in Japan, there was already some research on them in Japanese, and I thought that not being ethnic Korean would inhibit my access to those schools (which turned out to be true during my fieldwork).[48] What I found intriguing about this school is it tried to nurture the new abilities to transcend one's ethnicity, national identity, and citizenship.

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[48] I tried to make a visit to Korean schools in Osaka and Kyoto while I was there, but was not successful. Given the long history of anti-Korean racism and violence – which has often been directed specifically at Korean schools and their students – in makes sense that these schools are particularly protective of who they allow to visit.

To think about those issues, they focus on the experiences of Korean Japanese in Japan, a minority group that makes up about 0.5 percent of the total population in Japan (about 25 percent of the foreign residents in Japan).[49] I emailed the school asking if I could make a visit, and two weeks later, the vice-principal (now principal) replied to giving me permission. In June 2016, I made my first visit to KIS, met the principal and vice-principal, observed classes, and talked with 10 teachers over two days. In 2017, I went to their school festival in July. In 2018-2019, I corresponded with the current principal for permission to stay in school and started living in Osaka from April 2019 until the end of July.

The school was accommodating to my participation. I was allowed to sit at the desk in the teacher's room and take Korean classes together with other students (JH1-HS2), and I asked each teacher if I could attend their classes. After a month, I started to teach English after one of the teachers from the UK suddenly quit. There were a few teachers who were apparently cautious about interacting with me, but I ended up being very close to students, some teachers, and school staff. At the end of my stay there, one teacher confessed to me that he was very cautious about me in the beginning, which he ultimately regreted and wished he had talked with me more.

At this school, securing interviews with parents (and some alumni who I tried to reach out through others) was challenging. I did not receive permission to introduce myself to parents' meeting but distributed the flyer to ask for interviews. Only one mother (Park-san) responded to me that she could be interviewed. She has a master's degree in social work so she could understand the work of doing research. She told me that me being full-Japanese and being a researcher affects how Korean parents see me. I also interviewed one alumni's mother (Kawai-

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[49] These are rough estimations because the categories are not totally clear. For instance, there are some people who became naturalized Japanese citizens, or those who married Japanese nationals. Those part-Koreans and naturalized populations are sometimes not counted in statistics. For more information on Korean Japanese in Japan, see the webpage of National Diet Library (2020).

san). Both mothers tried to put me in touch with other mothers but they all declined to be interviewed. Kawai-san, who is Japanese, told me that many parents at KIS are "very exhausted" because they tried to improve school management several times and have not been successful yet.

Over the time, I found that KIS had several financial crises and curriculum development issues which made many students leave over several years. According to the alumni, one time, about 40 percent of the cohort set to graduate in March 2019 quit school within a year. The teacher turnover rate was also high during my stay. After I started my fieldwork in 2019, I noticed that most of the teachers I met in 2016 already left the school, and the school is on the verge of being bankrupt.

One breakthrough came at a school festival in June where I could personally introduce myself to some parents and alumni. One mother, who has two daughters at KIS thanked me because I sometimes helped one of the daughters with school assignments. Those daughters spent their entire life in California until the family "came back" to Japan last year. I became close to this family and visited their house twice. (For instance the picture that is now on my department profile was taken by their father who is a professional photographer.) We also hung out at the Gion Festival in Kyoto, one of the most famous festivals in Japan.

C High School is featured in many Japanese media and gaining more attention but I keep it anonymous in this dissertation.[50] When I was presenting my prelminary research at the Japan Foundation's research workshop in summer 2018, one professor in Japan told me about this school. I then searched on the internet and applied for the Teaching Assistant position. I did a Zoom interview from Ann Arbor with a school manager (almost equal to the principal) at one of

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[50] When I was working at C High School, I had to sign the document that says I cannot leak the secrets of school I learned while working as teaching assistant. This potentially exemplify their corporate mindset.

their branches in Tokyo. He was wondering why I, who could be a better pay in other institutions, wanted to work at their school. I explained that I am doing research on education and interested in knowing what they are doing. Then I received a notification of acceptance and started to work in June 2018 until the end of August.

It was just for two months, but I went to school 4-5 times in a week and worked eight hours every day. I worked with other undergraduate student teaching assistants to do administrative tasks, such as picking phone calls from parents, and supervised some project studies. One time, I receive a comment from other teachers that I am like a full-time staff as my working hours was the highest among all teaching assistants. In addition to my daily work, I attended the all teaching assistants gathering held in July. I also had a chance to talk with those in executive positions from time to time. I was paid ¥1300 (about $11) per hour.

Once, after I ended my job at C High School, I was able to attend an unofficial meeting with a core staff of this school when they spoke to a research group [研究会] of scholars and activists who are interested in alternative education in Japan. One of the founders of C High School is sending his daughter to an alternative school in Kyoto, and he and two executive staff came to Osaka to talk about what they are actually thinking about education and management of the school. Surprising many people in this research group (including myself) , these representatives of C High School made clear that they think of education as a business and expressed a very capitalistic mindset, rather than being serious about ethics or philosophy—which is totally opposite from those who engaged with alternative school movements in Japan for a long time. After working at C High School, I was able to contextualize such a presentation. They have a strong mindset of pursuing profits under the assumption of education being a

service industry. To give readers more holistic picture of data collection, I describe my typical days in each school in the following section.

Typical Days at Three Schools

- o Forest of Freedom School

Figure 9: School bus stop

The students' mobility at the Forest of Freedom School is centered around the bus schedules. Students come to several train stations where the school bus stops.[51] The last bus leaves for school around 8:30-8:45am from each station, and homeroom starts from 9:20. Students take classes until 12:30, and afternoon classes ends at 3:40pm. The buses to each station start leaving around 4pm, and the last buses are around 7pm. The first buses after the class are called "one bus" [一バス *ichi-basu*] and almost half of students take those buses. Those who do

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[51] As students often take the same buses from each station, the location of the station affects who people see regularly and therefore how friendships are made.

extracurricular activities or those who want to avoid crowded busses stay longer at school. On Wednesday, they finish classes in the morning and there are no classes on Saturday except selective classes. Commuting takes a lot of time for students. Many spend 1-2 hours (or even more) to reach the school because of its inconvenient location.

Students will not be penalized if they are late or absent. Although there are no school buses for those who are late, there are always some students who show up around noon, or leave school during lunch break. If students do not feel like attending some classes, they could stay somewhere at school, such as the library, an empty classroom, or the health-care room [保健室]. Some students just stay in the health-care room and hang out there for an entire day. But those who want to come to school late, or leave early, need to walk for 20 minutes to the local bus stop, and pay a fee to the train station.

Figure 10: The broken door with messages

Figure 11: The wall painting at the hallway

Teachers come to school before 8am, and get together in the teachers' room [職員室] to have a morning meeting for about 20 minutes. This is the only time for all teachers to get together. Then they are dismissed and go to each subject room where they spend the rest of the day. Many teachers live nearby, and drive to school, but some commute from Tokyo. If I take Limited Express train [特急] from Ikebukuro, I could see the same familiar faces. Many full-time teachers have a day off during a weekday because some come to school on Saturday; or when school event happens during weekend, those who worked for those events could take a day off on weekdays. Sometimes, teachers who did not come in on a specific weekday seemed to miss some important information announced or something happened on that day—and that did not seem to be a big deal.

When I went to this school, I woke up at 5:30 and took the train at 6:00 from my nearest station. After changing trains twice, I arrived at Hanno station at 8:15. I usually ate breakfast on the train or station, and waited at the Starbucks for the school bus which leaves the Hanno Station at 8:45. While waiting for the bus, I really felt awkward because full-time teachers come

to school 30 minutes earlier and in many cases, I am the only one adult to be in the waiting line, and on the bus, they say "those who are not related to school are prohibited (to ride)." Sometimes, no one sat next to me even if the bus is crowded.

While taking the bus was stressful, sharing the space with students was valuable for conducting fieldwork. For example, I could overhear students' conversations and I could see which students are hanging out together. Their modes of conversations are different from those in classrooms. One time, four boys (one of whom I sometimes chatted with) were talking about their sexual experiences explicitly. Generally, students are talking about their part-time jobs, and gossips about other students.

Even after getting off the bus, the commute is not over: students must walk up the slope to the school building for about five minutes. I heard that buses used to go up the hill, ending right next to the school building. But now there are too many buses and they have to go back to the station immediately (to load more students), and they do not do so anymore. I also heard that the current bus stops used to be a tennis court. As school has more students, they needed to change some infrastructure, and the history of bus stop exemplifies these changes. As I go up the stairs, I see one base-like structure on the tree where some students are always hanging around. I then enter the school building and go up the stairs to an English research school [英研-英語研究室].

As I did not get a certain space where I could spend some time, I had to find an empty room to kill some time. If there is anyone in the English room I asked them to let me in. When the morning homeroom starts, I could enter classrooms. Regularly, I observed English (grammar and conversation classes), Social Science (this semester it was World History), Music (singing together), and Physical education (practicing the traditional Japanese dances together) in the high

school. I went to Japanese and Korean classes one time for each with the permission of teachers. I sang together and practiced Japanese traditional dances together with HS2 students, and these two classes helped me to interact with students. The P.E. teacher is one of the few teachers who has been in school since its foundation, and he liked to talk about many things. I never expected to be close to the P.E. teacher – stereotypically they are usually authoritative – but he became one of the closest teachers to me at the Forest of Freedom School.

Lunchtime is very busy. They have a school cafeteria and it is always overcrowded. Many students take their trays outside, or to their classroom, and as a result, the school is always missing many lost trays and plates. Some teachers order boxed lunches which are delivered by a company. (In Japan, there are many companies to deliver boxed lunch to offices and schools.) But other teachers have to buy a ticket in the vending machine with students. As soon as the fourth period of the class is over, students rush to the cafeteria to wait for them to open the door at 12:20. If you are not in line when the cafeteria opens, you have to wait about 20-30 minutes to get your food.

Although I did not like using this cafeteria, they are famous for using trackable organic ingredients and for not using any artificial ingredients. They even have a book to introduce this cafeteria, titled as *Japan's Number One Ordinary household meal: Recipes at the Forest of Freedom School Cafeteria* [日本一の「ふつうの家ごはん」自由の森学園の学食レシピ]. This book is made by the Department of Food and Life at school [食生活部 *shokuseikatsu bu*], but there are many other books and articles written about this cafeteria mainly by alumni.

Figure 12: Books about the Forest of Freedom School's cafeteria.

Left: Japan's Number One Ordinary household meal: Recipes at the Forest of Freedom School Cafeteria.

Middle: Welcome to the School Cafeteria at the Forest of Freedom.

Right: "The Most Sincere School Cafeteria in Japan: The Trajectory of the Department of Food and Life at the Forest of Freedom School."

All these books introduce how great the school cafeteria is, and they say even alumni sometimes come to school just to eat foods here, which I doubt.[52] When I was eating at the cafeteria by myself, some students talked to me asking how I entered the University of Tokyo. One time, a few students who sat next to me asked me to give some of my food to them.

After lunch, I would go to afternoon classes, or the gymnastic building to attend a physical education class. For four months, we learned traditional Taiko drumming. I always had

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[52] If you do not take a school bus, you have to take a taxi from the station for 15 minutes (at a cost of about $30), or take a public bus and then talk for 20 minutes from the bus stop to school. For four months I was there, I did not see many people who were obviously from outside school.

muscle pain for two days after this class. When I do not have this P.E. class, I attended an English conversation class taught by a Canadian teacher. After the classes, I sometimes stayed at school and chatted with students. There were some students who are playing guitar or traditional Japanese instruments.

- o KIS

Students come to school either by Monorail, bike, on foot, or bus and train. As buses are very slow and tend to be caught in traffic, some rent a bicycle from the nearest JR station. In any case, most of the students spend between one and 1.5 hours to come to school. The morning homeroom starts at 8:30, and after lunch, they clean their classrooms and school buildings (including restrooms).[53] Students need to ask teachers to check the cleanness and receive their endorsement. After school, some students do extracurricular activities [部活動] but due to the low enrollment numbers, there are not many options available. Many students go to a part-time job, or karaoke often. A few students to go cram school [*juku*] to prepare for college entrance examinations. One notable feature of students here is that they keep updating their Instagram Stories sometimes even during the class, and tagging each other seems to be a big deal especially among girls.

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[53] In Japanese schools, students cleaning up the classrooms and school building is a regular practice.

Figure 13: A scene from a Korean class.

Student playfully draw anime characters when writing down their answers on the blackboard.

Teachers come to school before 8:15, and usually stay at school by 6pm or so. They all spend the whole day in the same room. Compared to the Forest of Freedom School, their teaching load is heavier, and most of the teachers seem to be very busy and tired. A few teachers live in the school dormitory, and many of them commute from Osaka or Kyoto. There was one Japanese teacher who teaches Japanese [国語]. She was also in charge of library room [図書室] and oftentimes retreated there saying "being in the teacher's room is unbearable [職員室の雰囲気に耐えられない]." Teachers order lunchboxes and every morning, administrators collect ¥500 from those who order for the day. Although KIS is a small school, teachers seemed to be a bit distant from each other.

I was allowed to attend the morning meeting of teachers which starts at 8:20, so I always took a train which leaves at 7:32am from my nearest station. The train ride was just about ten

minutes but the bus ride was about 20-30 minutes, then I walked for 10 minutes to school which is in the middle of rice paddy field. The area is known to be a *buraku* area and there are some cement factories.[54] Overall, it looks like the countryside but the atmosphere of the neighborhood was a bit weird. There was a suspect who killed an English lady in Chiba prefecture several year ago who was ultimately found working in one of the factory in this area hiding his identity (he was caught after be on the lam for several years). On the way to the local community center where students use for their P.E. class, I found a totally destroyed liquor store with the gloomy-looking lady in it. The sign said "We refuse service to anti-society sect [反社会勢力お断り]." I did not understand what that meant, so one time I asked her about what is anti-society sect and she yelled at me "(it's) yakuza! [暴力団]" This suggests that the neighborhood is not a typical safe suburb.

At school, I attended Korean language classes, English classes, and some social science classes including the one called co-existing multiculturalism [多文化共生] which aimed to discuss various social issues in Japan (and sometimes about problems faced by Korean Japanese people). When I taught English, I spent some time in the teacher's room to prepare for my own classes. I sometimes ate pre-ordered lunchbox in the teacher's room or classroom, but in some cases I went to the Korean BBQ restaurant by myself when I do not have any classes to attend or teach. Sometimes I cleaned together with students (they clean the school building at the end of lunch break). Once a week, I went to the community center nearby with students to join the P.E.

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[54] "The Burakumin (from the words buraku, meaning community or hamlet and min, meaning people) are not an ethnic minority, but rather a caste- or descent-based group. They therefore share with other Japanese the same language, religion, customs and physical appearances." (Minority Rights Group International 2018)

class. As KIS does not have its own gymnasium building [体育館], they use a community center when they have ceremonies and school events.

After classes are over, I stayed in a teacher's room for a while to do some work (and listened to the conversations between students and teachers). Towards the end of my stay, I started to play table tennis for an hour or two. Unfortunately, before the final exam, somebody locked the door of the room where we stored table tennis equipment. Every Monday, I visited the dormitory and ate dinner, and hung out with students. The dormitory manager held a Chinese language class after dinner, and I left the dorm about 9:30pm.

o   C High School

Every day, students have to check in between 8:45 and 9:00am using their ID card. There are roughly two groups of students. Some are in the Programming Course and the others are in the College Entrance Exam Course. The majority of students are in the latter. Those who study programming only spend time together with other programming students and programming teaching assistants. The other group spends the entire morning doing projects together. [55] In the afternoon, they are separated to several different classes such as reading English books, studying by themselves, or meeting with teachers. During lunch break, they were allowed to go out of school and get foods at a convenience store, but after the school installed a vending machine which also sells breads, students were prohibited to leave school completely. This was because school did not want to increase the possibility of students encountering some accidents outside the campus.

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[55] Students are divided into groups and work on some group project such as making an ideal vending machine at school (to get most profit), or promote health project (for example, some groups introduced how to stretch bodies).

Teachers come to school by 8:15am. Three to four teachers teach the project course for the entire morning, and spend most of the day for individual meetings with students and do their own work. Compared to other two schools, teachers do not spend much time for grading or teaching preparation. Instead, they focus on coaching students and discussing school management, as C High School is still in the stage of "start-up." Those who do not teach the project course will teach some classes in the afternoon such as P.E. or home-making [家庭科].

As a teaching assistant, I arrive at the nearest station around 7:30am and spent almost an hour to eat breakfast and wait for work to start. I need to go to school by 8:30, but trains often delay for 5-10 minutes, and to avoid the most crowded times, I chose to go early. Furthermore, not being late gives a good impression to others. Almost every day, somebody in the morning shift was late, and Slack gets busy in the morning because some teaching assistants (and sometimes teachers) send messages notifying others that they will be late. Teaching assistants being late was one of the things that annoyed full-time teachers.

After 8:30, all teaching assistants (four to six people, depending on the day) get together with one full-time teacher (who is in charge of teaching assistants), and check the flow of the day together. We all "have to" wear jeans because that is a uniform for teaching assistants, such as those in Apple store. After that, students start to come to school so each teaching assistant greets them. One or two teaching assistants will answer the phone, and after 30 minutes, they start to call students' homes if they have no arrived without notifying the school. But generally, it was hard to reach parents. During the group work classes, teaching assistants will walk around the classroom and facilitate the conversation. At the end of each class, teaching assistants has to sort garbage out and clean up the classroom.

I sometimes ate lunch together with other teaching assistants, or went to the restaurant nearby by myself. In the afternoon, I proctored students working on their own assignments. While I was there to answer questions from students, most of my time (and others' time) was spent on asking some students not to play games on their phone. I also proctored students reading English books. Almost every day, they have a session called "Much reading [*tadoku* 多読]" where students have to read English books, without translations into Japanese. Many teaching assistants showed their concern that this is a waste of time because students' English proficiency is pretty low; I agreed. I also helped one British teacher's English class once a week. Those who could do this work in English teaching were only me and another teaching assistant who spent almost all his life in Hong Kong, and doing this work somehow secured my position at this school.

At the end of the day, all teaching assistants get together and discuss what they thought problematic or useful during their work on that day. We share an Excel spreadsheet and people add their notes on the sheet, for instance about problematic students' behavior and how each TA dealt with it. This is a big event for teaching assitants because each day, they discuss "today's value [今日のバリュー]," highlighting who added value to the school that day. This is to honor those who did excellent jobs on that day, with concrete explanations written by other teaching assistants or teachers. If you are nominated several times, you might be promoted and asked to join some projects with full-time workers. If you are not nominated for a long time, you might feel ineligible to work here.

By the end of the day, the attendance rate of each homeroom class is announced on the Slack and Excel sheet. There were also several attempts to entice teaching assistants to talk to

students named "competition to talk to students" [声掛けダービー] and each teaching assistant reported the number of students they talked to.

Generally, people describe education as service which students buy with their tuition. In this school, there are several courses which require coming to school at different frequencies such as five times in a week, three times in a week, and one day in a week. The school has a strong policy that they do not let students in the school building if they come to school when they are not supposed to be there. One time, I was severely admonished by a head teacher because I let a student in the school building who was not supposed to be there. The student used to come to school three times in a week, but he had switched to online completely. On that day, he wanted to meet his friend and asked me if he could wait in the waiting room until class ends. After being told to kick him out, eventually, I had to go find the student and ask him to leave. When I told the student that the head teacher said he had to leave, with a disappointed face, he said "I thought he would say so… [あの人ならそう言うと思った…] Being a bit confused why it was such a big deal, I talked about my experience to another teacher. Then he said "Well, depending on their course, their tuition is very different [あー、授業料が全然違うんで]." I also knew that although the school's strategy promoted it as a cutting edge online school – the cheapest option –once students enter school, teachers recommend to parents that students should switch to in-person classes five times a week, the most expensive course. These rules and strategies make the school space completely commercialized. If you pay more, you get more access to the resource such as teachers and teaching assistants who welcome you with (performed) personality and warmth to maximize your learning opportunity.

In the following sections, I discuss the demography and the cultural codes of Three Schools. Each school attracts some specific kinds of students, and quite a few students had

experienced difficulties in mainstream school, such as school refusal or being harassed by

teachers. That makes it prerequisite for schools to create safe spaces

Forest of Freedom School: Freedom and Community

"There are two kinds of students at this school; the first one is those who had
problems with mainstream schools. The other is whose parents find their ideals in
the education here. Because of Gen Hoshino (a male alumni who appears on TV
often), the latter increased—he often mentions that he graduated from this school"
[Mike, English teacher]

Figure 14: A student at the Forest of Freedom School making a pose.

*Students at this school like to be barefoot. There is a famous story that some students walked around the train station with bare
foot, and somebody reported them to the police. In music festival, many students performed on the stage by barefoot.*

The Forest of Freedom School has junior high school and high school branches, and high

school is much larger. In junior high, there are only two homeroom classes. In high school, there

are six to seven classes, depending on the size of the cohort. The enrollment of students

fluctuates depending on the year. The ratio of boy and girls is about 1:1.

Students

The type of students slightly differs between those who enter from junior high school and those from high school. Among the students, narratives of being a former school refuser, or experienced depression are very common. Based on my conversations with students, most of them (about 80-90 percent), especially those who joined in high school, experienced school refusals due to bullying, traumatic experiences with teachers, or several forms of maladaptation to mainstream schools. On the other hand, those who joined in junior high school show slightly different characteristics. As junior high school is still mandatory education in Japan, going to private school at that point indicates that the family is enthusiastic about education, or trying to place their kids on a better social tracking. They tend to be upper-middle class whose parents are highly concerned about mainstream education. Some students also had negative experiences at public schools and that pushed their parents to seek alternative choices. A few exceptions are those who live near the school. Those students and parents know the Forest of Freedom School from their neighbors, elementary school teachers, or kindergarten teachers. For those kids (and their parents), this school seems to be rather one of the choices for their education—if they are willing to pay extra for private education.

At the same time, there are also some students who actively chose this school without having had terrible experiences at mainstream schools. Sayaka in HS2, who started at the Forest of Freedom School from high school, told me that she was "surprised" after coming to school because most of her peers had terrible experiences at their junior high school.

> "After I came here, I was surprised that others had so many hardships before coming here…which I actually didn't have. If you are inclined to escape from your work (or responsibility), it might be hard to be here. But these days, even those kids know how to participate in (what's going on) and show their true selves (to others)."
> 「内部生はわからないけど、外部生はほとんど不登校経験者だと思う。サボり癖がついていると（ここでは）大変かもしれない。でも最近、そう

いう子達も「出方」がわかってきている気がする。興味のあることには積極的に参加すればいいと思う。」

Coming from a good neighborhood from central Tokyo, Sayaka attends cram school two times a week, and would like to pursue art. But she is also interested in world history because of classes she found intriguing. Her narrative also makes clear the possibility that those former school refusers could change in this environment, and become comfortable enough to be open with others. At the same time, what Sayaka did not talk during the interview is her foreign roots—which people could tell from her appearance. It is unknown if that became one of the reasons to make her come to this school, but I assume it might be.

Her narrative also indicates the importance of participation. When she mentions that students who slack around [サボり癖] might have hard times, it might sound contradictory. At this school, students have a freedom to skip classes and activities if they want. At the same time, it is also a loss of opportunity being offered at school. But she also pointed that you can slack around at home so she wants to do what she could only do at school [サボるのは家でもできるから、学校でしかできないことがしたい]. As Sayaka says, students have a freedom to skip their works and obligations, but if they skip everything, they do not gain anything, either. I will discuss more on this in the next chapter.

There are more than a few students who seem to be mixed-race Japanese. Although I did not have a chance to ask about their racial and ethnic backgrounds to everyone, there seemed to be at least a few students with foreign backgrounds in each homeroom class. Some could tell from their appearance, but I could not those who are actually part Chinese, Korean, or Indonesian until they told me.

Having some sorts of development disorder is relatively common among students. According to the teacher of healthcare room [保健室][56], half of the students at the school have a development disorder on a broad spectrum [半分くらいの子達は、広いスペクトラムの発達障害ですね]. Having been in this school for more than two decades, she explained the gap between this school and the outside.

> "I think those kinds of kids (students with mild disabilities) would have hard time after graduation. Until five years ago, this school was not as harsh on attendance as they are now, and students from those times had harder times after getting out of this school. There was one alumni who said '(this school was) a dream world.' Here, even if the kid behaves somehow strangely, others understand the indices (and just think they are 'that kind' of students), so the student could manage to graduate (without being bullied). "
> 「そういう子たちは（卒業してから）苦労すると思います。5年くらい前は今ほど出席に厳しくなくて、そういう時の方が、出てから苦労することが多かったですね。「夢の世界だった」という卒業生もいました。変な子も、いわゆるインデックスがついている（この子はこういう子だ、という）ので、そのまま卒業までいられるんです。」

According to her, in previous years, the school was more tolerant and easygoing on students' attendance, and therefore, even those who did not actually come to school could graduate. But that made alumni's readjustment to the society really hard. Recently, the school became stricter on attendance and I could see some warning notes on students' desks if they are absent too often. This narrative suggests that the Forest of Freedom School, especially until some years ago, offered temporary escape from the general society. Students could have easier times while at school, but that did not help students prepare for their lives after graduation. The

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[56] Teachers in healthcare room are similar to nurses. They take care of those who are injured, and feeling sick at school.

comment of alumni who said the schools a "dream world" shows the vast gap between school and the rest of the world.

The term "indices [インデックスがついている]" indicates that the school offers an inclusive space even for those who behave somehow strangely. In other words, those who would be excluded and possibly bullied in mainstream schools could hold their cultural citizenship here. The concept of cultural citizenship is the subjective sense of feeling eligible to be in specific spaces (Ramirez 2011). Those who might have some disabilities in mainstream schools could be at this school as they are—others think that is your uniqueness.

The school seems to be conscious about creating an inclusive, and safe learning space rather than offering rigorous academic curriculum. Generally, classes at the Forest of Freedom School go slow. It is student-based and emphasizes highly on students' own thinking process. However, because students' basic academic knowledge is often low, sometimes it seemed to be difficult to expect some sort of output during the class. This dynamic is criticized in one of the articles in the *Hito* magazine. In the article, the author introduces a student's experience. One time, he voluntarily stopped going to school because he could not figure out the meaning of studying. After a month, he started to go to school again, only to find that he could easily catch up with everything he missed. The had not made much progress in the month he was absent. This made him disappointed that he might not be learning that much at school. For instance, English teachers officially state that group work is "not a tool for learning efficiently, but a tool to create a space for learning [ツールとしてのグループワークではなく、居場所づくりとしてのグループワーク]." Generally, it is a shared understanding that classes at the Forest of Freedom School do not need to prepare students for college entrance examinations. Instead, some

pedagogical techniques, such as group work, are used to offer the place to be [居場所] for students.

The school's demography also shifted in the more than 30 years since its founding. Most of the teachers who taught at this school since its foundation will retire in a year or two, and there are many students who did not actively choose this school. Those students and their parents came mainly because they heard this school has a relaxed pedagogy and is not academically challenging, a fact that sometimes produces conflicts among parents.

Teachers

Figure 15: Male teachers performing in the school festival

The demography of teachers at the Forest of Freedom School seems to be in transition. There are a few older teachers (in their 60s or late 50s) who have been at the Forest of Freedom School since its foundation, but the rest are in their 20and 30s. Some jokingly said this school does not have teachers in their mid-career [中堅がいない]. There are also some part-time teachers who teach foreign languages (Korean and Chinese) or special subjects [専科] such as health home science [家庭科]. About 20-30 percent of teachers are alumni of this school. Among teachers and parents, there are always some debates whether it is better to be alumni to teach at the Forest of Freedom School. In my observation, in the meeting or daily conversations,

those who graduated from the school sometimes could back up their opinion by saying that that was how things were when they were students. Those teachers are also close to the old teachers because they knew each other when they were students here. However, as those old teachers retire, more and more teachers who do not have first-hand connections with the Forest of Freedom School came to teach. That transition seems to be influencing the school culture, especially when teachers and parents talk about "what is the Forest of Freedom education?" [自森らしさとは何か]". As for gender-ratio, those in higher positions are mainly male. Roughly 70 to 80 percent of the full-time teachers are male, and many part-time teachers are female. Those who are not alumni learned of the school from their colleagues at public school, or professors when they were in college. All teachers have clear senses of this school being special, and almost everyone is critical about mainstream education in Japan.

One of the notable cultural elements at this school is that they avoid common terminologies to address teachers. They do not use the term "teacher" [先生]. In Japanese, teachers are addressed by their last name and the term teacher (-*sensei*). For example, if your last name is Brown, you will be addressed as Brown-sensei, which is similar to the meaning of Mr. Brown in an American context. Instead, teachers are addressed with –*san*, which also includes some honorific connotation but used more generally for everyone. (In this way, the difference is not easy to compare with the American context; both terms would gloss as "Mr." or "Ms.") Or more commonly, teachers receive nicknames from students and some even use those nicknames among teachers. It took me very long to be accustomed to this because I felt uncomfortable addressing teachers by –san, instead of –sensei or a nickname. Culturally speaking, addressing teachers as -san is perceived as somewhat rude.

Figure 16: Research room [研究室] for Social Science teachers [社会科]

Contrary to what I expected, the curriculum at this school is strictly fixed by each subject team. Subject teachers share the office (figure 3), and they team-teach—each semester, teachers spend significant amount of time to decide what to teach to students. For example, English classes for HS2 in fall 2019 were spent watching *Freedom Writers* (2007) and students were writing letters to students in the film. As the school has a long history if tailoring the curriculum of each subject, it was almost fixed, and individual teachers cannot decide what to do on their own. This was the same in other subjects I observed. According to senior teachers, student-centered teaching needs a significant amount of preparation, and based on the history, teachers are expecting what kind of answers students will give. In other words, although students could express their thoughts freely (and that is welcomed), teachers have built up some teaching manuals to prepare for the classes and these are not particularly flexible.

Teachers are bound mainly based-on the subject they teach. As they spend almost all their time in their office called "research room" [研究室], the subject teachers group seemed to be the strongest unit rather than grade-based connections among teachers. For example, the 20-30 minutes at the morning meeting is the only time for all teachers to get together. After that, teachers go back to their research room, and spend almost all the time there until they leave school for the day. Some teachers' offices, such as science and P.E., are independent house-like buildings. Therefore, depending on what a teacher teaches, their experiences at school could be very different. For example, the English subject team has more female teachers and the two highest-ranked teachers were both women. The atmosphere of English office was very different from the Social Science office where all teachers were men.

Teachers are also responsible for accountability. For some teachers, especially those in management positions, the school festival is a big deal because they present their educational practices to specialists [専門家] such as university professors. Called the "Open Research Workshop" [公開研究会], these events include demonstration classes that visitors can observe, and after that, discussions facilitated by specialists about how to improve. This give the school festival a more "official" tone compared to music festival that is mainly for students and parents. Teachers also need to present their teaching methods and contents to other teachers at school. One time, I could attend English teachers' presentation session about their pedagogy and curriculum. The audience was other teachers at school, and they discussed how their teaching practices contribute to students' learnings. During the discussion session, the topic shifts to more about whether this lesson could accord with school's policy.

Parents

Roughly speaking, there are two groups of parents who chose to send their children to the Forest of Freedom School: those who are highly interested in education, and those for whom there were no other options. Those who sent their children to FFS from junior high school tend to be in the first category and are highly interested in education or have a clear sense of refusal of the mainstream secondary education in Japan. The second group includes those parents who were at a loss about their children. For example, many students who entered FFS from high school experienced some forms of maladaptation in public school and ended up not going to school. I saw some parents who cried at the parents' meetings because 1) their child started to come to school and made some good friends, or 2) their child was still not able to come to school. Not many parents seem to be working for companies. Rather, they seem to be working at their own business or working in some unique industries such as entertainment or university professors—which is similar to parents at KIS.

Compared to mainstream schools, parents at alternative school play active roles in school events by being volunteers. For example, at school festivals and the music festival, mothers and some fathers work as receptionists, guiding visitors who came by car, and collecting money from those who took a school bus.[57] Some mothers visit the school to see how students are doing or have meetings with homeroom teachers to help in organizing school events. As the school is located in an geographically isolated location, some mothers (and fathers) in the same homeroom book hotels together, which can become opportunities for bonding and connections. Every year,

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[57] On event days, school buses are run by a private company, and during the special events, they increase buses. Parents and visitors need to pay $5 for round trips.

parents organize after-party of the graduation ceremony, and they spend a year for preparing for it.

KIS: Demographic Diversity and Some Challenges

Students

Since 2016, KIS has been losing students. The school used to have about 200 students for six grades. But as of 2019, it dropped to less than 80 students. JHS1 only had two incoming students in that year. Demographically speaking, about 70 percent of students were female, and most of the students were either part-Korean or full-Korean. There are old-comers such as third generation, and also newcomers from Korea who are called international students or exchange students [留学生] as their families were not in Japan. There were also a few Japanese nationals. Except for ten international students from Korea (and a few from China), almost everyone speaks Japanese as their first language, with various proficiency in Korean. There were two students of Korean ethnicity who came "back" from the United States. Many students aim to go to college after graduation, and some experienced going to traditional Korean schools in Japan [朝鮮学校]. Depending on the year, some go to universities in Korea or the United States, as well as Japan.

On a par with Freedom School, parents navigate students to come to this school. Almost all students from junior high school came to KIS because of their parents' preference, and Japanese national students, who mainly enter KIS from high school, found this school because

they were looking for a school to learn about Korea.[58] Compared to the Forest of Freedom School and C High School, students seemed to be more sociable and mature for their age. Their Instagram stories showed the close-knit community among students; they often go to karaoke together or go out to eat—many students work part-time after school and their allowances seemed to be more than those of the other school.

Students working part-time were not necessarily doing so to support themselves or their families. Instead, they work to gain some money for their own use. One girl, who works at the convenience store four to five times a week, cheerfully told me that she did so "because I want so many things!" [欲しいものいっぱいあるんで]. From what I saw on her Instagram, she did not seem to be working because of a dire need for money. (Of course, she might have been trying to hide this.), Some of the students are from rich families, with fathers and mothers who are business owners. Almost no parents seemed to be hired at the Japanese company. Generally, students are not that motivated to study, and sometimes they upload Instagram Stories during class time. Their academic level varies but generally weak. Some students are proficient in Korean, but others do not want to learn it. One time, a male student screamed during the breaktime that he does not want to learn Korean because he did not choose to be born in Korean in Japan. Some students are motivated and ultimately secured admission to famous universities, but generally, compared to 2016, the motivation of students seems to have gone down. Some of the students, including international students from Korea, live by themselves. The picture below was taken when we went to Korean Town in Osaka for a fieldtrip.

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[58] In 2021, KIS launched a new "K-pop course." All incoming students in this course were Japanese nationals (Asahi Shimbun 2021).

Figure 17: Field trip to Koreatown, Osaka

Teachers

Demographically, the teachers were diverse. When I was conducting my fieldwork, there were twelve full-time teachers (and one school principal), and several part-time teachers. There was one Singaporean teacher who was also the only full-time teacher. The rest were from Japan or Korea, and all speak Japanese fluently. Although many teachers are bilingual in Japanese and Korean, Japanese national teachers tend to be monolingual. Here is a chart of the full-time teachers about their nationality, ethnicity, and linguistic fluency. In terms of ethnicity and nationality, some are North Korean and some are South Korean. It matters significantly for one's identity whether they are from north or south, but for the sake of privacy, I deleted those distinctions. Instead, I added if the person is old-comer (their family has been in Japan for several generations) or new comer (someone who was brought up in South Korea, but came to

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Japan). Old comer is written as O, and new comer is N. There is one from North Korea but I did not include the person in this list.

	Gender	Ethnicity	Nationality	Languages spoken (by order of fluency)
Principal	M	Korean (O)	Korea	Japanese, Korean
V. Principal	M	Korean (O)	Korea	Japanese, Korean
Teacher A	F	Korean (O)	Korea	Japanese, Korean
B	F	Korean (N)	Korea	Korean, Japanese
C	M	Japanese	Japan	Japanese
D	F	Japanese	Japan	Japanese, Korean
E	M	Korean (O)	Korea	Japanese, Korean
F	M	Korean (N)	Korea	Korean, Japanese, English
G	F	Chinese	Singapore	English, Chinese, Japanese
H	F	Japanese	Japan	Japanese
I	F	Japanese	Japan	Japanese, Korean
J	F	Korean (N)	Korea	Korean, Japanese, English

Figure 18: Teachers' gender, ethnicity, nationality, and linguistic proficiency

The turnover rate among teachers is high, and depending on the semester, the teachers are different. It seems like every year, or semester, some full-time and part-time teachers quit. When I attended orientation for the academic year 2019, almost all teachers I had talked with in 2016 were gone. There are mainly two factors for this. First, the school management is unstable and even the school principal quits about every one to two years. Some teachers were disappointed

and left partly because of internal conflicts and the unsteady future of school. During the semester I conducted fieldwork, one full-time teacher and one part-time teacher quit. I started to teach English to replace the part-time teacher from Mid-May until the end of July. This changed the dynamics between myself and a few students, but I became much closer to teachers by sharing the hardships and challenges of teaching. To make matters worse, the salary for full-time teachers was low. Some teachers told me how much they receive, and I was surprised that it was slightly more than $2000 per month after taxes. Many teachers are highly qualified and have graduated from the top-tier universities in Korea and Japan, and devoting themselves to education. Objectively speaking, working in this multicultural, and multi-lingual environment is challenging. Teachers are required to have so many skills such as driving or organizing school events with students. For those workloads, obviously, this compensation is not enough.

Parents

The majority of parents from Japan, are alumni of (traditional) Korean school in Japan [朝鮮学校], and they are either 1) did not want to send their children to the Japanese school, or 2) are looking for some alternative to traditional Korean school due to its outdated curriculum and specific educational philosophies. There are some divides between new-comer and old-comer parents. While old-comer parents think highly of nurturing ethnic identity and community making, new-comer parents expect their children to be proficient in Japanese and English and to go to prestigious universities.

My observation is that some parents are very rich, and they tend not to graduate from Japanese universities. Therefore, they do not know much about the entrance examination system

in Japan. For example, one alumni told me that he and his family "had to rely on teacher C" who used to teach at the public school. They all went to Korean school for three generations, and they did not know anything about Japanese universities, such as their entrance examinations. While Japanese parents are the minority at KIS, they tend to play a big role among parents such as being president of the parents association. It is partly because those Japanese parents are highly interested in education, and they already participated in some educational activism in their community, or want to assist in the management of alternative schools. Those parents were easy to approach and willing to be interviewed.

Parents are deeply involved with school events. At the same time, they have tension with those who are in management positions, such as principle and vice principle. For example, whenever they have parents meeting (*hogosha-kai*), mothers (*omoni-kai*) come to school to prepare school lunch. Usually, students and teachers order lunchbox delivery so the lunch on these days is special. Parents are also vocal to tell their requests on school managements.

Figure 19: Miso pork stew made by mothers.

It is a typical Japanese homemade dish.

C High School: A Start-up Company Thinks Education

Students

Students in C High School tend fall in two categories and are either 1) very motivated for self-study, especially about programming or the internet, or 2) former school refusers. The school wanted to have more students in category #1, but in reality, many students are in category #2. While observing classes and facilitating groupwork as a teaching assistant, I noticed that quite a significant number of students are indulging themselves (or engaged themselves) with online games when they were not supposed to be. As all students are given MacBook Pro laptop and asked to carry it with them all day, they are all good at using computers. Although some teachers or teaching assistants were concerned about students being distracted by games, or messaging apps during the class, they cannot confiscate iPhone or laptops because it is a policy of school to use those devices for learning.

Being a student in this school requires some internet literacy skills. For example, every morning, students have a homeroom meeting using Slack. Slack is a communication app which is popular among tech companies. About 70 percent of students are male. While there are some "star" students who appear on school's advertisement such as being super-smart, or already being a professional sports competitor, I would say that about 80 percent of students are so-to-speak in the "high risk" group for dropping out. Even if students are registered to come to school five times in a week, only about 50-60 percent of students actually attend every day. (Depending on your course, some students come to school five times in a day.) The narrative of being bullied, or having negative experiences at mainstream school, was also common in this school. Overall, almost all students came to this school after having some problems at mainstream schools, which the management people did not expect when the school was founded.

Teachers and Teaching Assistants

Teachers are do not seem to be so-to-speak traditional ones. Generally speaking, teachers at this school are very young. The majority of teachers are in their 20s. It is because this school is new, and some people came from the (also) newly-built tech company which contributed to making this school. For example, the head of the school branch where I worked was in his late-20s. One of the notable features of teachers at this school is that many of them do not have a teacher's certificate [教員免許]. This is possible because they do not teach specific subjects, so technically speaking, they could be categorized under "school staff," not as teachers. Legally speaking, as long as there is one person who has a teacher's certificate in the school building, other "teachers" could be categorized as lecturers [講師]. They cannot do some tasks, but their main role as a homeroom "teacher" is to coach students—managing students' semester schedules, and listen to their difficulties and figure out solutions together. To do this, they do not have to have a teaching certificate. Therefore, teachers at this school do not teach subjects except P.E. [体育] and Health Education [保険], etc. Students study by watching the recorded lecture on their own, and teachers focus on coaching such as discussing what the students want to do for their future, and how they could set up schedules and goals to reach it. This seems to be why the school hires teachers with various backgrounds.

There are mainly two categories of teaches: Those who worked for private companies such as a travel agency or IT company, and those who have a teacher's certificate and were teaching at mainstream schools before joining C High School. Roughly speaking, those who are from educational backgrounds seem to be different from those who come from different fields. To me, teachers from private companies [民間企業] seem to be more eloquent and versatile, while those from the teaching background seem to be more genuine. When I was working as a

TA, I was closer to teachers from educational background except one who used to work in a travel agency.

At this school, people tend to describe education as service and the school as a startup company. One teacher made this clear by saying "Education is a service. We need to offer the same quality of service to students every time, and everybody should offer the same quality of service per session." One teacher, who came from the famous human resource company, always reminded teaching assistance about cost and effects. The principle of costs and effects were applied when they invest certain amount of time for each student, and how teaching assistants should be friendly with students in order to make them listen to what teachers and teaching assistants say. In the following chat log on Slack, the head of school lists the attendance rate of each homeroom class.

> staff_XXX [10:57]
> @here
> ＜今日の登校率＞ [Today's attendance rate]
> 今日は週５が低いねぇ。[Today, many 5-day/week students are absent…aren't they?]
> 雨だと体調不良増えるとか梅雨恐怖。多少体調悪くても朝ちゃんと登校するってのも大事だと思うんだ。[If students become sick on rainy days, what happens when we get into rainy season? I am scared. I think it's important to tell students that even if they are not feeling well that much in the morning, it is important to come to school.]
> そういうことも伝えていこうね。[Please tell students that, okay?]
> ```週５ [5-day/week]　63.0%
> 週３　[3-day/week]　62.4%
> プログラミング クラス [Programming course students]　72.4%
> A [Name of the homeroom teachers↓]　52.2%
> B　50.0%
> C　57.1%
> D　84.0%
> E　67.7%
> F　64.5% ```
> ＊Ｄクラス独走！！２日連続８０％over!!＊[ D class always aces! More than 80% of students come to school two days in a row! !]

心と体を健康にするのは D クラスかな。 [I guess D class would make students' mind and body healthy.]
＊個人面談やグループ面談、３分面談、休憩中、授業中、すれ違った時、スラック上でも、もっともっと生徒とコミュニケーション取ろう！！
[When you meet students at individual counseling session, 3-miniute meeting, during the break time, class time, when just passing by, on Slack, try communicating with students more and more!!]
生徒が静かに座ってたらそれだけで仕事は終わりかな？彼らと信頼を深めるチャンスはもうないかな？ If students are sitting still, is that the end of your job? Are there any more chances to get more trust from students?
目があっただけでニヤけるような、生徒を幸せにできるようなスタッフ像を本気で真面目に演出しよう！Let's perform seriously and enthusiastically. Make efforts to create the image of staff who make students happy, like whenever students see your eyes, they grin.
我々はプロフェッショナルだ！エンターテインメントをどんどん創り出していこう！We are the professional! Let's keep creating more entertainments!

In this Slack post, there are two main points. First, the head lists up each homeroom class's attendance rates, which potentially evaluates each teacher's performance and triggers the sense of competition among teachers. In addition to the tips for communicating with students, he emphasizes the staged "image of staff who make students happy, like whenever students see your eyes, they grin" because they are the "professionals." This phrasing also suggests that teachers need to perform their personnel to create "entertainment" in order to make students happy. While they do not need to feel it genuinely, teachers need to perform the ideal images "seriously and enthusiastically."

Teaching assistants also contribute significantly to the school's management. They are mainly undergraduate students (and a few master's students) who are doing administrative jobs such as answering phones and proctoring students as they watch recorded lectures. When students come to school, they do groupwork but other than that, teaching assistants proctor students as they take English classes and watch videos for two to three hours a day. While

recruiting teaching assistants, the school does not emphasize the emotional labor involved with the job but practically, most of the work by teaching assistants is to manage interpersonal relationship between students, and between teachers and students. For example, teaching assistants are required to remember all the students' names as quickly as possible without looking at the rosters. Therefore, any new teaching assistant has to ask students their name. This is not easy because many students do not use show the name unless they are watching recorded lectures, and some tease new teaching assistants by telling them fake names.

Sometimes, teaching assistants need to engage in very sensitive and complicated cases that nobody knows the right way to do it (such as supporting depressed students and persuading problematic students to behave appropriately). When I talked about the difficulties in doing teaching assistant at this school, one of the colleagues said he actually consulted some of the cases to the professional psychotherapist privately, and the person said "those cases are what psychotherapists solve in two years"—meaning that some cases are too burdensome for teaching assistants who work in hourly wages of $12.

The policy of costs and effects are applied to teaching assistants' performance. Although there was not any sense of competition among teaching assistants, each teaching assistant was evaluated daily. At the end of the day, one full-time teacher and several teaching assistants discuss "today's value (*kyono varyu*)" and the teaching assistant who contributed to the work the most would be picked. When I was chatting with my colleague, he confessed to me that he does not feel worth being here because he "does not produce much value for a while." Some of them, especially those who are capable, was recruited by the school or the tech company that relates to the school.

Chapter 4 **The Politics of Educational Choices**

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze how people are making choices to go to non-mainstream schools. Although the schools are necessarily focused on students' needs, I found that parents play a substantial, if not overwhelming, part in these decisions. It is students who receive education at school, but it is not possible without the support and agreement from parents. Therefore, I argue that choosing alternative education is more of a family's preference to avoid internalizing mainstream educational norms, rather than students' individual choices. Generally, if students move into alternative schools in junior high school, they are doing so mainly because of their parents' policy. Students who join in high school show more degree of their individual preferences, but parents still affect their decisions explicitly and implicitly. Furthermore, in my fieldsites, the more parents influence the choice of school, the deeper they engage with school management which, in turn, require the accountability. That in turn, facilitates the conversation and communications among those who relate school.

In the following sections, I analyze the narratives of how students came to choose their current schools, with particular attention to how parents are affecting those choices. In many cases, those joining in junior high school internalize school culture more strongly than those from high school, and then become important actors in the student body when they proceed to high school. Students who join later, staring in high school, tend to have experienced negative

incidents in public junior high school, which pushed them to seek an alternative environment for learning.

Parents as Strong Navigators

Parents are stakeholders of decision-making to choose unique schools. Especially when kids are small, parents rather than students themselves are more likely to come up with alternative school choices. It should be noted that two of my target schools, and most private secondary schools in general, have junior high school branches that create six years of secondary education. (C High School started their junior high school branch a year after my fieldwork). In high school, those who enter from junior high are labeled "in-group student [内部生]," and those from high school are called "out-group student [外部生]." Although it also depends on each group's overall numbers, in many cases, in-group students tend to be more dominant in the classrooms because they know each other already and are familiar with the school culture.

Specifically, parents play significant roles in sending students to non-mainstream school when they begin in junior high school. In the Forest of Freedom High School, about 30 percent of students joined in junior high school, and at the Korea International school, nearly half of students have attended since junior high school. My fieldwork reveals a general tendency that these in-group students are advantaged in school life. First, those who came from junior high school already know teachers and the school itself. They tend to take leadership positions in homeroom classes, especially at the beginning of the first year.[59] Their parents are also influential when parents are involved in school events.

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[59] Especially after people started to share their experiences at schools on the internet, more and more people learned of the division between students who enter from junior high and those enter from high school (Tyugaku Juken Shimpo 2015). Some internet postings might be exaggerated. But generally, schools give priorities to those from junior high school because they tend to enter better ranked universities than those from high school. Many 6-year secondary schools, both public and private, are quitting to accept students from high school (Asahi Shimbun 2020).

Sachiko-san—Disability, Devotion, and Alternative Education

When I attended a parents' meeting of HS2 at the Forest of Freedom School, I had a chance to meet Sachiko-san, one mother taking a leadership role during the teacher-parents meetings. Sachiko-san's narrative embody how her privilege, her devotion to education, and her child's disability prompted the family to move to alternative schools. She graduated from the most competitive girl's high school in Tokyo which sends many students to the University of Tokyo every year. Her husband is a university professor, and she sent their son to alternative elementary school before he joined the Forest of Freedom School.

Sachiko-san stood up as a leader among mothers (there were no fathers in the meeting except Sachiko-san's husband who came late). During the parents' meeting, mothers did not have specific roles being assigned. Sachiko-san spontaneously facilitated conversations between the homeroom teacher and other parents. She seemed to know a lot about the school. Her son, Takashi-kun, is a hard-working student with a peculiar style of communication and behaviors. He is talkative but does not look at my eyes when talking to me, and the flow of the conversation sometimes changed abruptly. Apparently, he seems to be autistic and would have been hard to survive in the mainstream school's classroom.

According to her, Sachiko-san and her husband gave up sending Takashi-kun to mainstream school when Takashi-kun was at kindergarten. Compared to other kids, Takashi-kun needed more time to be adjusted to group life at school. For him, it was very difficult to hang out with other kids, and he always cried when he could not keep Sachiko-san within his sight. She wonders if mother-infant separation [母子分離] might have taken longer than usual for him. After seeing a doctor who specializes in child development (and her husband's former classmate) to consult about Takashi-kun, she was told that Takashi-kun needs more time to develop himself

emotionally but in the end, will be able to have a normal life like her husband. They decided to

pick the best school for Takashi-kun to have the necessary time to develop maturity and survive

in society. First, they sent him to a private alternative elementary school in Kanagawa prefecture

because they knew the school principal. To send him that school, they moved from Tokyo to

Kanagawa prefecture. When he graduated that school, they thought public high schools there

were too militaristic. Deciding not to send Takashi-kun to mainstream school in that region, they

then moved to Saitama prefecture so that Takashi-kun could commute to the Forest of Freedom

School. A few years later, her husband could move to a different university where he could

commute from Saitama, but until then, it was hard for them to settle down. Takashi-kun was the

only child so they could prioritize his needs over other stuff.

As an active parent who organizes many things, for instance parents staying together in a

hotel when the school holds events, she notices the gap between parents who came to this school

when their child was in junior high school and those who joined from high school.

> "I do feel the difference between parents of those who came from junior and those
> who came from high school. The former tends to be highly conscious about
> education, and the latter is, well, some of them come here mainly because their
> kids stopped going to school at some point, and they were not sure what to do.
> Some just come to this school because they heard this school is laid-back on
> attendance and makes it easy to graduate. Some mothers even cry during the
> meeting because their kids finally started to come to school so that's their goal."
> 「やっぱり違いはありますね（中学入学組と高校入学組で）。内進生の親
> は教育に関心のある人が多くて、高校組は…子どもが学校に行かなくなっ
> て、もうどうしたらいいのかわからなくてここに来た、みたいな。この学
> 校が出席に甘くて卒業しやすいということだけを聞いてくるような方もい
> ます。そういう親は泣きますね。保護者会で（子どもが学校に行くように
> なったから感極まって）。そこがゴールになっているという。」

Her narrative highlights how parents at the Forest of Freedom School join the school for

different reasons: those who send their children to school based on their concern over the

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mainstream education, and those who were seeking some urgent solution for school refusers. Of course, these motivations can overlap as in-group students likely also experienced some negative events in elementary school that enticed their parents to look for alternative school choices.

In Japan, school refusal more often occurs at the stage of junior high school, rather than elementary school, as school rules and the rigorousness of curriculum becomes stricter (Yoneyama 1999). From Sachiko-san's perspective, the tone of out-group students' mothers was more "urgent and despairing" [悲壮感が溢れてる] compared to in-group students' parents because they faced more traumatic experiences in junior high school rather than in elementary school. In this case, keeping the student in mainstream school for longer, through junior high school, heightens the likelihood that they face such difficulties.

The episode of crying mothers at the parents' meeting embodies how much mothers of school refusals suffered. That simultaneously suggests that for those mothers, their children coming to school. As Sachiko-san mentions, mothers discussing school policies or how to relate to school management might be less critical than their urgent agenda; their kids leave the house and go to school. Therefore, more technical aspects matter, such as the school being lenient regarding attendance so that their children could graduate easily.

She also indicates the importance of refusing mainstream education at the level of mandatory education.

> "I guess the school also tries to take care of those who came from junior high school because they chose to come to this school at the level of mandatory education—public junior high schools are free."
> 「学校としても、中学から来た子達を大事にしたいという気持ちはあると思います。義務教育の段階から自森を選んで来た、ってことですから…公立に行けば（教育費が）タダですからね。」

Coming to the private junior school requires a significant financial commitment for family. In many cases, especially in big cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, sending one's child to private junior high school shows parents' active and literal investment in education as opposed to going to public school, which is free. Although about 90 percent of Japanese students go to high school, post-secondary education (high school) is technically optional. Therefore, if a parent decides to send their child to a private school, they have more responsibility for their child's education and financial costs compared to the mainstream, in which parents first think only about the entrance examination to enter high school. In recent years, more and more prefectural government started to subsidize more for those who go to private high school, but going to private junior high school would not receive any of those supports.[60]

For schools, it is also difficult and tiresome to create an alternative curriculum in junior high school. because those years are still under the mandatory education which makes it hard to teach something drastically different from mainstream schools (at least officially).[61] Again, Sachiko-san mentions that for a private school, being chosen by students and parents at during a stage mandatory education demonstrates a deep commitment.

In-group students' parents also tend to take the initiative to organize gatherings for school events. At the Forest of Freedom School, parents sometimes stay at hotels together on events day such as school festival [文化祭] or music festival [音楽祭] to hang out and discuss school matters. This is partly because the school is geographically isolated, and partly for parents' bonding. They sometimes communicate with the homeroom teachers to discuss how to manage the classroom. For example, at the restaurant after the HS2 parents' meeting, their main agenda

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[60] Saitama prefecture, where the Forest of Freedom School is located, is no exception. The graduate cohort of 2021 was the first generation to receive the significant amount of subsidization from the government.
[61] Some the teachers told me that teaching something different from government curriculum [学習指導要領] is much harder in junior high school, compared to senior high school.

was about how to organize a party after the graduation ceremony of next year, and they share

updates how other homeroom classes are doing. They also talked about other teachers, their

homeroom teacher, and the school's financial situation. As there is no clear protocol being

suggested by the school regarding how parents should or should not involve ceremonies and

events, every class and every year are different. [62]

Students also feel the gap between in-group and out-group students. For example, one in-group student told me that the atmosphere of his homeroom class changed a lot after he became

a high school student. Basically, he thinks out-group students are too quiet and he needs to spend

extra energy to guess what they are thinking about, rather than talk freely.[63] He was less able to

guess their thinking or anticipate their reactions. Numbers matter, too. He also indicated that

when school was small, dynamics are more unpredictable (there are only 2-3 homeroom classes

per grade in junior high school at the Forest of Freedom School), and complained to me about

the passive attitude of *gaibusei*. But, by high school, the newer students "outnumber those from

junior high school and change the dynamics in classrooms." Although in-group parents and

students are more likely to participate in school scenes as a result of their knowledge and

connections, they cannot neglect newcomers who sometimes outnumber them.

Miho and Her Family—Choice, Guidance, and Individual Agency

At KIS, I observed less division between those from junior high school and those from

high school. The terminology such as in-group vs. out-group students did not exist, and students'

characters seemed to matter more to form groups. At the same time, I observed more influence

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[62] In more official level, parents even published a book about teachers. Near the school's founding, parents interviewed almost all teachers at school and published *"Who's Who"* in the late 1980's.

[63] I will discuss more about how these two groups internalize school cultures differently in chapter 3.

and presence of parents at this school. Compared to the patterns at FFS, parents generally

preferred to exert more influence over students' educational choices at Korea International

School. At this school, many parents themselves emigrated from Korea recently or many years

ago and when they were younger, their parents (the current generation of grandparents) worried

about discrimination in mainstream schools. But at the same time, these parents were not

particularly enthusiastic to send their kids to the traditional Korean schools in Japan [朝鮮学校]

because of its curriculum and culture. When I talked with students about why they came to KIS,

almost all students answered that it is because of their parents—some learned of the school

though their relatives and neighbors, and sent their children to school camp [お泊まり合宿 or

サマーキャンプ]. (KIS conducts this two day camp with prospective students to create

relationship between them, current students, and teachers, and it is parents who sponsor the

event.) Overall, parents influence students' decisions to come here more than at the Forest of

Freedom School.[64]

Every year, KIS (like schools in general) has some "star" students, and Miho is one of

them. As a former head of student council, she appears in the school magazine which is

published for parents and people who sponsor KIS, and is powerful enough to mobilize others to

resist the school principal's decisions about some school policies. Within the school, she is

perceived to be one of the most influential students. As with the case of some students at KIS,

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[64] At KIS, the small size of the student body seems to produce less tension between those from junior high school and high school, compared to the Forest of Freedom School. But sometimes in-group students differentiate themselves from those from high school. When I was having an early dinner with KIS students, some students made this clear by complaining about one girl who deviated from this norm. She had entered from high school but became a very powerful figure in a class. They admonished her to me, saying,"if she comes from high school, she should be quiet for while" [高校からなら、しばらくは大人しくしてろって感じ]. But as the semester went on, students mingled equally each other, and each other's personalities, rather than how long they are at school, seemed to influence the relationships they built and leadership positions they held.

Miho is fluent in Japanese and Korean, and her family had strong opinions about her educational choices.

In Miho's case, she went to South Korean school in Japan for her primary education and had thought about going to a private Japanese secondary school close to her house. When I met her, she was her last year in high school, and was considering going to a community college in Seattle. As she explained it, she aims to eventually matriculate at the University of Washington after spending two years in community college so she can save on the cost of tuition. Her narrative describes how her family influenced her educational choices regarding being international and fluent in multiple languages as a third-generation Korean in Japan.

> "Originally, I was planning to take an entrance examination for the X private girl's junior high school in my neighborhood. I also went to cram school to prepare for it. But my parents are friends with the parents of a student at KIS, and I went to their summer camp. Then I was just shocked by the KIS students there—like how they were friendly and brilliant. We also talked about how if I go to the private girls' junior high school in my neighborhood, I would forget Korean, and at KIS, I could learn English and Korean, and also establish my identity."
> 「もともと X 女学院を受験しようとして、塾にも通ってたんですよ。そしたら親が KIS に行っていた先輩の親と友達で、サマーキャンプに参加することになって。そしたら驚いたのは、先輩が普通に話しかけてくるんですよ！小学生的にむっちゃ驚いて。フレンドリーだし頭良さそうだし。そういう衝撃があって、あと女学院に行ったら（韓国語）忘れるよねー、って。それで、（KIS なら）英語と韓国語学べていいし、アイデンティティ確立できるしってことで。」

Similar to other narratives, Miho's mother was friends with the mother of KIS students, and that personal connection was crucial to make them think about KIS. She (and her parents) were thinking about going to the regular private Japanese school. But at the same time, other schools that could nurture her ethnic identity were their options, too because they did not want to lose her Korean language skills which she learned at the South Korean elementary school. Going

to KIS was also beneficial for nurturing her identity as a Korean Japanese, and learning English

to open up the possibility of being more international to explore the world beyond Osaka.

> "My parents wanted me to see the wider world, not just stay in Osaka. They
> cannot speak Korean and have not studied abroad, so they cannot talk back when
> people say some bad things about Korea…they always say that they want their
> kids to see beyond (Osaka). So I went to international kindergarten, and we were
> choosing Chinese school or Korean school for my elementary school, and I ended
> up a South Korean School to learn the language of my country, I went to a South
> Korean School in Kyoto."
> 「親は自分に大阪にとどまって欲しくなくて、いずれは外の世界を知って
> 欲しいと思っていたんですね。親は韓国語喋れないし、留学とかもしたこ
> となくてずっと大阪にいたから、韓国のことについて色々言われても言い
> 返せないし…。子ども達には外の世界を見て欲しい、っていつも言ってま
> した。幼稚園はインターで、小学校自体も中華学校か民族学校かで迷っ
> て、まず自分の国の言語を、ってので K 学園（韓国系学校）に行ったん
> です。」

Her parents hope Miho can achieve what they could not secure for themselves. As her

parents do not speak Korean and do not know much about Korea, they want Miho to learn the

language and history. They also support her to leave Osaka to broaden her horizons. At the same

time, they wanted to avoid sending Miho to the traditional Korean schools in Japan, which are

overwhelmingly associated with North Korea, partly because of the family's South Korean

ethnicity and identification.

> "My grandfather (father's father) is first-generation Korean from South Korea, and
> he does not have good impression to the North. He also fought in the Battle of
> Incheon.[65] My mother's mother went to North Korean school for her junior high
> school, and then went to South Korean school (both in Japan). She was OK with
> sending me to North Korean school, but my mother did not like the idea."
> 「おじいちゃん（父方）は一世で、北に対していいイメージがなくて。仁
> 川上陸作戦にも行っていたんですよ。母方のおばあちゃんは中学校朝鮮学

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[65] The Battle of Inchon (인천상륙작전) was a battle of the Korean War that resulted in a decisive victory and
strategic reversal in favor of the United Nations Command (UN) in 1950. As a result of this battle, South Korea
recaptured Seoul, its capital.

校で、高校はK学園。グランマー[66]は朝鮮学校行ってもいいと思っていた
けど。朝鮮学校にあんまり母はいいイメージ持っていないんです。」

This series of narratives imply that Miho could articulate why she ended up coming to school based on her family history. At the same time, I do not see the sign of her individual agency when choosing schools. On the one hand, Miho is a good student who could observe and explain her family's trajectories and their wish for Miho's education. The complicated family history and their preferences on education demonstrate how rich and diverse the individual lives in contemporary Japan and how she appreciates it. However, as for her school choice, she did not seem to exert her own taste that is different from her family member, if any.

But after becoming a high school student, she starts to show her agency. While Miho was generally content with her school life, there was a time when she and her mother seriously thought about leaving KIS. When she was in second year of high school, she noticed that the school management—including finances –was very unstable. At that point, her mother gave her a brochure about transferring to other high schools. But in the end, she decided to "believe" in the school and see how things go. Being president of student council was another reason to stay at school at that moment.

> "One time, when I was second year in high school, I noticed how unstable the management of this school is, and at that time my parents brought me some brochures about transferring (to another high school). I was really worried if this school could survive with this unstable foundation and management, but decided to believe in the school a bit more. I was also president of student council back then, and that also made me decide to stay."
> 「一回高二の時に、学校の基盤のゆるさを見たときに、親が転入のパンフ を持ってきた。この基盤のゆるさでは、（学校がやって？）行けるのか、 って思っていけど、もう少し信じてみようかなと思った。学生会長をして いたから残ろうと思った、ってのもある。」

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[66] In Japanese, Miho calls her mother's mother *guranma*., the *katakana* pronunciation of grandmother.

Even if her mother suggested that Miho transfers to another school, she chose to stay. Her being in a responsible position among students also made her consider to stay. When thinking about her future education plans, her parents exert the importance influence in deciding her choice. While she wants to speak English fluently, she also does not mind coming back to a Japanese university after finishing up two years of college in the U.S., partly because "My parents say it is okay to come back after two years. Maybe I transfer to the Japanese university after that." [親も別に２年後に戻ってきてもいいって言っているし、その後は別に日本の大学に編入してもいいかなって] It seems that for her, doing good discussion seems to be a crucial part for her rather than speaking English fluently. She kept mentioning that going to the U.S. is "to do the serious and genuine discussion [本気の討論]. [67]

Miho's narrative about her past and future educational choices demonstrates the transition from family preference to the more intersectionlaities of decision-making. Her coming to KIS from junior high school strongly reflects her parents involvement. As a in-group student

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[67] Currently, she is not sure about what kind of choices she should make in relation to being international. While she asserts that she does not have any concerns for her future, learning English has been daunting sometimes. Compared to Korean which she learned quickly during her primary education at the South Korean school "without trying hard" [気がついたら喋れるようになっていた], she confessed that she sometimes loses her confidence and motivation to learn English. Even though she has gone to international kindergarten and studied English hard since Junior high school, her TOEFL score was barely the minimum to pass the cut-off for the community college. She jokingly said that her score is "like a trash compared" to mine [カスみたいなもんです]." Her confidence took a serious hit when she went to Vietnam for an international high school student conference. The other participants from the U.S., Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam all spoke English better than she did. Although her mother helped her get through that moment, she still considers if she should continue studying English, wondering if her inability to master it might mean its just not cut out for her. "There are many kinds of minorities in the world—Korean Japanese is not only 'the minority' in the world. In the U.S., there are many ethnic groups, so I think I can be just one of the minorities. In that environment, I want to engage in serious discussions."「私ら（在日コリアン）だけがマイノリティじゃなくて、世界にはいろんな種類の人間がいる。アメリカっていろんな民族がいるから、自分も一マイノリティとしていられると思う。そんな中で、本気の討論がしてみたい。」While she does not have many American friends, she hopes to do engage in a discussion in the U.S., possibly with other ethnic minorities. To be conscious about her being minority, and gain knowledge and experiences of talking about it—is also what her parents hope her to embody. While Miho is being active about pursuing her own interest and desire, those motivations are strongly affected by her parents' educational policies and hopes.

of KIS, her family guided her choices based on her ethnicity and future opportunities. But after becoming a high school student, she showed more of her own preference to stay at KIS even if her parents implied that could switch schools. Miho's episode is a good example to illustrate how in-group students receive support from their family, without huge traumatic experiences at mainstream schools. In-group students also do not show their own preference at the point of entering junior high school

In contrast, students who come to non-mainstream schools after junior high school tend to have more traumatic experiences. In the next section, I introduce Haruka and her father's narratives regarding how they came to refuse mainstream institutions and sought alternative choices under some restrictions. They also thought about choosing the Forest of Freedom School for Haruka but ended up choosing KIS because of geographical proximity and Haruka's interest.

Haruka and her Father—Trajectories and Transformations of a Former School Refuser

In many cases, when students say that pursued their interests, those directions are carefully guided by their parents. Next, I examine the narrative from a student and her father about her path to KIS. While Japanese parents are the minority at KIS, they tend to play outsized roles among the parents, such as being president of the Parents' Association. This is partly because these Japanese parents are highly interested in education. For Japanese nationals, sending their children to an international school where the majority of students are of Korean ancestry, is unusual. Therefore, parents that make such a choice tend to be highly interested in education itself or already hold jobs in the field of education. In the course of my research, I found ethnically Japanese parents were easier to approach, and were more likely to welcome my

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questions, compared to parents of Korean ancestry who tended to be cautious about being interviewed by a Japanese national.

At KIS, I was able to interview Haruka, a first-year in high school student and her father. After experiencing traumatic incidents at elementary school, she stopped going to school for several years, including three years of junior high school. Observing their daughter's maladaptation to mainstream school, her parents looked for many options, including a correspondence program [通信制] for her high school. They lived in a rural area and, due to this geographical restriction and other financial challenges, the father was mainly looking for public schools with dormitories, but ended up settling on KIS (which is private).

Haruka's narrative exemplifies how educational choices are made with parents' guidance and students' individual preferences. When I interviewed Haruka, she told me that she decided to come to KIS based on her own will. But when I also talked with her parents, it turned out to be that her father and mother played huge roles in that decision. With me, Haruka did not talk much about her experiences of being a school refuser [登校拒否児] for several years. However, her father explained that her troubles in mainstream school were so significant to make them look for alternative options for high school. By paring both Haruka's narrative and her father's, I found that her maladaptation to mainstream school, mainstream education's militaristic characteristics, Haruka's refusal of those educational philosophies and pedagogies, and her parents' past and present experiences and stances to education all contributed to Haruka's decision choosing KIS over other options.

Haruka's Narrative—Interest-based School Search and Dislike to the Public School

Haruka is one of the students in whom I observed a positive transformation over the four months of my stay. At KIS, she is one of the few students who do not have ethnic roots in Korea. In 2019, she entered KIS high school and started to live in the dormitory. Before I talked with her, I saw her always wearing a facial mask and she did not show any signs of emotion. I was taking a Korean class with her (we were both in the intermediate level) and it was obvious that the teacher pays extra attention when calling on her. Whenever she answered, I could barely hear her. My observation was echoed in the meeting log of teachers. I saw a note listing Haruka as "one of the most concerning students" and telling teachers to pay extra attention to her due to her long history of school refusal.[68] After a while, Haruka and I became closer when I started to visit the dormitory once in a week. I had dinner together with students and took a Chinese class taught by the dormitory manager. Haruka and I also shared our experiences of having orthodontics because one time, she told me that she wore masks so as not to show her braces to others. However, about a month later, I saw her without a facial mask, laughing with other students.

Toward the end of the semester, she agreed to an interview, and I heard her reflections on education, school culture in Japan, and her interest to Korea. When she was in JHS1, she started to like BTS (a popular Korean boys' idol group) and started to write about them on Twitter. Then the internet right-wingers [ネット右翼] started to harass her online, blaming her liking Korean idols. She wondered "why there are such terrible people in the world?" [なんでこんなひどい人たちがいるんだと思って] and started to be interested in human rights and racial

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[68] "She is the most concerning student. In junior high school, she just went to health-care room and took classes separately from other students. She might be stressed out by living in the dormitory and attending all classes now" [最も心配な生徒。中学時代は保健室登校、別室指導。本人が希望して KIS に進学。現在寮に住んで全てのクラスに出席しているのは本人にとって相当ストレスなはず].

discrimination. Then she decided to learn not only the language but also the history and human

rights of both Japanese and Korea, and chose to come to KIS. For her, KIS was attractive as it

teaches Korean Japanese history in its curriculum. Over time, she noticed that ultra-right wingers

on the internet cannot understand English so she thought English would help understand

international relationships and things in general. She thinks that just believing everything

published by the Japanese media makes people biased, so she wants to read overseas news to

understand the situation better.

For her, foreignness seems to be crucial for being a better education. She feels the current

education is Japan does not have good parts and is too militaristic. According to her, in overseas

school, it is important to say one's opinion but in Japan, on the other hand, everybody has the

same opinion. Therefore, they just listen to the opinion of majority and do not listen to the

minorities, and she does not like it.

> "if you say something a bit different, you are picked on as "KY" (meaning you are
> lacking the ability to read the room and do or say what is expected;
> 空気を読めない) and that's very insidious [陰湿]."
> 「日本の学校は軍国主義的だと思う。海外の学校では自分の意見を言うの
> が重要だけど、日本では何か人とちょっと違うことを言ったら、KY と呼
> ばれていじめられて。そのやり方がすごく陰湿」

Although Haruka does not have a first-hand experiences of going to foreign schools [海

外の学校], she imagines that those schools require being more eloquent to express one's

opinions. While her statement of Japanese schools being militaristc should be based on her own

experiences (which was more elaborated later by her father), Haruka idealizes the foreign school

as a place for better human interactions.

She emphasizes the difference of school culture between KIS the public schools she

attended. Acknowledging that there are some ongoing problems at school, she feels that people

at KIS are more open to talking about problems rather than just hiding them. She also likes to do "deep talk' [深い話] with her peers. She juxtaposes her opinions about public school students who just write down the class contents in their notebooks and reluctantly say their opinion when needed; but at KIS, she thinks students express their thoughts so that is interesting and different from what she had experienced earlier. Somehow, she idealize "overseas schools [海外の学校]" where people are supposed to express their own opinions,[69] and she applies that image to KIS where people are more open to talk about problems, rather than avoid talking about them.

Another Perspective—A Father's Trajectory to Find a Better Place for His Daughter

Compared to Miho, Haruka's mother seems to be less active for guiding her school choices, and her father is more influential. While Haruka mainly talked about how she chose her high school based on her interests, her father gave a more holistic explanation of why Haruka came to this school.[70] I interviewed him when Haruka's family came to school to attend their sports festival. Himself graduated from Kyoto University, the top university in western Japan, he runs non-profit organization for local community building, as well as teaching community development and sociology in some universities part-time. Having been chair of Parents' Committee at school [PTA会長] for a long time, he felt public schools in Japan are problematic. His story included details that Haruka had not shared, especially about her traumatic experiences

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[69] Not only Haruka, but also others students at KIS but also students in my other fieldsites sometimes said similar things.

[70] She told me that her mother will support what she wants to do "as long as she does not commit a crime." Her mother told her that, when she was younger, she had to give up many things due to financial limitations and would like Haruka to learn what she wants to pursue "My mother told me that she had to give up what she wanted to do because of the financial difficulties, so she wants me to do whatever I want to do."
「お母さんがもともとやりたいことがいっぱいあったけど、お金があってできなかったのもあって、自分の子どもには好きなことをさせようと思っていた。」

with public school teachers.

> "In some situations, like sports festival, I felt school is extremely militaristic [軍国主義的] but it became crucial at one point. It was when Haruka was in her 4th grade…She was harassed by her Homeroom teacher. Until then, I told her to go to school (even if she does not want to). Haruka is serious and hard-working [真面目だから] so she was made to be a group leader [班長]. Whenever her group members did something wrong, all group members took responsibility altogether [連帯責任]. If anybody did not do their homework, all group members are scolded repeatedly. After three months, she refused to go to school."
> 「運動会などで、軍国主義的でやばいかなとは思っていたけど、あるときに決定的になった。小学校4年生のHR担任から異変が起こり始めた。ハラスメントを受けて。それまでは学校には行けと行っていた。はるかは真面目なので、班長にされ、何事も連帯責任にされていた。全員HWをやらないと繰り返し怒られる。7月から不登校になった。」

Although Haruka had noticed the militaristic aspect of their pedagogy, it wasn't until she was harassed by her homeroom teacher to take responsibility for all of her groups members' mistakes that she stopped going to school. This group-oriented discipline [連帯責任] is commonly observed in Japanese mainstream schools, and what Haruka and her father indicate as "militaristic." At first, Haruka's father forced her to go to school, but the harassment by the homeroom teacher finally made her school refusal.

Haruka's did not fit in the image of typical school refuser. The family also sought an alternative study space [フリースペースのようなところ] for those who do not go to school. But Haruka was too good to be there.

> "One day, we got a document (documenting her as being incapable to go to school) so we tried going to a space for school refusers. After spending some time there, the support staff said, 'She is not the kind of kid who needs to be coming here.' According to them, Haruka can study and read by herself. The space is not for those kinds of kids…If she can study by herself, she does not need to come."
> 「診断書ができたので、不登校の子のためのスペースにも行ってみたが『この子はうちに来る子じゃない』と言われた。どういうことかというと、『はるかちゃんは自分で勉強を始めたり本を読んだりできるから、そ

ういう子のためのスペースではない』ということ。自分で勉強できるなら
ここに来なくてもいい、と。」

According to the employee of free space, the space is not for those who could learn by themselves. Here, we clearly see an example of common attitudes toward alternative schools as only for those who are incapable of studying or working by themselves, rather than a positive choice that a capable student might actively choose. Those study spaces are for children who cannot focus on studying or need to catch up with classes. If they are too capable, such as being able to study by themselves, they are not accepted in those spaces. While Haruka could not be part of the mainstream school by dropping out of it, she also did not fit in with what refusals should be—those should be struggling to catch up with the mainstream curriculum. According to those who manage alternative schools in Osaka area, they could get some subsidization from the local government if they present their space or "school" as a remedial program—to help students going back to mainstream education. But if the school actively pursues the "alternative value" that could conflict with mainstream ones, the public funding tends to be withdrawn.

School's location was also important for the family. Managing money and costs were also important for the family as they made a decision. The father's sister who lives near the Forest of Freedom School suggested that Haruka goes there, but he found that it was too far expensive for them.[71] Therefore, they targeted schools that are 1) public and 2) have dormitories. However, they ended up sending Haruka to KIS which is private, but close to their home.

> "Actually, my sister who lives in Saitama Prefecture suggested that Haruka goes to the Forest of Freedom School, commuting from her house. But after I did a quick search, I found that going there is financially challenging. Then we narrowed down the options to the public schools that have a dormitory, but we ended up coming to a private school."

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[71] At the Forest of Freedom School, It costs about $10,000 to attend per year. In addition, commuting passes could cotst $50-100 per month.

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「妹が埼玉に住んでいて、はるかは自分のところから自森に行ったらどうかと提案してきたが、少し調べてみると、自森はちょっと経済的にきついかなと。それからは公立で、寮があるところという基準で選んでいたのですが、結局私立に来てしまいましたね。」

Even though KIS is private and costs almost the same as the Forest of Freedom School, they could easily drive to KIS from their home (in two hours). That enabled the family to send Haruka to KIS. He also mentioned that compared to the dormitory at KIS looked much cleaner than other schools as it was built relatively recently. This point partly suggests that geographical proximity is essential for some families even if they send their children to school dormitories.

Aside from escaping from the mainstream educational, he values the curriculum of KIS. He believes that it's important to study foreign languages at a young age. Therefore, he thinks interacting with Korean Japanese people would be beneficial for his daughter's intellectual development. He hopes his daughter can gain the ability to converse with others who hold different opinions, rather than ditching such relationships. He reflects that in high school and college, he was surrounded by people with similar background and mindsets. Therefore, he wants his daughter to be with people with diverse backgrounds. He already started searching for possible colleges. But all in all, he thinks "dialogue ability [対話力]" and "communication ability [コミュニケーション能力]" are important to survive in the society.

"As for the language learning, it would not be realistic to learn in one's 40's or 50's because of the absorption (of the language would be less). I think the most important skill that should be nurtured is "dialogue ability" [対話力]. It is similar to communication ability [コミュニケーション能力]. It is an ability to be able to talk with someone who are different from you, and you need know your role (in the group) [自分の役割を知ることが大事]. You need to understand how to navigate your discussion. We (father and mother) started to understand it in the latter part of our life and I think that skill is important aside from being rich. In Japan, people do not have this ability and people just express extreme opinions. For example, if people think PTA (Parents and Teachers Association in mainstream schools) is a problem, they should think about how to change the

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organization rather than just abolishing it. I want Haruka to notice those things earlier than we did (he and his wife)."

「言語に関しては、やはり 40 代や 50 代で学習しようと思っても無理があ
りますよね。吸収の問題で。（将来に備えるために重要な能力は何か？と
いう問いに対して）自分は「対話力」だと思う。それは「コミュニケーシ
ョン能力」と似ている。自分と違う人と話せて、かつ自分の役割を知るこ
とができる力。議論の進め方を知っていて欲しい。自分たちは（人生の）
後になって知ったから。自分の中で、金銭的価値以外にこれが重要だと思
っている。そして日本社会の中で欠けているのがそこだと思う。極論ばか
りが出ている。例えば、PTA が問題なら、「なくす」ではなくて、どう
変えることができるのかを知るべき。そこで、多様な人たちと、多様な経
験を通じて知ることが大事だと思った。そういうことに、自分たちよりも
早く気付くべき。」

In this narrative, he somehow juxtaposes foreign language proficiency with dialogue ability [対話力]and communication ability [コミュニケーション能力]. To train Haruka’s communication ability, he thinks being surrounded by those different from her and knowing her own place would be beneficial. Based on his experience at PTA, he indicates that in Japanese society, people do not know how to discuss and how to improve the current situation. He wishes Haruka to nurture the ability by interacting with diverse kinds of people.

The narratives by Haruka and her father show that even if students framed the experience of coming to school based on their choices, it is not solely on their own choice. We know that even if Haruka talked about choosing KIS based on her own negative experiences and interests, her father’s narrative clarifies that her choices and directions are also heavily affected by the support of her parents, especially the father. At the same time, she exerts her agency in the process of choosing school. Over the course of choosing a school, Haruka and her parents visited a public high school in Tsushima (the island in west Japan) where they teach Korean. However, as it is a public school, the curriculum was not that different from others schools except that fact that students can learn Korean as an elective. The pedagogies and atmosphere were rather

rigorous (similar to Haruka's public school) and their English education was not strong. For Haruka's father, this school looked good because it is public, has a dormitory, and close to his relatives. But ultimately, she refused to go to the public school in Tsushima Island because she also wanted to learn about human rights and study English—and partly because she wanted to refuse the institutional culture of mainstream public schools which made her suffer for a long time. Haruka's case embodies the intersections of Japanese mainstream schools' problems, individual refusals to that institutional culture, and parents' educational policies, finance, to form the action of alternative choices.

The gap between Haruka and her father's narratives shows how each person frames narratives to manage their impressions. Haruka did not talk much about her difficulties in mainstream schools and being a school refusal for a long time. Instead, she framed coming to KIS based on her academic interest, possibly to show the better side of herself to me. While Haruka briefly mentioned her mother supporting her, she did not touch her father. On the other hand, her father emphasized that he guided Haruka's educational choice. Both stories are true, but they have different thoughts on her choice and intentions to reveal their stories.

At the same time, in the case of KIS, I would like to emphasize that joining the school is could also be by the pressure from the mainstream society. One day, after I talked with a member of the staff regarding my employment contract for teaching English, he told me about what he thinks about my research. Knowing that I am doing a research on how people are choosing alternative education in Japan, he expressed his concern that the term "choice [選択]" might not be appropriate. Having been in charge of recruiting students, he met many parents of Korean ethnicity whose kids are school refusers. He shared that he was also worrying about whether he should send his kids to Japanese school given the risk for bullying. Only in that moment, did I

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understand that he too was Korean Japanese. Before that, I had no idea and he used only his Japanese name even at KIS. He emphasized that people come to KIS not only by choice, but also the potential concern of being discriminated against—which I believe totally reasonable. A false dichotomy between choice and force is not what I aim to present. Instead, in these examples, I see a combination of the two—such as parents' guidance vs. students' individual will. Social norms and normative expectations create many things that parents and students must navigate, pushing some people turn to alternative education. Being Korean Japanese, and navigating the potential risks that brings, is one of those factors. In this case, people might feel that it is more about a force that drove them to turn to alternative school choice, but still, those individuals try to navigate themselves for what they think their better well-being.

Parents at C High School: Hard to See or Meet

Although I could find some parents' opinions regarding their educational choices on the internet forum and magazine articles, I did not have direct contact with parents at School C. My position as a teaching assistant allowed me to know deeply about how school was managed and was shifting day by day, but at the same time, contacting parents individually was prohibited. Based on my conversations with students, their narratives were similar to those at the Forest of Freedom School and KIS—they experienced school refusal because of a teacher's harassment, or because they were being bullied. A few students were especially interested in programming and the flexible curriculum C High School offers. A future project could focus on those advanced students in correspondence high school, but at the same time, those cases might substantially overlap with C High School's policy of producing elites through the possible least investment, which I introduce in the next chapter.

Generally, those promotional pieces by C High School on the internet emphasize the flexibility of the school day (learning time) and the curriculum, just slightly touching on how the school accommodates those who could not go to junior high school. For example, the pedagogical style within C High School asks students to watch recorded videos, which suits those who did not go to school and need to review the basics. When I attended a public seminar at C High school for prospective students and their parents in August 2019, it was fully booked online, and parents and kids have to be together to enter the room. If parents or students arrived alone, they could not enter the seminar room.[72] The seminar mainly emphasized how C High School is inexpensive and flexible—if you choose online courses, it is less than $2000 per year, and students have a wide range of courses to take to fulfill their interests. Students at C High School could reduce the class hours by passing online exams and for the rest of time, they can use time to focus on their interests. It is likely that C High School also appeals to students who are former school refusers and their parents. At the same time, school's flexible curriculum also targets some students who want to pursue something other than school study, or students who are "too good" to go to mainstream schools.

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[72] I asked the head teacher in my school building to let me attend this seminar, and I received a permission to be there.

Conclusion

Choosing alternative school for one's secondary education is the mixture of student's individual motivations and how parents support and navigate their children's choices. Especially students who choose to go to these schools starting in junior high school are likely to reflect their parents' educational preferences. Those students starting from high school show more complicated combinations of the parents' and students' will. Haruka's case illustrates how her parents guided her educational choices, while she ultimately made a decision between the schools they identified.

Not only Haruka, but also many students I met who joined alternative schools in high school tend to have experienced difficulties in public junior high school. These students need to "catch up" with those who joined from junior high school to learn the school culture, which sometimes becomes disadvantages as they try to participate in school life. The dynamics between those first wave and second wave students become important when analyzing interpersonal dynamics at school, and how that affects the image of ideal students at each school. At these three schools, parents impact schools by 1) sending students to school 2) affecting how students behave at school and 3) being key actors at events and festivals in various ways.

It is actually the combination of the two—such as parents' guidance and students' individual will, and the society creates the bigger layer of navigation or force to make certain kinds of people, such as school refusals, ethnic minorities, or those who want to go beyond the regular Japanese way of learning, turn to alternative education.

Chapter 5 **Ideals, Realities, and Conflicts in Three Schools**

Introduction: The ideology of Ideal Students

In this chapter, I discuss how images of ideal students are narrated among people at each

school. In each school, there are certain educational goals and slogans to express their

pedagogical goals, which are sometimes vague or hard to achieve. Even though students,

teachers, and parents do not agree on a single figure of what makes an "ideal student," images of

this aspiration character entice conversations about the school. Moreover, students, teachers, and

parents interact with each other to create the image of ideal students – it is a contradictory,

moving target and created through social interactions. While teachers and sometimes teaching

assistants are powerful figures to evaluate and manage students' interactions at school, their

images of ideal student do not always overlap with what students think is cool. Among students,

those who joined a school from junior high school level (and their parents), compared to those

who arrived later, tend to be more powerful in setting what seems ideal. Interpersonal

interactions between students and teachers, and students and students, are influenced by the

school cultures they belong to. At the same time, these daily interactions create their school

cultures.

Furthermore, at each school, these images of ideal students routinely abut against

conflicts and tensions. Oftentimes, when people narrate these tense events, or try to intervene to

address a problem, they refer to their ideal image of education. In each classroom, there are

unique dynamics that emerge as a crystallization of their school culture. To examine how people

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are dealing with, and talking about, problems I analyze dramas, conflicts, and tensions at three

schools, which provide a particularly helpful vantage point from which to see how educational

ideals play out in practice. When people try to establish a new mode of education, people

imagine the new, better education based on what they already know. As long as these gaps

between ideal and reality exit, some people imagine, practice, and create new alternative

educations.

This chapter consists of three parts. First, I introduce the common characters (all real

people) at the schools—what kind of students, teachers, and parents are there and how they

contribute to create the school culture. Then I go into detail about what actually happens at

school—what kind of students are perceived as plausible, and how people are making sense of

educational goals and philosophies in each school. I also discuss how evaluations are conducted,

such as how gradings and other forms of evaluation are being practiced. Lastly, I analyze

moments of trouble and tension that happened at each school, which expose how the schools'

ideals are challenged or maintained in daily lives.

Ideals, Realities, and Conflicts in Three Schools

In each school, there are some patterns of ideal students, and those images are strongly

related to what schools advocates for their educational goals, and how they evaluate students. My

fieldwork suggested that each school has its educational ideals and ongoing realities that do not

always accord with their goals and philosophies. For example, expressing themselves actively at

the Forest of Freedom School, being multilingual and open minded at KIS, and being

independent and productive at C High School, are the specifically imagined to be important

among people in each school.

But those images are not monolithic and completely fixed. They also keep changing as students change every year and being challenged by students. Of course, compared to elite schools that has established traditions, ideal students' images are blury and contexual in my target schools (alternative schools). In the following sections, I discuss how each school pursues to achieve its educational goals and how those top-down notions are negotiated among teachers, students, and parents. Then I analyze chow conflicts and tensions in each school embody the reality of education.

<div align="center">Freedom Enticing Conversations</div>

In general, at the Forest of Freedom School, the term freedom [自由] represents their no-instruction policy. Their concept of freedom in education was drastic when the mainstream education was more rigorous and justifying corporal punishment in 1980's, when the school was established. As the mainstream education in Japan has somehow incorporated the words such as respecting individual uniqueness [個性の尊重] or relaxed education [ゆとり教育], the concept of freedom less stood out. That was one of the big concerns among teachers when I interviewed some of them in 2016. But still, the term freedom [自由)] is a powerful concept among those who talk about the school.

Although nobody agrees with a single concrete definition of what freedom means, the term functions to spark conversations among students, teachers, parents, alumni, and those who talk about the school. When I asked the HS2 teacher whose class I was observing, he said it is important to think about it, rather than finding a singular answer for three or six years:

"I do not have a definite answer to the question about what the freedom is. I think it is more important that each one of us think about its meaning for three or six years."
「自由とは何か、っていうのに（自分の）明確な答えはないですね。むしろ、３年間なり６年間かけて、その意味について一人一人が考えていくのが大事かなと思います。」

He emphasizes the importance of keep thinking about the meaning of freedom. His words make sense when I interact with students, teachers, and parents at this school. While they do not come to the exact definition of what freedom is, "freedom" is their common language for them̶they always talk about freedom on a daily basis, and that entices the conversations among them. This phenomenon is somewhat contrastive to KIS. At KIS, people also do not define the term "trans-border citizen [越境人]," but people talk about it much less in their daily lives. Maybe freedom is much easier to talk about for various topics.

Having been a school refuser himself, he wanted to contribute to education. He was once working for a public high school but felt what he was doing was not right—the overall pedagogy and school culture seemed to be too coercive. He was wondering to continue his job or not, his colleague told him about the Forest of Freedom School. Observing him to teach classes and manage his homeroom class, he has a clear sense of rejecting mainstream educational norms but does not actively impose his thoughts to students.

As what freedom means differs for each person, the figure of ideal student could change over time. According to some teachers, students were more active and thoughtful about 30 years ago. One teacher recalled:

"When this school was fresh from being established, students' eyes were sharper (they seemed to be hostile) and they were aggressive. The current students are, for better or worse, milder"

「開校当初に来た子達は、目つきが鋭くて、本当に攻撃的だった。今の子は、良くも悪くもおとなしい子が増えましたね」

When the coercion of mainstream schools was harsher, students had more urge to refuse it, and sought for an alternative way of learning and living. On the other hand, nowadays students do not seem to have a strong sense of refusing the mainstream education compared to those day. As Sachiko-san, indicates, some parents send their children here because of school's relaxed attendance policy, rather than the uniqueness of its history and pedagogy.

At the same time, people think about how they live a life, rather than which college they go to. Many students' concerns and interests seem to be about themselves such as what they like to do, or not. Signiant amount of conversation among teachers and among students is about how students are doing. When I attended the parents' meeting of HS2, most of the conversations are about how their students are doing and who did what to prepare for the school festival. Nobody spoke about the school curriculum or entrance examination, which seemed to be very different from what people in other schools do.

In other words, students need to find something they. Devote themselves to, rather than acing in classes they take. The following post on the internet forum indicates the tip to take advantage of "opportunities" which school offers.

Figure 20: A Post on the Internet Forum

"Everyone's High School Information" [みんなの高校情報]

<Translation>
Current student/Matriculated in 2016
(Title) Seemingly free, but more rigorous than you expect
Posted on December 2016
[Rules1, Frequency of bullying 1, extra-curricular activities 3, college admission 3, school facilities 2, uniform 3, school events 2]
Total evaluation
"For those who actively [しっかり] think about what they want to do after the graduation, this is a great place. You could have many opportunities. On the contrary, those who go to school without any big goals cannot take advantages of chances. But there are many people who have a history [わけあり] such as being bullied or school refuser at elementary school and junior high school, so you can be friends with similar students. I feel comfortable being here because I do not need to worry about being the same with others. I also like the time being in the school bus."

The post says two things 1. You can get chances if you know what you want to do—if you are not determined, you waste your opportunities. 2. Students here tend to have been bullied or school refusals. While skipping classes is tolerated at the Forest of Freedom School, just having a lackluster lifestyle is not the goal of this school. Basically, the ideal student in this school need to take advantage of freedom, not to be spoiled by it. For instance, they need to devote themselves to something, and actively participates in school lives and events. It might sound contradictory that at the school which advocate for freedom, students feel pressure to do

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something. However, reading the writings by students and alumni, as well as listening to what students say, I found that the ideology of "finding something to devote oneself to" is powerful and looming. For example, many alumni mentioned that they had a peer pressure to "find something which you can devote yourself to [卒業までに何かやりたいことを見つけなきゃ、ってプレッシャーはあった。それが見つからないとちょっとダメ（なやつ）って感じ]. Even if you do not need to attend classes or prepare for college, you have to find something to focus on.

Ironically, these narratives suggest that being free does not mean that students could be free from any sorts of work at school. If students just indulge in this relaxed mood, they just waste their three years. This means that students who are active to pursue something they love, tend to feel like they are somehow on the right track. At the same time, some notice that freedom always comes with responsibility. For example, one student told me that it is impossible to enjoy school only by coming sporadically because you have to do something until the end (once you decide to do). When you prepare for school events, if you stop coming in the middle, it means you just gave it up.

Another point is that those who came to the Forest of Freedom School from junior high school [内部生 *naibusei*] feels more eligibility than those from high school [外部生 *gaibusei]*. In some situation, students notice that they are from different cultures depending on your junior high school. For example, when we take a P.E. class, we need to come to the gymnastics building after the lunch break. I was always the very first one waiting at the corner of the building before the teacher comes, and Sayaka (on page 92) tends to be the next. One time, she joked that we cannot rip off the culture of public school from ourselves [公立の学校行くと、

どうしてもね]. Sayaka knows that being punctual is not much a required norm at this school, but based on her educational background, she still tries to be on time after spending more than 1.5 years at the Forest of Freedom School. Those who came to public school tend to be more on-time, or sit still when waiting for something. But those from junior high school practice "Forest of Freedom School Time [自森タイム] which is sometimes 20 minutes late. They also show more carefree behaviors such as leaving classrooms or doing something else while teacher is talking. But those behaviors are not perceived as a big problem to be solved.

Students also narrates the difference of these two groups more directly. For instance, one day, I was taking bus which arrives at school around 12:30. Every time I took this bus, I saw some students attending school from the afternoon.[73] On the way to school, from the bus stop, one *naibusei* student told me that the school culture changed after he became a high school student.

> "Things have changed after I became a high school student. It's like you have to be more sensitive about what others are thinking. The current HS2 has many *gaibusei* because of the government subsidization. *Gaigusei* tend to ditch the (human) relationships once they feel that they are not a good match each other. They seem to be avoiding conflicts, and we do not have a serious and fierce interactions."
> 「高校に入ってから色々変わってしまった。空気を読まなければいけない、みたいな。今の高二は助成金の関係もあって74、外部生が多い。外部生は、合わなかったら（人間関係を）切る、って感じで、そこで終わってしまう。争いごとを起こしたくなさそうな感じで、ぶつかり合いがない。」

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[73] In the morning, there are school buses which goes directly to school, but if you are late, you need to take a public bus. But it costs about $6 for round trip, and you need to talk for 20 minutes after getting off the bus. Some parents complained their kids getting up late because that also means they have to pay for the bus fee.

[74] In 2018, the Japanese government and Saitama prefecture decided to support the family who send their children to high school. Therefore, the expenses to send children to private high school was mitigated.

He feels that *gaibusei* tend to avoid conflicts, and just cut out the relationship when they do not get along each other. *Naibusei,* on the other hand, tend to be more vocal and prefer discussion or talking to each other—respecting the culture of dialogue [対話] is one of the characteristics of this school but those from high school seem to have a bit of difficulties in practicing it. Usually, *naibusei*, who already know how to practice school's institutional culture, tends to be more advantageous in social life at school. Still, he somehow feels overwhelmed by the fact that "things have changed" at high school.

The ratio might help to understand these dynamics. Only 25 percent of HS2 students (as of 2019) are from junior high school, and number wise, those who came from junior high school becomes minority. One of the narratives by a *gaibusei* boy resonates with the narrative above. He does not feel comfortable in his own homeroom class and tend to hang out with students in the class where I was allowed to interact. According to him, he is careful about speaking up and communicating in his own homeroom class [2組ではうまくやれていないから、あまりしゃべらない方がいいかなと思っている。クラスの中心になるのは面倒だし]. He prefers to remain silent because he know that he is not in a comfortable position do communicate freely with others in his own homeroom class. He also wants to avoid being the center of interaction in his homeroom class.

In addition to daily lives, some school events show what are special about this school, and what are features as symbols of school. It is notable that at the Forest of Freedom School, people think highly of expression oneself by speaking, singing, or performing. One of the school's highlights is music festival [音楽祭] in December. It will be conducted for two full days, and according to many students it means "more important than school festival [文化祭]."

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Usually, school festival is the biggest events at Japanese high school, but at the Forest of Freedom School, music festival seems to be more important for students as that is an event of students, by students, for students. Especially those who are committee members [実行委員], and those who do MC for the performers are perceived as cool and ideal students. One of the alumni who came to the music festival as an elementary school students recalled that he was surprised that high school students are tactfully doing their MC in front of everybody [高校生が全校生徒の前でかっこよく MC をやる、ってのが衝撃的だった] at school.

In the following section, I discuss two students to describe how students imagine ideal figure of the Forest of Freedom School student vis-à-vis their interactions with peers, family, and teachers. Akira-kun fits the image of ideal students, but he worried about the gap between this school and the world outside of it. Taro-kun devote himself to the minor sports league. While devoting oneself to one's passion seems to fit into the plausible image of this school, his lack of participation in school activities made him somewhat marginalized.

Akira-kun: The Versatile Student

While being different from others is forgiven at the Forest of Freedom School, the school also advantages some types of students behavior. For example, Akira-kun seems to be doing pretty versatile and being liked by teachers. Using the polite speech style [敬語] naturally when approaching me, he stood out among others who use casual speech style to everyone. One day, when I was strolling around school after class, I found him practice San-shin, a traditional guitar in Okinawa, Japan. Allowing me to play the instruments for a while, he told me that in this

school, you need to "have an ability to gather people [人を集める力が必要]." When I asked for

the clarification, he continued:

> "In this school, you need to make others involve and do something together (with
> you) For that end, you need to find something to devote yourself. It could be
> anything, like traditional Japanese dancing as XXX (name of the student) in our
> class does… If you have something, like playing instruments, people will come to
> you—did you see people around gymnastics after class ? I think they represent
> what this school is. It is those who cannot find it who complain about this
> school…like this school does not prepare students for college exams. (Posing a bit
> before talking) Those who have productive hobbies are great. They can be like
> Gen Hoshino.[75] If not, they start complaining that we do not have any paper tests,
> etc."
> 「この学校では人を巻き込んで、一緒にさせることが大事なんです。その
> ためには、何か打ち込めるものを見つけないといけない。なんだっていい
> んですよ。うちのクラスの XXX がやってる日本舞踊とか。例えば楽器と
> か何か（できることが）あれば、皆集まってくる。 放課後、体育館のと
> ころでダラダラ集まっている人たちは見ましたか？ああいうのが自森っぽ
> いと思います。そういうことができない人が学校に文句言うんですよ。こ
> の学校全然受験の準備してくれないとか。(少し考えながら)生産的な趣味
> がある人はいいんですよ。星野源みたいになれる。そうじゃないと、この
> 学校テストない、とか文句を言い始めるんですよ。」

It is interesting to hear him mention the ability to "*attract others involve in the things*

together" as an alternative ability to, say, academic achievements. In order to nurture this ability,

he suggests that one should find something to devote oneself to, and then attract other by that

ability/performances. He mentions one of his classmates who is a semi-professional dancer of

traditional Japanese dancing [日本舞踊] who sometimes travel to other cities with her team. In

the P.E. class at this school, the entire year is spent to learn traditional Japanese dancing, and that

student sometimes becomes the model performer to show the bodily moves to other students. He

also indicates that those who cannot internalize the school culture here (i.e. find something to

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[75] A popular multi-talented person who is a singer, writer, and musician. He is *naibusei* of the Forest of Freedom
School.

devote oneself) complain about what the school does not offer, such as the school does not conduct any paper tests and prepare students for the college entrance examination.

His words made sense as he interacts with others after school. While we were chatting in the hallway, sitting on the floor playing with *shamisen* (traditional Japanese instrument which Akira-kun was practicing), some students passed by, saying hello to us. Those who cannot feel part of school culture, mainly by not being able to find activities they like, cannot take an active role in the after-class school building. start to complain, and try to pursue different values such as preparing for college exams. But that makes them be in danger of wasting their time because almost all classes are not aiming to prepare students for college entrance examination.

His word endorses what is being written on the internet post which I introduced earlier. The post mentions that "those who go to school without any big goals cannot take advantages of chances." Students do not need to be determined for their goals in the beginning, but at some point for their school life, they must find something they could devote themselves—that might lead you to be something successful such as being a celebrity. Furthermore, school's isolated location makes it hard for students to go to cram school (but some students still go to cram schools a few times in a week). For students, commuting to cram school takes significant amount of time. It is a shared knowledge that the school does not focus on training students for college entrance exams. Therefore, complaining to school regarding its disadvantage to prepare for the college exam—could partly be rebutted as one should know it before choosing to come here. Students need to find something they want to do, but preparing for college entrance examination might not be one of the major goals that school expects them to aim for.

At the same time, Akira-kun's plausible school life—to pursue whatever he likes, is financially supported by his family. One day, Akira-kun, I, and another friend of him were

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chatting in the English teacher's room. When Akira-kun said "my mother always tells me that I should do what I want to do, and my older brother is doing so, too—like going to China," his friend (who is actually Sayaka) asked, jokingly, "well, where does that money come from? [その金はどこから出てくるんだー?]" and Akira-kun was a bit hesitant to answer. Surrounded by a few of good friends like him, he seemed to be enjoying his school life. However, he also confessed to me that he is worried about his future.

> "My brother went to University X (a prestigious national university for studying foreign languages) to major in Chinese studies, and I think I need to prepare for college as I am already HS2…and once I go to cram school, I found that this school's curriculum is very slow, especially math—even though I expected that, it is still shocking."
> 「兄はX大に行って中国語を勉強してて、だから自分ももう高二だし大学への準備しなきゃいけないと思うんだけど…塾に行ってみたら、この学校の進度すごく遅いんですよ。特に数学。やっぱショックですよー。分かってたとはいえ。」

Akira-kun shows his dilemma between enjoying his school life and preparing for college. His bother went to China while being at high school, and successfully connect his interest with his university choice. Although Akira-kun seems to enjoy fitting into the school culture, once he know the world outside school, he was to figure out how to deal with external criteria of evaluation, such as preparation for college entrance examination. Ironically, even he criticizes those who complain about the curriculum of the school, he shares the similar concern when he thinks about his future after the graduation. His narratives show that even students could fit into the culture of alternative school, they cannot be free from the mainstream values, such as college preparation.

Another example shows the importance of participation. Even if you are popular, you cannot be an ideal student if you do not participate in what happening at school. Taro-kun is a tall, sporty-look guy who seems to like wearing Patagonia (a U.S. sports brand popular in Japan). He was always surrounded by other "cool" boys and girls, and popular in class. He seemed to be very inert during classes. I found him often sleeping in class with his towel under his face (which is a sign that he really aims to sleep) or skipping classes. When I asked him why he came to school, his answer was somewhat unexpected. Coming from an expensive residential area in central Tokyo, he is determined to be a professional beach volleyball player. Although beach volleyball is still minor in Japan, he joins the team and spend most of his after-school time for practicing. When I asked why he chose to come to this school, which requires long hours of commuting, he told me that he just wanted to go to "an easy high school [ただ楽な学校に行きたくて]." He has to go to many different practice places depending on the day, and therefore, his mind is "always occupied with the train schedule (to go to those practice places on time)."

Taro-kun's case shows that students need to be selective about what to do to enjoy their school life at this school. Although Taro-kun has something to devote himself, it did not make others "do something together" with him. Compared to playing instruments or dancing, nobody played beach volleyball, and it was not on the school curriculum or extracurricular activity. On the contrary, the boy who is good at Kabaddi (a team sports originated from India) was more influential; he is often featured in the school news, and I could feel that teachers acknowledge his importance. The trick is the Forest of Freedom School promotes Khabaddi among its students, and they always win the tournament in Japan every year. Taro-kun's popularity did not make him a dominant figure in the school life partly because the school did not give any form of

endorsement to his devotion—although people did not frown on him skipping classes or not coming to school, his devotion was more by a solitary manner, and it did not mobilize others to do something together with him.

The lack of his presence and participation in school life also undermined his positions at school events. Him coming to classes and school sporadically also excluded him the official positions for his homeroom class. One day, I overheard the conversations among students regarding who should be committee members [実行委員] for the incoming music festival. Usually, students who are good at being a leader and communicate well with students and teachers are picked, and Taro-kun was one of them. But one student ditched that option saying "because he does not come to school [あいつ学校来ないじゃん]," which was followed by nods from others. His popularity in class did not guarantee him to represent his homeroom class in official settings—such as the music festival.

Taro-kun can be valued as he is, but he cannot be a dominant figure in his homeroom class. Even though he can be cool, he does not participate in the space. Of course, joining school events enthusiastically, or being featured in school news, are not only the way to be an ideal figure at school. There are a few students who became famous after the graduation even though they say they "hated" school and skipped a lot of classes. But at least during being a student, you need to be there, participate in everyday lives at school actively, and cannot step down from it.

Although Akira-kun and Taro-kun are both enjoy being at school, their difference of participation made them be in different positions in their homeroom class. The key to feel comfortable, and to get most out of this school, and the other two schools, is participation. While ditching classes is not being frown much in this school, students must come to school to participate what is going on at school. This is an interest twist as school advocate for freedom but

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in order to be their ideal student, or to be influential, students need to be there physically to participate in what are going on.

Institutional culture differs depending on schools. Therefore, my target schools show different types of narratives to discuss ideal students. In the next section, I analyze how different educational environments affect how to participate in social life at school.

Minority-ness, Ethnicity, and Linguistic Diversity

My fieldwork revealed that for students, KIS was not always their first choice: Some students and parents "had to" choose non-traditional schools because the students could not survive in mainstream schools. In the case of KIS, parents expressed concern about bullying in mainstream Japanese schools or the inadequate education at Korean schools, which suffer serious funding deficits and out-of-date curricula. My fieldwork and reading the book written by one of the founders made me realize that whole the book defines what is the trans-border person, those who are at KIS do not have a monolithic image of definition of trans-border person. But if I were to suggest based on my data, people at KIS tend to imagine the trans-border person as being Fluent in three languages (some said I am real trans-border person [越境人] because I am Japanese who lived in the States and Korea speaking three languages, or doing a lot of extracurricular activities such as doing some volunteer activities. While some actively negates being bilingual or trilingual as a prerequisite of being a trans-border person, it is inevitable to talk about learning language and being a trans-border person.

Curriculum wise, they teach three languages with equal amount of time per week, and parents expect students being fluent in English and Korean in three to six years. However, English teachers were always struggling to improve students' proficiency even though they were

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working very hard on it. When I observed language classes, it was obvious that students pick Korean quicker than English because of the linguistic proximity between Japanese and Korean. Furthermore, there were many students whose parents are from Korea, or who attended Korean school (either North or South) in Japan. One time, I was surprised to hear a boy speaks Korean fluently even though he never seemed to be listening to the class. It turned out that he attended Korean school for his primary education. Although he hated being there, his gained the linguistic proficiency at his younger age, which is very advantageous for language learning.

While multilingual education produces unique resources for students, it also complicates gaps between expectations and realities in school life. During the lunch break, I was sitting in a meeting for an upcoming school festival with students and a teacher at KIS. When the teacher told students that they need to make instructions for visitors in three languages [English, Korean, and Japanese] on how to separate garbage, one student resentfully said:

> Even if we write them in English, no one will read them. We should tell visitors that we actually do not use English here. [Writing in] Korean and Japanese is enough. It is not good to tell a lie [*嘘つくの良くないですよ*]! I feel I was deceived [*むっちゃ騙されたわー*] The school said that they use three languages (at school) but that is not true.
> 「英語で書いたって誰も読まないですよ。来る人に実はうちら英語使わない、って言った方がいいです。コリア語と日本語で十分ですよ。嘘つくの良くないですよ！ナ（韓国語で「私」の意味）むっちゃ騙されたわー。学校は三言語使うっていうけど、全然そんなことないし。」

She points out the contradictions between what school advocates, and how people actually behave at school. Before coming to school, she thought people at KIS use three languages but in reality, very few people use English. She feel that she was deceived after knowing that the school is not actually a trilingual environment. Other students also expressed that their expectations were different from the reality. For example, one student complained that

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there are no international students from Europe, and he thinks those are the "*real* international students [ホントの留学生]." While many students are fluent in Korean, just a few students could communicate in English. KIS teaches English, Japanese, and Korean as the target languages but students and teachers (except native speakers of Korean and English) speak mostly in Japanese. The number of class hours spent on English and Korean are equal (five hours per week). Therefore, timewise they are equally focused on English and Korean.[76] However, because of the linguistic similarities between Korean and Japanese and the presence of some students from South Korea, the student body is more proficient in Korean than English overall.

In addition to linguistic proximities, cultural ties matter for learning the new language. Ethnic connections and family ties turn some students more into Korean, than English. One girl told me that she feels Korea being more familiar to her because her mother is from Korea, and she was familiar to Korean people and Korean culture since her younger age. According to her, English and English-related popular cultures are "too far to imagine, and be interested in [遠すぎてイメージが湧かなくて、興味もあまりない]."

Some students complained about the school environment not being "international" because they only have Koreans. Demographically, most students are of Korean descent, either in part or in full, but the instruction language is Japanese. Almost all interactions among students and teachers are in Japanese as well, except between students and teachers who are both from Korea. As I observed, school regulations (*kôsoku*) such as dress codes or pedagogy seemed to be those of a regular Japanese school. For example, they instruct students to wear uniforms appropriately, as by specifying the length of girls' skirts. Similarly, boys can wear V-neck but

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[76] However, due to the language proximity and ratio of Korean students from Korea, some heritage learners have made KIS students more fluent in Korean than English.

not U-neck sweaters.[77] Teachers also make sure that students perform greetings appropriately before and after class. However, those from other Korean schools told of their surprise when they came to KIS for the first time. If students cannot make certain scores in weekly tests or do not finish their assignment, they have to stay after class. However, students' success does not seem to be their priority. Even in the 12th grade, students do not receive much instruction regarding entrance examinations or the jobs they seek (even though the majority of students aim to continue their study after high school, either in vocational school or college).

In some aspects, the institutional culture at KIS seems to be similar to that of mainstream Japanese school. Although KIS does not aim to make "ideal Japanese citizens" and it offers relaxed classrooms, being at KIS made me feel that this is a school that observes Japanese ways of instruction and only sometimes uses Korean in greetings in certain situation. For example, students are required to greet teachers right before and after class in the Korean language and clean the school by themselves, and, except in some classes such as English, pedagogy is more teacher-centered than student-centered. These characteristics are quite typical of regular Japanese schools, though here sometimes rendered in Korean. Students who are late for school must go to the teachers' room first and report their reason for being late before going to class.

Cleanness also plays a major role. As Japanese schools do not have janitors to clean up the classrooms and hallways, teachers must pay attention to its cleanness. Every day, students need an approval signature from teachers upon finishing their cleaning, and homeroom teachers are picked on if their classrooms are dirty. For example, during class, some students joked about

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[77] For more about how Japanese schools emphasize general comportment and deemphasize rules related to academic honesty, see Hill (1996).

the teacher being on bad terms with the school principal. Later that day, I asked if there were any problems going on. She told me, laughing:

> "Ah, they are talking about the time when I was their homeroom teacher. I think it was…two years ago? I was once scolded by the school principal for leaving the classroom dirty, and those students saw it. They keep talking about it for such a long time. I think they will joke about it until they graduate!"
> 「ああ、あれは私があの子らの担任だった時のこと言ってるんですよ。2年前だったかな？教室が汚いって校長に怒られて、それを見てたんですね。もうずっとそのことについて話してて、これは卒業まで言われるな、って思います。笑」

In other words, making classroom dirty was serious enough that school principal scold the teacher. Their curriculum, instructions, and emphasis embody the eclectic and complex figure of a school still heavily influenced by the Japanese model of education. How then do people inside KIS think about the ideal figure of students?

Newcomers Dreaming of Success in Korea or Elsewhere

After interacting with students for a few months, I noticed that what students think about their future is strongly related to where they came from. Basically speaking, there are differences between oldcomer and newcomer Koreans regarding how they chose KIS, what they feel at school, and what they hope for their future.

Tae-ho is a high school student who came to Japan when he was three years old. Disliking the education in Korea, his parents thought about using the 12-year rule for Tae-ho to enter a Korean university so that he does not need to compete with students educated in Korea. Simply speaking, Korean citizens educated overseas for 12 years can take different entrance examinations for universities in Korea, which makes it much easier to secure admission to highly ranked Korean universities than by taking the general exam designed for Koreans educated in

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Korea. Tae-ho has busy days going to school, cram after class, serving on the student council, and taking extra English classes (taught by me after school). One day after the class, after he asked me questions about how to study English, we chatted for a while. While he is happy about being at KIS, he feels that he needs some sort of "urgency" [危機感] for his future:

> KH: How did you choose to come here [どうしてこの学校に来たの？]
> T: I joined KIS's open campus and thought it was great but…well, it was more like I was forced to come here by my parents. They wanted to use the 12-year rule, and wanted me to study foreign languages, too.
> Author: What do you want to do after the graduation?
> T: My parents came to Japan to take advantage of the 12-year system, so they want me to go to good universities and possibly speak four languages (English, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese), because they say that speaking those four languages makes me a very desirable person in the job market. But sometimes I am not sure if I can trust their words…you know, sometimes you do not want to listen to your parents.
> KH: Why is that?
> T: They came to Japan in their 20s so they can speak Japanese, but no English. Therefore, they do not know much about the English-speaking world.
> KH: So, you want to go to Korean universities, not Japanese universities?
> T: Yes, as I can speak Japanese already, going to a Japanese university is not in my mind, and I was never educated in a Korean institution so far. By using the 12-year rule, it would be great if I could enter either a high-ranked Korean university, or maybe an English-speaking university would be great, too.
> KH: How do you think about the school life at KIS?
> T: Not bad. I like being close to the teachers and talking about whatever I want to talk about. If you went to regular schools, teachers would be too busy to take care of each student. But I feel that I need to have some sort of urgency [危機感]…
> KH: Why is that?
> T: Well, being a high school student myself, I need to decide which direction I will go, and need to decide how to prepare for it. As you can see, this school does not make you prepare for college admission that much, so you need to figure that out on your own. Students are also not studying hard…well, some do though. You know it because you are here for a while, right? I feel that just being here and being content with what you get might not be enough. You know, some students just fool around during class and teachers are sometimes too busy to deal with it. I think it is a waste of time and money.

Tae-ho is thinking about his future mainly based on his privilege of using the 12-year system to secure easier admission to a Korean university. For him, going to Japanese universities

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is not an option because he already speaks Japanese fluently and being in Japan for long enough. While he feels that his parents expect him to go to a highly ranked university, he is not sure how much he should follow their opinion, as they did not follow the same path, such as studying at an international school as he is doing now. Both international students from South Korea and Zainichi students with South Korean nationality use this 12-year rule to enter highly ranked universities in South Korea. This exemplifies how even though KIS tries to transcend national borders, students and parents need to think carefully about their opportunities based on their nationality, and therefore, look for their own best way of education and life choices beyond their current school life.

Zainichi Koreans' Anxiety: Speaking Zainichi-go and English Being "Too Far"

In contrast, oldcomers tend to be more laid back and have rather vague images of their future. Mina is a third-generation Zainichi Korean whose parents went to Korean school in Japan. Mina herself went to Korean school before coming to KIS and has never experienced Japanese school. Being in a last year at high school, she needed to decide her strategy for college admission. However, when we had a conversation at the dormitory cafeteria after dinner, she seemed to be at a loss about where to go.

> Author: So you wanted to talk about college?
> M: Oh, yes, I really cannot decide my major…I cannot even decide which disciplines or type of schools I want to go into…Oh, by the way, do you know X University? One teacher suggested that I apply to it.
> Author: Yes, I know two people who went there, and one is actually from KIS. Do you want me to introduce him to you?
> M: Well…I am not sure what I should ask. Probably the teacher can tell me about that.
> Author: But don't you think it's better to ask a person who is currently there? He would have more information.

M: Yes…but I am extremely shy. I am not good at talking to strangers. I think I am too used to this kind of small community. I worry if I can really make friends in college.

Although the dormitory manager highly praises her for being responsible and caring for others, she seems to be passive about choosing a college. She tries to search for a college based on her personal connections and suggestions from the teacher rather than her interest. Being from a Korean school, Mina is fluent in Korean. However, she is not interested in using that skill or in going to Korea because of her different speech-style. She also thinks English-speaking countries are "too far":

> KH: Which TOPIK78 level are you [TOPIKは何級？]
> M: Level 6...somehow [一応六級です…]
> KH: Oh, then you can even go to college in Korea! Not many people can reach level 6.
> M: But I do not want to speak Korean to South Koreans! You know, what I learned at Korean school is Zainichi-go (Zainichi Korean's speech style), which is different from contemporary South Korean speech,
> [でも韓国人に韓国語で話したくないんですよ!
> 在日語ってわかりますよね。朝鮮学校で習ったのは在日語だから] so some expressions or words do not make sense to them. When they make faces [in response to my phrasing] I just stop talking…
> KH: What about English-speaking college?
> M: Before coming to KIS, I studied at a high school in California for half a year, but as I did not know the grammar well, I could not learn English much. It was…too far (linguistically and culturally) [なんか…遠い]. Now I know the reality and I am not that into exploring it more. My parents also worry if I go there for a long time. Originally, I was planning to stay longer but ended up coming back early. Maybe an English-speaking college in Malaysia would be good. My friend goes there.

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[78] TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean) is a Korean language test for nonnative speakers of Korean. The test is offered six times annually within Korea and less often to people studying Korean in other countries.

Her narrative shows how individuals react to linguistic and cultural differences. Mina feels somewhat stigmatized by speaking *Zainichi-go* and is sensitive to the reactions of South Koreans. Although she has many resources, such as having studied at a U.S. high school and holding the highest level of TOPIK, and supportive parents to pay for her education, she seems to be afraid of relating to others outside her comfort zone. Contrary to my concern, several months later, she secured admission to the prestigious private university majoring in international relationships.

Zainichi Korean parents in particular have not generally wished to send their children to Japanese schools, as they themselves graduated from Korean schools or their children had negative experiences at Japanese schools, such as bullying. Interestingly, those parents who graduated from traditional Korean schools in Japan are not always in favor of the education they received. Mina's parents thought that going to a Korean high school is a "a bit too enough" [もう十分かな] and sent Mina to KIS. While they appreciate her close relationships with her teachers and peers at the Korean school, they also realize that the quality of education there is not that high.[79] Her parents expect KIS to offer higher standards of education, especially in English. However, mainly due to the linguistic differences between Japanese/Korean and English, students' English proficiency is much lower than their Korean proficiency. Except for those who spent some years in the U.S. before coming to KIS, no one is capable of attending an English-speaking college right after graduation. This is one of the main reasons for student and parent dissatisfaction.

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[79] Mainly due to the lack of funding, Korean schools in Japan have a shortage of teachers, and those teachers need to teach subjects that are not in their areas of specialization.

The ideal figure of the student at KIS depends on where the student is coming from. Under the Japanese-style pedagogy and norms, everyone thinks language is somehow important to claim being a trans-border person, or the perks of coming to this school. While many of them have intimacy to Korean language and culture, learning English is challenging for them. But symbolically, being fluent in English affects their imagination of ideal school environment. While there were a few narratives about being open-minded as being a condition to be a trans-border citizen, people tend to show more interests and concerns about linguistic fluency about ideal learning space and practices.

Staged Personalities for Best Service

One of the reasons that people establish C high school was built to reduce the number of those who cannot go out of one's room (and therefore, unemployed).[80] Those people are called hikikomori, and that has been a social issue for a long time. Therefore, the figure of those who are independent and could support themselves is one of the ideals that school aims. Simply speaking, compared to the other school, the ideal image of students—and those who work at C High School is simpler but multi-faceted; you need to be a high performer, good at communication, and successful.

After I started to work in this school as a teaching assistant, I found that they are not aiming to convert education into online 100 percent. For example, they promote themselves as online high school, but actually once students enter the school, school suggests them to switch to commuting option because that gives the school more tuition income—those who physically come to school pay more tuition fees. At school, one of their focus is to make students work in groups for each project, and students who are taking classes 100 percent online is not their main focus (to spend time and resources). For example, there are courses of 5-day (to come to school), 3-day, 1-day, and totally online. School prohibits 3-day, 1-day, and online course students to enter school building when they are not supposed to come to school (when they do not have classes). This is because 5-day students pay more fee for classroom facilities.

Overall, market-driven strategies and policies were very prominent. Sometimes I sensed this school is closer to a vocational school to teach programming skills, internet skills, and

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[80] For more about its history, see introduction.

marketing rather than teaching something like humanities, natural science, and social science. Of course, students can listen to recorded lectures of each subject on their own, and when they are good enough, they could choose how to spend their time at school as they planned. For example, the in each month school assesses the performance of students and sometimes gives recognition to some high performer students. If you are recognized, you obtain some freedom to tailor your own curriculum (but you still need to watch some videos and pass the minimum number of exams). As of the summer of 2018, those who gained these recognitions were less than 1 percent of total students. One ironic story is that one student who gained the full amount of freedom to tailor his own curriculum while being at school stitched to online course. According to him, he found no meaning to commute to campus if he could do whatever he wants to do—and switching to the online course which requires less amount of tuition does not harm anything for his learning.

While this school might sound very cold and mechanical, they keep talking about communication. For example, the significant amount of work among teaching assistants were taking care of students' emotional needs, or disciplining students (in a friendly way). At C High School, education is narrated in term of service, cost, outcome, and performance of certain persona. Teaching assistants, who are not that common in Japanese schools, are mediators between students and teachers. They do more emotional work in order to make teachers focus on their own work, such as coaching individual students and tailoring curriculum. Although school wanted to focus more on training smart and competitive students[81], in reality, much of the work at school was about caring about students' behaviors and interpersonal relationships—which some people did not imagine when they built C High School. It was also a common phenomenon

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[81] The conversations with those are in the positions of management.

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in all of my schools that while teachers and managements think about their uniqueness of pedagogy, interpersonal relationships among students as well as between teachers and students are the majority of the work at school. But especially at C High School, there was a clear contrast between school's ideal and ongoing reality.

Communication and trust are important for those who work at C High School. Hiring college students as part-time teaching assistants seem to be a good idea because school could reduce the cost of its emotional work by young, cheap labor. Teaching assistants greet students in the morning, and talking to students in a friendly manner to gain rapport [信頼関係] with students, but the goal of doing so is to let students listen to what teaching assistants say (stated by the meeting for teaching assistants). Teachers also perform to show the ideal personnel to students, and sometimes to teaching assistants, too. As teaching assistants do menial jobs such as checking students' daily notes and facilitating conversation, and listening to their concern, teachers can show their professional sides to students more.

As middlemen between students and teachers, teaching assistants have insightful views to this school, and what are valued here. Sakai-san, head of teaching assistants, was about to graduate from Keio University. He already secured a full-time position in one of the most highly-paid consulting companies in Japan. He had been working in the C High School almost from its foundation. When he recalled his job interview at C High School, he thought other TAs seemed to be selected based on their personality, such as being nice to vulnerable students. At first, he thought working at C High School is *kaigo*, which means care work for senile old people.

> "honestly, I thought (working at) this school was doing kaigo. Making minus to zero was not fun. So I once quit, and did internship in another company for three

months. That was not fun, either. So I thought fun things are not in outside. At the same time, X-san[82] started to work here and things got more organized."

「正直言ってC高校は介護だなって思って。マイナスをゼロにするのは面白くなかったから、一度やめたんですよ。それで別の会社でインターン3ヶ月やって、それも面白くなかったんです。だから、外に楽しいことはないんだなってわかった。その時からXさん（先生）がここで働き始めて、色々ちゃんとしだしたから。」

At first, Sakai-san felt that working at C High school was similar to take care of senile elderlies as students were so incapable of doing anything. Being dissatisfied of "making minus to zero," he switches to more prestigious internship which is very popular among students. Not being happy about doing that job either, he finds that he needs to create something fun on his own.[83] Not only him, but many other senior teaching assistants spoke about having X-sensei at C High School changed the school significantly—specially to make things more organized and harsher.

Under the mindset of education is service, X-sensei (actually called X-san) made school more systematic yet competitive. Many old-comer teaching assistants mention that the school was very chaotic, and teaching assistants were "just chatting with students." But after X-sensei came to school from a famous private company which specializes human resources, things have changed. X-sensei, who is in charge of managing teaching assistants, constantly insisted that education is a service. He also stated that teaching assistants need to perform in certain ways to maximize the outcome by minimum time and resources. That means, each teaching assistant should have a set of shared standard, and behave under the similar mindset. This attitude to

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[82] In this school, similar to the Forest of Freedom School, teachers and teaching assistants call each other with –san, rather than –sensei.

[83] After the interview, noticing that I was taking notes in Korean sometimes, he told me that his is actually a third-generation Zainichi Korean.

maximize outcomes by minimum investment—which sounds very capitalistic—was consistently

observed through my fieldwork at C High School.

To make things more efficient, X-sensei proposes the importance of performance [演技]

when interacting with students. At the end of the day, X-sensei and all teaching assistants have a

meeting. One time, when we discussed how to facilitate the discussion among students, X-sensei

explained the importance of overreacting. According to him, in order to elicit more words from

students and getting close to them, you need to show your interest even if you do not actually

feel that way.

> "You know, A-san (head teacher) is always calm and cool, but when he
> facilitates students' discussion, he acts like 'oh my god, did you do extracurricular
> activities!? Whaaaaaat!? And then!?' It's important to show your big reaction. For
> example…(start role playing about eliciting conversation about tennis)."
> 「Aさんっていつも落ち着いててクールですよね。でもディスカッション
> 入る時は『部活やってたの！？えーーっ！？それでそれで！？』みたい
> な。大きいリアクションを見せることが大事です。例えば…（テニスをし
> ていたという例で実演）。」

By referring how head teacher behaves and showing role playing, X-sensei demonstrates

the performance skill to make students talk. He implies that A-san's overreaction is a

performance—A-san might not be actually interested in the student's extracurricular activities.

The goal of performing to be interested in what students saying, is to elicit more conversations

from them, and facilitate discussion so that students could learn a lot from the limited discussion

time.

Regarding the aspect of this performativity, head teacher uses the term "entertainment" to

describe the environment where students get excited *(Figure 17)*. One time, head teacher posted

a following message on Slack: "Let's perform seriously and enthusiastically. Make efforts to

create the image of staff who make students happy, like whenever students see your eyes, they

grin [目があっただけでニヤけるような、生徒を幸せにできるようなスタッフ像を本気で真面目に演出しよう！]. We are the professional! Let's keep creating more entertainments! (emoji of crab dancing) [我々はプロフェッショナルだ！エンターテイメントをどんどん創り出していこう!] Instantly, I felt his messages a bit mind-controlling and manipulative, but it implies the importance of creating staged image of being professional. Takeyama (2019) uses the term "staged seduction" when hosts[84] and their clients create the special space of intimacy in order to make clients spend as much money as possible, and make hosts work hard to their fullest. Although this job seems to be deceiving female clients by fake flirtation—these hosts will never be their real boyfriends—hosts frame their work under masculinity and make clients happy by selling dreams. Similarly, people at C High School can legitimize them performing certain persona by being professional, not deceiving students. By doing so, they could work without feeling burdensome. Juxtaposing host club and alternative school might sound surprising, but under performance and gaining outcomes by one's effort, they show close similarities. Therefore, setting up entertainment stage at school and performing excited staff is not a fraud—that is part of the service that you can offer to students.

All these arguments center around how each school think highly of participation with ideal student figures. Although C High School's situation sounds rather extreme, it is a great showcase that all schools, where I conducted my fieldwork, share the sense that good students need to participate actively in what school does. First, similar to the host-club, schools and classrooms in general, are staged setting. and teachers have specific personnel and everyone does impression management (Goffman 1946). According to Honda, classroom is "theater and warzone" (Honda 2011) where students seek to find the position in the group where they could

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[84] Host bars are where male hosts entertain female clients by talking and flirting.

maintain their value and security in the group. I state that by finding a good position at school, such as devoting oneself to some plausible activities, speaking multiple languages, or practicing independent and effective learning style, students could be endorsed by the schools, not only in the classrooms. As I discussed with the cases at the Forest of Freedom School, to get the most of school, students need to participate, and at C High School, teachers and teaching assistants help students to participate in the discussion or conduct project, by preforming nice, helpful adults who are always keen to communicate with students.

<p style="text-align:center">The Value of Care</p>

While they think highly of managing human relationships with students, care labor is still undervalued. Echoing with Sakai-san who juxtaposed the teaching assistant's work as care work for senile seniors [介護], another teaching assistant expressed some difficult cases which are potentially beyond the duty of part-time teaching assistants.

> "In this school, teaching assistants and sometimes teachers are doing jobs which are supposed to be done by psychotherapist or counselor. One time, I talked about the case of student who I worried about to the professional psychotherapist, and he said "that's what psychotherapist cure in two years"
> 「この学校では TA や、たまに先生が臨床心理士とかカウンセラーがやるような仕事をしてるんです。一回、知り合いの臨床心理士の先生に自分が心配している子のケースを話したら『それは臨床心理士が 2 年かけて治療することです』って。」

The fact that teaching assistants do crucial emotional work suggests various points. First, while teaching assistants need to care for students, they should not spend too much time. Similar to students who entered the Forest of Freedom School from high school, those who have traumatic experiences, mental illness, or complicated family situations need more time and

attention to be able to participate in the school life. However, that does not justify teaching assistant's (or teachers) spend extra time for them. In the handbook of teaching assistants [業務の心構え], the school clearly writes "think about you cost and outcome. For example, two teaching assistants spending their 30 minutes to one students, should be avoided," and this was emphasized in several meetings for teaching assistants. No matter how difficult the student is, teaching assistants need to be cautious about cost and effect—they cannot spend too much time for one student. While that sounds reasonable under the policy of cost and effect, I personally found the task is demanding and emotionally exhausting. Other teaching assistants are all nice and professional, and almost all of them secured the great jobs after graduating college. In other words, college students only who are capable enough to do this difficult jobs—there were some teaching assistants who were forced to quit because they could not contribute to the school much.

Second, the school does not aim to invest much in taking care of students' emotional needs. Teacher X once mentioned, "this high school is perceived to be those who struggle, but actually NOT." When I had a chance to attend a closed meeting with those who are in highest positions in C High School, they also emphasized that the school is designed for those who are too good to be controlled by the Japanese education system. However, they also admitted that their mission is also "reducing the number of *hikikomori* (those who cannot go out of their own rooms due to psychological disorder). Therefore, they revised the flexible curriculum to those who are competitive, but at the same time, they noticed that most of their students are those who are struggling, and now they also focus on reducing the number of those who are living under the welfare by teaching them programming to make a living.[85] The ideal student at C High School

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[85] However, one of the executive committees send his daughter to an alternative elementary school which is not endorsed by the Japanese government. That school is closer to the characteristics of the Forest of Freedom School.

would be those who do not rely on social welfare after the graduation, and work independently, hard, and efficiently while at school. But in reality, students who reach to that level has yet to be a few.

The Power of Grades and Evaluation

At school, students receive grades and evaluations, and alternative schools are no exception. In my target school, each school shows different stance on grading and evaluation, but they still need to give some evolutions on students' performances.

At the Forest of Freedom school, grading has always been a big concern among teachers. The school gives written feedback on each subject at the end of the semester. It takes significant amount of time, and teachers spend one full week to give written feedback to students. It has been a long tradition for the school that they refuse giving numerated grades to students. The school was established as an antithesis to the mainstream education in 1980s—which controlled students by rules, and the pedagogy was heavily geared toward making students receive good scores on paper tests. However, as the time goes by, the school needed to give numerated grade from 1 to 5 (5 is the highest) to students for the sake of recommendation system—universities take some students who are recommended by their high schools without paper tests [推薦入学制度]. To take advantage of this system, students need to have good GPA. Therefore, the school actually gives numerated grades to each student for reference. When students receive the booklet, they do not know their numerated grade, but if they ask teachers, they could know.

Teachers have an ambivalent attitude toward this. While some feel uncomfortable giving actual grades to students, some think it is a good way to make students be more serious about learning. Generally, not many students are focusing on class, and some are leaving and entering classrooms during morning homerooms and even during class time, or doing their own stuff (drawing, reading comics, or checking their phone). Some think it is a teacher's responsibility to offer engaging classes, but many feel that it is very challenging to make the student without the pressure of test, or some sort of evaluation system. For example, one teacher told me the phrase "Teaching at this school is similar to talking to the crowds on the street in Harajuku (the town which is popular among teenagers) [自森で授業をやることは、原宿の雑踏で群衆に語りかけるようなものだ]." Another teacher, who is actually an alumna of the school, showed her frustration of the relaxed policy of this school.

> "Inputs are definitely little here (students learn very little amount of new stuff here). If teachers cannot conduct classes, learning itself does not happen. Even if students feel that they were forced to learn somethings now, they could re-arrange what they have learned [*manabi hogushi*] later on."
> 「ここでは圧倒的にインプットが少ないと思います。 授業自体が成り立たなければ学びは成立しないし、後になって『学びほぐし』をすればいいのでは、と思うんですよね。」

She thinks that it is problematic that students do not learn new things that much. If students do not focus on classes and teachers cannot appropriately teach, learning does not happen. If students have enough input, they could re-arrange their knowledge later depending on their individual needs. Although she could pursue her interest in Korea after the graduation and received bachelors and masters from abroad, she thinks the current pedagogy at the school does not work well to many students. Therefore, she is planning to send her kids to more competitive elite school [進学校].

Students also feel dilemma about caring about grades at this school. One time, I heard a student talking about his concerns about his future direction [進路] to his homeroom teacher. He wants to go to the university but at the same time, he is not sure if it is a right thing to worry about his grades at the Forest of Freedom School where students are supposed to pursue what they are really interested in.

> "At this point, I want to go to college…and I know that I need to study (if I aim to go to a good one). If I use recommendation system, I have to get good grades at school—well, I did not expect thinking about this kind of stuff (being conscious about study and grades) coming all the way to this school."
> 「とりあえず大学には行きたいと思っていて…そのためには勉強しなきゃいけないとは思うし、推薦使うなら（学校の）成績をよくしなきゃ行けなくて…でもまたやりたいことが決まっていないうちにこういうこと考えるの、自森に来てまでしなきゃいけないんだって。」

His narrative shows the dilemma of how to spend his time at high school. He knows that going to college requires studying. Taking advantage of the recommendation system, he needs to keep a good GPA. But at the same time, he feels that devoting himself to the entrance exam and grades is plausible at the Forest of Freedom School, especially when he is still not sure about what he wants to do. The teacher suggested that he might be able to use the recommendation system depending on the college he wants to go because he is good at speaking in public. Generally, students submit essay and take interviews. Therefore, those who are good at interviews tend to have good results. The teacher suggests that this student might want to use recommendation system to secure admission to college rather than taking exams. Although there are no paper tests and students are supposed to focus on what they really want to do, when they

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think about college (and sometime jobs) after graduation, they need to consider what they are good at, and how to make strategies to make good outcomes.[86]

Similarly, at KIS, grades are important for those who use recommendation system. While tests are not that easy, one student complains that some foreign teachers do not understand the Japanese system to enter college. For example, her English teacher is "too harsh on grades" and does know how receiving lower grades affect her overall prospectus to secure college admission. Term exams at KIS show interesting politics and negotiations between teachers and students. Generally, many students fail the exam and some have to take additional ones [追試]. However, some part-time teachers avoid making difficult exams. First, if more than certain number of students fail, the teacher has to write a report about why that happened. Second, part-time teachers do not proctor the additional exam (if that happens) so the logistics would be complicated. Therefore, toward the end of the semester, some complicated negotiations between teachers and students—regarding what will appear in the exam. The final letter grades will be adjusted by those in management positions so part-time teachers do not know what kind of grades students receive.

At C High school, students and teacher do not care much about grades as there are just a few students who use recommendation system, and those students are already good at managing their learning schedules and finishing assignments. But for those who commute to school, evaluation became important from some point. After I quit working there, some teaching assistants told me that the school started to make groups (for group work) depending on how they performed in the previous semester. When I was there, the school tended to form groups

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[86] Later in this chapter, I introduce the narratives of another student who worries about the curriculum of this school being too easy to prepare for college.

with student of various abilities—there are one or two hard-working students, and the rest for to five students are either mediocre or low-achievers. In many cases, I observed hard-working students struggle I lot to make others work, and most of the teaching assistants seemed to be welcoming this change.

In the final part of this chapter, I analyze some conflicts and tensions in each school in order to deepen the understandings of how these education practices and ideals are challenged in daily lives at school.

Conflict #1 "If You Complain This Much, Why Don't You Just Go to *juku*?"

In a World History class at the Forest of Freedom School, we were learning Industrial Revolution of the 18th century. We were about to watch a movie by Nehru to study colonialism, the concept of self-property, and cultural relativism. The class was going well as Sato-sensei nicely elicit how students think about certain issues such as *Saty* in India, a system that brides brings money to husband's house.[87] At the same time, the class was intermittently interrupted by Comet-kun.[88] Comet-kun interjects lecture to say what Sato-sensei will be saying next, or his own perspectives to the people or incident. When Sato-sensei explained environmental damages of Spinning Jenny, he also mentioned that while it improved the efficiency of making threads, the machine harmed environment due to the huge use of water for cooling down and washing itself. Then, Comet-kun interrupted; "I think you mentioned it because nowadays people started to be picky about environment, didn't you? [最近環境についてうるさくなってるからそうい

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[87] After explaining the system of dowry that might lead to the abuse and death of female, the teacher asked the opinion to students. One student answered "well, I cannot say how they should do…because I was born in Japan, I think it should be abolished, but not sure how people out there think about it…"
[88] At the Forest of Freedom School, students tend to have unique first names.

うこと言ったんでしょ？]" While I was a surprised by his rude speech style and the way he

utters, Sato-sensei just nodded and agreed calmly, saying "yes, that is also tue [それもあるね]"

Comet-kun then escalated. When the class was about to watch a movie about Nehru, the famous

prime minister of India of mid-20th century together, he said "I think movies are generally all

biased depending on who made it. I also cannot forgive Nehru because he is anti-Japan! [しかも

ネルーって反日だから許せない！]

At this point, not all students seem to be paying attention to what is going on. Some

students sitting behind the classroom were chatting about unrelated topics. Comet-kun

relentlessly complained that he did not want to watch a movie with comments such as "How long

it will be?" "I cannot be silent while watching it", and "I don't want to watch it." While students

are generally lenient and respect each other regarding unruly behaviors of their peers, some

students around him started to grin, and performed to punch and kick him on the air. Some

saying "shut up" in small voices.

Finally, Sakura-chan, one of the powerful girls in this class spoke up:

> "Why do you keep complaining this much!? Why don't you just go to cram
> school? You can take private tutoring and you can keep talking! I want to listen to
> (what Sato-sensei says)."
> 「なんでそんな文句ばっか言うの！？ってゆうか塾行ったら？個別指導し
> てもらったらずっと話してられるよ！私、話聞きたいんだけど。」

Some students started to laugh. Then she continued:

> "Oh, did I say a right thing, haha?"
> 「あ、もしかして正論出ちゃった？笑」

Comet-kun became quiet, and the class kept going on. After the class, I had a chance to talk with Comet-kun. He told me that he really hates watching movie because they are biased, and he was also worrying about talking too much while watching it so that he could be a nuisance to others.

These series of interactions between Comet-kun, Sato-sensei, the student who spoke up, and the rest of the class show the complicated dynamics about the behavioral norms and the image of an ideal student. In the beginning, Comet-kun kept interrupting Sato-sensei was not immediately penalized. Sato-sensei did not tell Comet-kun to stop, or he did not make a face. But Comet-kun's attempt to stop watching the movie and control the class was not successful. His peers did not support his behavior, and after the comment from Sakura-chan, he became silent. The rest of the classmates endorsed Sakura-chan silently. Comet-kun has the freedom to express his thoughts and opinions that do not overlap with that of the teacher. But he had to stop at some point because of peer pressure.

While Comet-kun does not seem to have very close friends, he was not bullied or ostracized in his homeroom class. He casually joins UNO (card game) with others and students do not pick him up even if he says something strange or potentially problematic. Even after this incident, he did not seem to have trouble being in a class. In other words, being rebellious to the teacher and being condemned (and mocked) by classmates did not cut out the relationship between him and his classmates. This drama exemplifies that at the Forest of Freedom School, being different or certain deviation is forgiven to some degree. For those who behave a bit different from others could be in the space somewhat safely.

At the same time, Sakura-chan who accused Comet-kun was also endorsed tacitly by other students by being nodded, and she was not criticized or condemned either. In other words, she felt eligible to speak up because she know that her action would be supported by her

classmates and the school in general. Him being rebellious to the teacher was not perceived as a big deal by teachers and students. That embodies the egalitarian educational philosophies of school. Takana-sensei, who is a homeroom teacher of Comet-kun, said "I heard everything from other students, and I think that is how my homeroom class is, haha [そういうことを全部言い合えるのがうちのクラスだと思います。笑]. This incident did not make Comet-kun being ostracized from the class. In some situations, Comet-kun represented his homeroom classes. At school festival, he moderated discussion with visitors tactfully, and at music festival, he performed the curator role (MC)—both he did a great job as if professional adults do.

But Comet-kun himself is conscious about the fact that he is different from others, but he is not sure how to fix it. Before this incident, Comet-kun confessed to me that he himself knows that he stands out among others in a bad way, and that was one reason he came to this school. According to him, the way he relates to other changed drastically after coming here—he feels less pressure to express his thoughts compared to the public junior high school where he is from. At junior high school, teachers were "always keeping eyes on him even during the break time in the hallway". Comet-kun is also one of the students who takes up the whole lunchtime of Tanaka-sensei to discuss his concerns, problems, and any other miscellaneous topics. While he worried about relationships with some others in this homeroom class, at least in the Forest of Freedom School, he finds his own space without being bullied or marked by teachers.

Conflict #2 "I Feel Annoyed When You Guys Speak in English"

Some incidents could crystalize how people perceive problems as problem, and how to solve it under the name of education. For instance, there was an incident which cast questions

regarding the politics of language and feeling safe at school at KIS. One Japanese girl complained that an English teacher and American student chatting in English is "annoying [ムカつく]," claiming that they might be talking something bad about her. This incident might look like just an ordinary moment of conflict in a multilingual environment. However, it revealed the complicated cultural conflicts at KIS that involve linguistic capability, ethnicity, and diversity politics.

Cathy was grown up in the United States and came to the school in Japan for the first time when she entered high school. Unfortunately, not knowing Japanese and Korean much, her transition to the new life at KIS was not easy. In her homeroom class in HS1, majority of girls were not interested in learning. Whenever I took classes together with them, I saw teachers struggling to make them study. One day, being furious to other girls who keep chatting during the class, Cathy said "shut up, bitch" to two girls in English, and it became a huge issue. Although Cathy immediately went to apologize to school principal and vice principal, the mothers of two girls insisted that Cathy's mother should apologize, too. Those two girls are the most problematic girls in class such as being unruly to teachers and always talking to others sitting around them. They were also powerful among their peers, and other students were hesitant to complain something directly to these two girls. The mothers them seem to be so-to-speak "monster parent [*monpe* モンペ]" who insisted Cathy's mother should apologize to them. According to these mothers, their daughters were "too be frighten to go to school"—which I thought a total lie.

Their homeroom teacher was also in a difficult situation. She is from Singapore. Although she was fluent in English and Chinese, she sometimes had a language barrier to communicate in Japanese. Although the teacher insisted that Cathy does not need to apologize to

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those two girls, vice president of school, who is actually a former teacher of Cathy's mother, told her that if she (Cathy's mother) apologizes, everything will be fine [丸く収まる]. Eventually, Cathy apologized to the problematic girl and she said "well, I never expected to hear that kind of comment from my friend, but I will forgive you." This answer made Cathy somewhat indignant because Cathy wonders if they were ever friends since the beginning. To make matters worse, while having a meeting to solve this problem, one of the bad girls said "I feel annoyed if you guys speak in English. You guys should be speaking about me!" to the homeroom teacher and Cathy in front of everyone. Since then, both Cathy and the homeroom teacher feel unsafe to speak in English at school. She thinks it's a discrimination, but the school principal says it is bullying [いじめ], not discrimination [差別] to the homeroom teacher.

As a result, Cathy feels uncomfortable to be in the classroom. Other students are afraid of those two bad girls, and they do not support Cathy that much. Still, she never skips classes even if her mother says she could skip school sometime. According to Cathy, going to school everyday is "That's only one thing I can do." Cathy feels KIS is "not international at all" as the majority of students are Zainichi Korean who speak Japanese as their first language and it is not really diverse. She also does not like teachers behave like friends to students and not punishing or scolding students. She thinks "they are just receiving their salaries by fooling around with students" and dismisses the school as "just a countryside school [ただの田舎の学校じゃん].

The school could not take advantage of this incident to respect diversity and create a safe space. On the last day of the semester, we had a mass gathering. There, school principal told everyone that they need to be nice/cordial [やさしい] to each other. He also said teachers should talk to students in their native language, not mentioning about what it is like to be a linguistic minority at school, and what it means to be accused of speaking one's native language under the

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policy of three languages and trans-border person. The incident was just dealt with interpersonal conflicts which should be solved by being nice to each other.

While leaving the concept of border-crossing person rather open could give some room for people's own interpretations, it sometimes has negative effects on community solidarity, making the organization less cohesive and the teaching less consistent, which might oppress those who are the minorities in the organization. You always think of new things based on what you already know. Teachers know Korean schools in Japan, but do know the English-speaking world, and the school does not know how to treat the English curriculum and English teachers. KIS somewhat functions as the safe space among Zainichi Korean students but the school might not be sustainable in the long run. The emergence of KIS indicates the shifting educational policies among Korean schools in Japan, which are not just confined to reproducing Korean citizens in Japan, but extend to shaping border-crossing people who can transcend their ethnicity and nationality. Students and parents are conscious that what they can hope for is strongly molded and affected by their nationality or upbringing. Finding a more concrete vision of a border-crossing person strong enough to replace the ethnic identity of Zainichi Koreans in contemporary Japan might be an urgent issue for the school to make itself sustainable.

Learning English imposes another challenge to KIS. Compared to Japanese speakers learning Korean and Korean speakers learning Japanese, learning English takes significant amount of effort to reach the certain proficiency. Without English proficiency, some students and parents cannot fulfil their aspirations of being trilingual, which affects their image of being a trans-boder person. A small school can offer an intimate atmosphere among students and

teachers but often lacks courses[89] and resources for those who aspire to certain fields, such as the sciences. The current disorientation of the school indicates that constructing an education model based on something besides ethnicity is challenging without a strong and consistent focus on alternative values to pursue.

Am I Good Enough? Neoliberal Pressure and the Sense of Community

Everyone at C High School is continuously evaluated. In the previous section, I described that grades are not important at C High School, but students are grouped based on their performance during the live class sessions—it is how they could work independently and efficiently with communicating with others. While students are cared for by teaching assistants and coached by their homeroom teachers, those interpersonal relationships are also recorded, reported, and evaluated.

The image of ideal students could also be applicable to teachers and teaching assistants, and in addition, they are under the pressure to show some outcomes. Saito-san, one of teaching assistants, is slender-looking, soft-spoken college student who enjoys playing in the music band. I felt the most comfortable to work with during my shift. One day, he was helping out new comer teaching assistants and facilitating the group work with students pretty well. During the break time, students come to him for chit chat. When I praised how well he works here, his reply was somewhat surprising.

> "Well, honestly speaking, I think head teacher does not like me. These days, I have not produced any "value" and feel uncomfortable being here. It was much more laid back last year, but especially since we started to report each other's

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[89] One mother told me that her son quit KIS because the school could not offer enough classes to prepare him for veterinarian school.

value and doing many small competitions such as "greeting race," or number of writing comments to students' diary, things got more impersonal."
「多分 A さん(教室長)俺のこと好きじゃないだろうな、って思うんですよ。俺最近バリューずっと出せてないし、居づらい。去年はもっと気楽だったんですよ。でも特に互いのバリューを報告し合うようになったり、『声かけダービー』』とか、生徒への日誌のコメントの数を競うようになってから、ちょっとギスギスしてきたところもあるかなって。」

As with the cases with many workplace, there are some specific terms and rules at this school that are strongly tied with its policy and culture. For example, teaching assistants need to report "value" of their colleagues when they notice each other's good jobs. That are written down, stored in google drive, and shared in the end-of-the-day meeting. For instance, when I see my colleague reconciled disputes between students tactfully, I report that incident on the google spreadsheet. At the end of the day when all teaching assistants get together with Teacher X, we discuss those "values" reported on that day. At the end of the month, they decide "Monthly MVP" to honor the best teaching assistant of the month. There are several contests such as "greeting race." Greeting race means each teaching assistant reports the number of students who they talked to. By those system of surveillance and evaluation among teaching assistants, teachers could check how each teaching assistant is doing their jobs.

Unable to produce these "values" significantly, Saito-san feels that he is ineligible to be in this school. Whether you are mentioned frequently or not in those spreadsheet (that are shared everyone who work there) affects one's subjective sense of feeling comfortable to work at C High School. At the same time, the sense of competition did not seem to ruin the sense of community among teaching assistants. There might be a sense of hierarchy among themselves, they had drinking gatherings every so often, and some even traveled together.

Conclusion

When people try to establish a new mode of education, people imagine the new, better education based on what they already know. This project is not about seeking the best educational pedagogy, nor about crystalizing the definition of alternative education in Japan. Rather, I examine how people are imagining and creating a better learning space for those who refused mainstream education in Japan. My data shows that in contemporary Japan, unique schools tend to attract those who, actively or passively, refuse to be part of mainstream education. The new education is imagined and created vis-à-vis what people already know as good or bad models. Test-oriented, justifying corporal punishment mainstream education in the 1980s, ethnocentric education in Korean school and the hateful attitude of the Japanese society, and neoliberal and profit-seeking cooperate mindsets all directed some directions of alternative education in Japan. My target schools all embody different ideal figures of students to pursue a better way of educating the next generations. At the same time, the cohesive community of learning also plays important role to affect how people interact each other. Students, teachers, and parents talk about these images and even though they do not come to agree with a single figure of ideal student, these images entice conversations among them.

The conflicts and tensions in each school present how people at school make sense of the gaps between their ideal education and ongoing reality, and how schools are located in the greater Japanese society. Students at the Forest of Freedom School know that their curriculum does not prepare them for college entrance examination, but they feel ambivalent about just studying for college without finding what one really wants to. Even if the students could enjoy being part of the school culture by playing instruments or performing traditional Japanese dances, that does not always secure their future jobs and professional skills. But using

recommendation system could be a bypass to good universities. At KIS, people tend to gauge being trans-border citizens by linguistic proficiency, and being open-mined or culturally sensitive tend to be forgotten as part of the important school curriculum. The curriculum itself was being fractured by the high turnover rates among teachers. C High School is being successful in having many students but their business models and neoliberal mindset sometimes go too far, that some students who could internalize those attitude just quit school and work independently by themselves, and the school's goal of efficiency is sustained by staged personnel of friendly teachers and teaching assistants that are available as long as they pay tuitions.

These examples do not undermine the value and movements of alternative education in Japan. They illustrate how establishing the perfect model of education is impossible, and how imagined ideals and ongoing realities always dissatisfy some members. As long as these gaps between ideal and reality exit, some people imagine, practice, and create new alternative educations.

Chapter 6 **Technologies, Curriculum, and Communication in the Learning**

Introduction: Does Technology End Group-Living?

In an interview published in 2017, the principal of N High School—a famous online high school in Japan emphasized that being alone is the new educational trend. According to him, producing similar personnel through education does not match contemporary Japanese society's social needs.

> When Japan was in its era of a booming economy, we created similar personnel, and everyone went to big factories doing the same work. Of course, this contributed to developing the Japanese economy. But times have changed. Now the ability of "*hitori*" [being alone, individual] has become important. I believe that each one of us having a fulfilled life would strengthen society. Therefore, "*hitori*" is an essential keyword for future Japan. An education that respects "*hitori*" will be crucial from now on (Yoshikawa 2017).
> [かつて高度成長の時代は、画一的に人材を作り出して、大きな工場に行って、みんなで同じ作業をして…。もちろん、これが日本経済を発展させた背景の一つではありますが、今は時代が変わってきた。そうすると「ひとり」の力が大事になってくる。ひとりひとりが充実することが社会を強くすることになると思います。だから「ひとり」というのは、これからの日本において非常に重要なキーワードです。「ひとり」を重んじる教育が、今後は大切になってくると思います。]

The principal emphasizes the importance of respecting individual uniqueness in education. He contrasts contemporary Japanese society with the past. In his view, when Japan needed many factory hands doing similar jobs, creating like-minded individuals through education met societal needs. This observation resonates with Japanese mainstream schools' general characteristics, which I discussed in chapters one and two. He then emphasizes that now we live in different

times, times when it is necessary to train one's individual ability. Rather than following what everyone else does, individuals need to enrich their own abilities. In the article, the principal also suggests that online learning—not mass, teacher-oriented traditional classes—enables individually-tailored curricula.

Online learning has the capacity to transcend time and space: students can learn whenever they want and wherever they are, as long as they have an internet connection with a laptop or smartphone. While this sounds like a beneficial turn for individual learning, the question remains as to whether the internet can replace in-person learning completely. Media is what mediates communications between people (McLuhan 1964), and new technologies change how people communicate each other. Does digital technology change the importance of intimate group-living at school that enables individuals to maintain middle-class status after graduation?

In this chapter, I primarily discuss two topics: 1) how new technology, such as programming, is incorporated into mandatory education, and 2) how technology affects the way people imagine and discuss what might make the "best" education. Welcomed or not, technology is integrated into everyday learning experiences, and it influences human interactions among all involved in schools, whether teachers, teaching assistants, students, or parents. Rather than discussing the morality of using technology for learning, or how it makes learning efficient or not, I examine how people interpret the fact that technology diversifies learning options.

Based on those two points, I analyze three kinds of ethnographic data. Firstly, based on the example of programming, I examine how the government justifies teaching new technologies within the school curriculum. When programming became mandatory in primary education, the government stated that learning programming would help students to gain a "programming way of thinking" [プログラミング的思考] to benefit society, rather than producing more

professional programmers. The Ministry of Education focuses more on nurturing learners'

mindsets than on students developing specific technological proficiencies. The seemingly new

turn in education is always situated within the framework of making good citizens who benefit

society and the nation. In this thinking, the motivation for learning is located in a social contract,

in which studying hard makes an individual acceptable in Japanese culture. At the same time,

this education reform gives private schools more latitude to tailor their curricula using digital

technologies.

The second part of this chapter explores how the internet and communication apps

mediate professional relationships among school staff. This part is mainly based on ethnographic

data obtained at Korea International School (KIS) and C High School. KIS experienced a huge

change in learning styles and everyday school life after they allowed students to use smartphones

in the school building since 2018. C High School is a newly built online high school (similar to

N High School). While C High School replaced most of the subject classes with on-demand,

recorded internet lectures, students can choose their schooling days. While present at school,

students spend about 70 percent of their time on group projects and learning English together.

But they also learn mandatory subjects, such as math, Japanese, and social sciences, by watching

recorded lectures in individual booths every day. Communication apps and shared cloud

platforms (such as Google Drive) offer new learning and communication tools for both students

and school staff. These features create an alternative space for learning. As C High School and N

High School are different, their educational policies and systems are very similar. Therefore, I

use N High School as a prototype to discuss how new and alternative they are my ethnographic

data is from C High School's branch in downtown Tokyo.

Lastly, I discuss how smartphones and messaging apps mediate complicated peer-to-peer interactions at KIS. After a policy change that permitted students to use smartphones at school, teachers had a hard time conducting classes. Messaging apps both facilitated and complicated communications among students, teachers, and parents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Whether technologies made students feel more comfortable or not while at school is not yet clear; however, these platforms diversified how people communicate with each other in school and beyond. Compared to mainstream schools that are slow to incorporate technologies into their pedagogy and daily interactions, my target schools show diverse ways educational institutions use technologies in their learning and communications.

In all these situations, technology influences how people imagine the best version of education. Technology changed learning styles and interpersonal communications in fluid ways. It helps students learn subjects individually, without spending time with teachers and classmates in a classroom. Smartphone and message apps can be a source of distraction, but they also offer more agency to students and parents in communicating among themselves and seeking information on their own. Schools' locations and technology policies also affect how students use smartphones in their daily lives in and around the school. For example, if a school's location near a city allows students to go to karaoke before or after school, students' posting about such activities on social media (e.g., Instagram) brings these extracurricular events into school communities in real time, as other students can instantly see their peers' non-classroom behaviors. On the other hand, geographically isolated schools with poor network connections do not allow students to access the world outside school easily. Although technology diversified ~~complicated~~ the way people learn and interact, my fieldwork data show that people still highly regard interpersonal communication as essential for learning. Even with increased digital modes

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of communication, however, interpersonal connections are still required for students to feel comfortable at school.-By using technology, people still imagine and talk about the places to which they belong.

Programing for the Sake of a Better Society?

The Japanese government promotes learning technology as a way to make better citizens. In 2020, programming became a mandatory subject in elementary schools. It sounded like a drastic change of curriculum, and the media sensationalized it accordingly. However, it ended up being similar to the case of English in 2014.[90] In short, both English and programming requirements became halfway measures. The rules and implementation guidelines were vague. For example, the government states that it does not expect students to master actual programming but, rather, to learn how programming works. As the Ministry of Education did not assign a specific number of hours for learning programming (as in the case of English, too), teachers had to tailor their class content to include the "programming way of thinking [プログラミング的な考え方]." Those classes are designed to "nurture the attitude to take advantage of the computer's working for creating better individual lives and the society." [コンピュータの働きを、より良い人生や社会づくりに生かそうとする態度]. Therefore, under these vaguely-phrased guidelines, teachers who are already busy teaching other subjects had to incorporate programming into curriculum design and pedagogy on their own.[91]

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[90] For more about how the MEXT aims to use English education, see MEXT (2013).
[91] This is also very similar to the situation when the government established the subject "life science [生活科]" in elementary school. For more about the failure of this measure, see Kariya (2002) and Park and Lee (2013).

The government's slogan for programming exemplifies a conception of education aimed at producing ideal citizens for the nation. The goal of learning programming is not about learning the skill itself. Instead, the policy frames the goal in relation to individual and societal well-being. This is similar to how the government advocates the value of learning English. The goals of learning English, according to the government, are to nurture "communication skills," "for 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics," and to "boost education that relates to Japanese identity, such as traditional culture and history."[92] In other words, students must learn English in school in order to improve their overall ability to communicate, including with those outside Japan, so that they can promote Japanese culture and history in a global world.

The logic of learning new fields in order to become better citizens is also found in the programming education policy. According to the government's statement, there are three main goals: 1. Nurture a "programming way of thinking [プログラミング的思考]"; 2. Familiarize oneself with both programming and the fact that information technologies, such as computers, support an information society [情報化社会]. And cultivate an attitude toward *solving daily problems and constructing a better society* by taking advantage of computers, etc. (my emphasis); 3. If programming is contextualized in other subject classes, ensure it enhances the learning of those subjects.[93] These goals emphasize a "programming way of thinking," rather than learning programming skills in of themselves. By integrating programming into education standards, the government aims to teach students how society works and to train them to solve

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[92] All these citations are from *Action plans for English Education Reform in Response to Globalization* [グローバル化に対応した英語教育改革実施計画] by the MEXT.

[93] [①「プログラミング的思考」を育むこと、②プログラムの働きやよさ、情報社会がコンピュータ等の情報技術によって支えられていることなどに気付くことができるようにするとともに、コンピュータ等を上手に活用して身近な問題を解決したり、よりよい社会を築いたりしようとする態度を育むこと、③各教科等の内容を指導する中で実施する場合には、各教科等での学びをより確実なものとすることの三つ]

problems to improve Japanese society, while simultaneously deepening their comprehension of other subjects. According to the Ministry of Education, meeting these overall goals, in turn, will contribute to the broader project of maintaining the well-being of the nation.

Strange Partnership: Alternative Education and the Correspondence School

Even if the introduction of programming did not significantly change mainstream schools' curricula, its inclusion gave social recognition to programming. This shift in programming's social status, in turn, increased the visibility of alternative schools that focus on specific fields, such as programming. For example, N High School established a three-year course dedicated to programming. Contrary to the general educational policies that do not aim to master the programming skills, the programming course at N High School teaches students practical skills, to enable them to get a job after graduation. While students still need to take some online classes to fulfill the high school graduate certificate requirements, those classes take much less time than their counterparts in a full-time high school. For instance, students enrolled in N High School's programming course are required to spend only two hours per day (*figure 19*) and four hours per week (*figure* 20) at school for subject studies. This hourly commitment is significantly lower than for mainstream school students, who are required to attend classes for five to six hours every day. Students at N High School can thus spend more time studying programming.
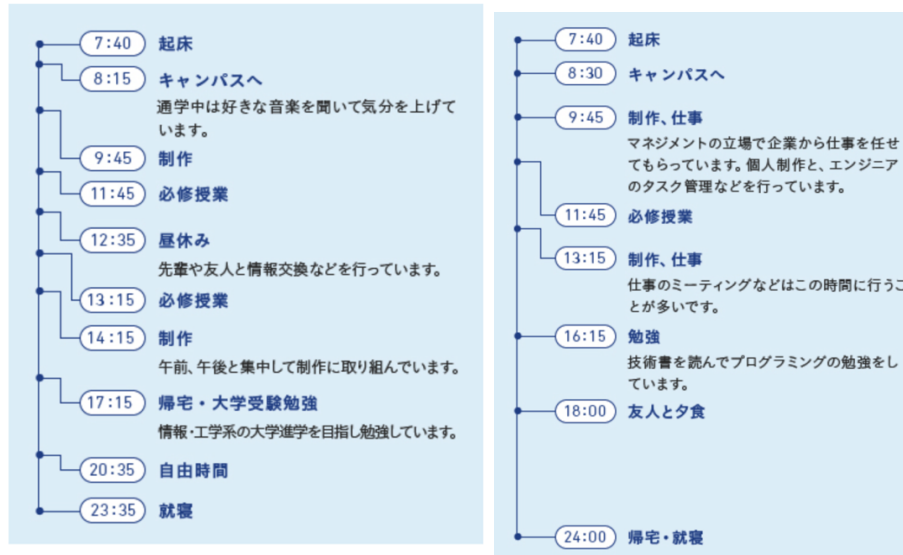
(left)

7:40 Wake up [起床]
8:15 Go to campus
While commuting, I listen to music to put myself in a good mood.
[キャンパスへ　通学中は好きな音楽を聞いて気分を上げています].
9:45 Crafting [制作] (working on one's own programming)
11:45 Mandatory classes [必修授業]
12:35 Lunch break
I exchange information with my senior colleagues and friends
[昼休み　先輩や友人と情報交換などを行なっています]
12:15 Mandatory classes [必修授業]
14:15 Crafting
I concentrate on it in the morning and afternoon
[制作　午前、午後と集中して制作に取り組んでいます]
17:15 Going home, prepare for college entrance examination
I am studying for college to specialize information and engineering
 [帰宅・大学受験勉強　情報・工学系の大学進学を目指し勉強しています]
20:35 Free time [自由時間]
23:35 Go to bed [就寝]

(right)
7:40 Wake up [起床]
8:30 Go to campus
9:45 Crafting and work [制作、仕事]

I have a management job at a company. I do my own programming and manage other engineers' tasks. [マネジメントの立場で企業から仕事を任せられています。個人制作と、エンジニアのタスク管理などを行っています]

11:45 Mandatory classes [必修授業]

13:15 Crafting and work [制作、仕事]

I often do work-related meeting during this time

[仕事のミーティングなどはこの時間に行うことが多いです]

16:15 Study [勉強]

I am studying programming by reading books

[技術書を読んでプログラミングの勉強をしています]

時間	月	火	水	木	金
9:00 ～ 9:30	登校				
9:30 ～ 9:45	朝礼・日誌記入				
9:45 ～ 10:35	制作	数学	制作	英語	制作
	休憩				
10:45 ～ 11:35	制作	数学	制作	英語	制作
	休憩				
11:45 ～ 12:35	必修授業				
	昼休み				
13:15 ～ 14:05	振り返り	振り返り	振り返り	振り返り	振り返り
	休憩				
14:15 ～ 15:05	制作				
	休憩				
15:15 ～ 16:05	制作				制作 / SS
	終礼				

Figure 22: Weekly Schedule of Programing Course Students at N High School

月：Monday 火：Tuesday 水：Wednesday 木：Thursday 金：Friday

登校: Going to school

朝礼・日誌記入: Morning gathering and writing your journal

英語：English 数学：Math

休憩：Break time

振り返り：Reflection

終礼: End-of-day gathering

Despite this difference in required education hours, N High School students receive the same certificate when they graduate as students who graduate from mainstream schools. The trick of this flexible curriculum is that they take advantage of the Japanese system of correspondence high schools [単位制通信制高等学校], which issues credits under different processes. N High School is categorized as a credit-based correspondence high school. While mainstream school students attend classes every day and take mid-term and final exams during the semester, N High School students take online quizzes, submit papers called "reports" [レポート], and take a big final exam at the end of the semester. If students do this process efficiently, they can significantly reduce class time. That is, students can bypass the process and time of taking live classes with other students just by taking specific tests. Yet, they still receive a high school graduation certification [高校卒業資格].[94]

The correspondence school model was a wise choice among high schools that do not primarily teach subjects such as math, English, social sciences. Before the policy change, those who wanted to learn these computer-related subjects needed to go to vocational school or professional school [専門学校 or 資格学校]. The government did not endorse such schools as part of mandatory education: they could not receive government subsidies, and their students could not obtain the proper certification of high school graduation. But the new education policy promoted programming, making it an official subject in Japanese education. This means that the official rhetoric of technological advancement and social change gave legitimacy to certain sets of knowledge, marking them as worth learning at school. Simply speaking, programming was

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[94] In credit-based correspondence high schools, students watch short-videos, take small exams, and write papers. At the end of the semester, they take bigger exams but overall, compared to regular schools, students could reduce the time to be spent for taking classes if they perform well on tests. For more about the system of Japanese correspondence high school, see Teshima (2018).

legitimized as a proper school subject under the banner of improving individual and societal well-being. This new turn and revision offered schools some agency to tailor school curricula more freely. Even for schools whose goals do not align with the government goals of producing human resources, this policy changes diversified legitimate choices in education. Using the Japanese correspondence high school system and the government's new turn toward programming, N High School implemented a new curriculum that enables 1) learning programming intensively under the rubric of mandatory high school education, and 2) reducing the time spent on subject classes. Although the programming course is not the only course offered at N High School, the curriculum design of the programming course enabled the school to create other flexible curricula. In terms of numbers, about 4,000 students were enrolled in N High School in 2017; this number grew to 15,000 in 2020. Of this total number of students in 2017 and 2020, about 20% were enrolled in the programming course.[95] The rest of the students were mainly learning mandatory subjects with some activities to catch up with junior high school level or preparing for general college admission.

This section reviewed how programming impacted Japanese education reform's latest turn at the slogan level, which affected alternative schools' curriculums and policies. In the following sections, I discuss how technological environments are shaping people's interactions and learning. Specifically, based on the ethnographic data obtained in participant observations and interviews at three schools, I discuss how actual technology use, especially smartphone usage and other new technologies, affects how people relate to each other at school.

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[95] In 2021, they have about 15000 students in total.

Individual School Agency: Toward the Freedom of Curriculum

Technology is deeply integrated into our learning environments. Some lament that technologies deprive people of "real" human interaction, exhausting us because of techno-stress. However, emails, smartphones, and communication apps are already deeply rooted in our daily lives. Rather than discussing whether or not we should use technologies for education, I analyze how technologies are intertwined in learning and human interactions at school. Chapter 3 discussed the importance of participating in the place to access the resources offered at school. Against that backdrop, I ask how technologies affect the way people participate in school life.

In an interview cited in the beginning of this chapter, the principal of N High School emphasizes that the internet enables students to be "alone." However, I argue that while students may have significant latitude to learn mandatory subjects by themselves, close interactions with others, described by Slater as "wet" relationships (Slater 2008), still retain importance in learning. According to Slater, wet relationship—being connected closely through group-living—maintaining in-depth relationships with other members in the organization to which one belongs, such as school or a workplace—is essential to stay in the middle class in contemporary Japan. This is because when students, mostly from lower-ranked high schools avoid interpersonal connections, they end up in non-professional service jobs that make them replaceable. Interestingly, I observed that even when mediated by cutting-edge technologies, human-to-human interactions still occupy a significant amount of the time and energy spent in learning.

According to the Japanese government's policy statement, students should internalize a "programming way of thinking by learning programming." That suggests that students learn a new way of thinking to understand society. Similarly, literacy affects how individuals express themselves and recognize their ability and agency (Ahearn 2001). Furthermore, a major conceit

of area studies in university education is that language learning cannot be separated from content courses (Tansman 2004). Learning new technologies is similar to learning a foreign language: new technological knowledge has consequences for how one express one's thoughts and perceives things. Given these frameworks that show that how you learn also affects what you learn, I argue that learning and using technologies affect not only what to learn but also how we see things.

Technological advancement did facilitate the process of learning by oneself. Similar to N High School, students at C High School do not need to take subject classes such as Japanese, math, natural science, and social science with their classmates and teachers. Students use an app that offers recorded lectures (sometimes streams) on these subjects by cram-school teachers [予備校講師]—they are teachers, but students just watch them lecturing. It is a nearly one-way direction of communication. After watching videos, students take online tests, and when they pass, they can proceed to the next session that leads to credits necessary for graduation. Some students choose to come to school for physical schooling but, in an extreme case, they can do everything online. At the end of the semester, students gather physically and take a test in person; when they pass a few more extensive tests and attend their minimum of 5-days of in-person attendance a year. By doing so, they earn a high school graduation certificate [高卒資格].

Generally speaking, cram-school teachers are more efficient at teaching than high school teachers who have many other obligations other than teaching their courses.[96] Under this system, aside from asking questions online, students can learn by themselves without being bothered by relationships with teachers and other students.

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[96] Those cram-school teachers work for private companies, and they are paid according to their popularity. Therefore, they have much more pressure to teach better than mainstream high school teachers.

This learning style has been deeply connected with students who refuse to go to school [登校拒否] Because it allows them to work alone, online high school was a primary option for students who did not (physically) attend junior high school or were academically struggling. As discussed in Chapter 3, the founders of C High School, who had worked for a big IT company, noted that many capable programmers and workers did not (and could not) go to school. At a closed meeting with executive management personnel at C High School, they explained the school's origins frankly, including why programming was core to the high school's establishment. Working in the IT sector, they had noticed that some employees were not good at communicating with others but could be talented programmers. Therefore, they initially sought to establish a school to help those who cannot get jobs due to their lack of communication skills.[97] By teaching programming, they aimed to "reduce the number of *hikikomori* [those who are incapable of leaving their rooms] who are under social welfare [福祉に頼っている元引き こもりを減らす]."

Their ambitions merged with those who wanted to launch something alternative to mainstream education. While those founders had little background in the education sector, they connected themselves with those did, such as their current school president, who taught in mainstream public schools for decades. The Japanese government's efforts to incorporate programming into mandatory education facilitated N High School and C High School leadership attempt to establish a new type of online school that teaches various subjects rather than programming itself. But when they discussed the curriculum's flexibility with the Japanese

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[97] But they also aimed to target elite students who are considered too high achieving to go to mainstream schools.

Ministry of Education, reducing the number of school refusers was a powerful tool for negotiation.[98]

      Once they created a school, they found that many of their students need support for learning itself. Taking care of long-term school refusers who suffer from poor communication skills and lack necessary academic knowledge for their grade levels became important priorities. As I discussed in the previous chapter, teaching assistants and teachers at C High School spend most of their time coaching and managing interpersonal issues. That was not originally the primary concern of those who were crafting a curriculum to produce elite personnel. When I was working there as a teaching assistant, I noticed that those who designed the school have a bigger vision of utilizing technology to innovate. For example, they were trying to send students to the University of Tokyo and foreign universities (mainly the United States) to make the school famous in Japan. Sometimes those aspirations did not seem to accord with the struggles in the classroom.[99] Once one teaches students at school (students who choose to commute to school a few days a week), one finds that they need more encouragement and emotional care. One of the teaching assistants who worked at the school for a long time described the situation as

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[98] This is an important agenda among those who are trying to establish alternative schools in Japan. Basically, local and national governments tend to support schools for those who are incapable of catching up in mainstream education. If they want to establish alternative schools that are "too good" to serve those categories of students, government does not subsidize or endorse them as official schools. In chapter 2, Haruka's father was told by the free space staff that she does not need to come if she could study by herself. In other words, those spaces are remedial institutions for those who cannot catch up with mainstream education.

[99] They seemed to focus on expanding schools based on their market-driven strategies and be distant from political statements, even if that is strongly related to classroom dynamics and creating a safe space for students. For example, they say that Company D (one of the companies which created C High School) is tolerant [寛容] of LGBT people. But they do not protect LGBT kids in the school because they "do not want to be on the side of any ideology [どんなイデオロギーにも組したくない]. At the end of the workshop, the organizer asked me to comment, as they know that I used to work there. I talked about my experience at C High School (nicely) noting that one student teased me of being "sissy," and his homeroom teacher personally apologized to me. When I asked them if they would try to set up guidelines to protect LGBT kids, they said that making that rules or guidelines itself is an ideology. In my opinion, if they do not set up any rules, the same phenomena (bullying or oppression of LGBT kids) will happen. After I said that, they did not say anything and just kept nodding (in a typical gesture of ending the conversation).

"caregiving for senile seniors [*kaigo*]." But even in that situation, the use of technologies

affected how students learned and interacted at school, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Technology in Daily Lives at School

In the same interview discussed above, the principal of N High School also mentions how

smartphone changed timelines for interacting with students.

> As smartphones became widely available in the society, our era changed, too. For example, in old days, when you have a trouble in the classroom, teachers could say to students that "OK, let's stop here. We can talk about this tomorrow, again." "tomorrow again [*mata ashita*]" could imply that the teacher wants you to go home, talk with your parents, and contemplate (about the trouble they had). However, now you cannot say "tomorrow again." After that, students might contact each other directly and things might get worse. For kids, it might be a misfortune, but they could do it for 24 hours. On the other hand, students could find friends through the internet and that is happening more often.
> [スマートフォンが世の中に広がり、時代も変わったと思います。たとえ ば、昔だったらクラスで揉め事があったりすると「もうやめとけよ。また 明日話をしようや」って先生が子どもに言えたんですよ。「また明日」っ ていうのは、家に帰って親としゃべって、その間に色々考えて欲しいとい う意味もあったと思います。でも今は「また明日」なんて言えませんよ ね。「また明日」と言った後に、ケンカしていた子ども同士が直に連絡を 取り合って、より状態が悪化する場合もある。子ども達にとってはかわい そうなことかもしれないけれども、24時間、誰とでもそういう状態にな ってしまう。一方で、ネットを通じて友達ができることも増えてきたと思 います。]

This narrative indicates how smartphones seem to have changed how people interact at

school. Before smartphones were prevalent, once students went home, they were supposed to

take time off from the trouble at school, perhaps discussing it with their family. However,

today's increased connectivity means that teachers and administrators need to fix a given

problem in a timely manner, as they cannot control what students would do with their

smartphone. Compared to 15-20 years ago, smartphones changed the landscape of classrooms

and break time at school drastically. In this section, I analyze how technologies affect learning at school, especially how smartphones mediate human interactions at school.

Studying by oneself could increase the subjective sense of happiness among learners. Sociologists claim that human beings feel happier when they are connected with others through shared interests, not by their physical closeness.[100] The ultimate example is that people feel a greater subjective sense of well-being by living alone. It is because they are not forced to interact with others if it is unnecessary (Klinenberg 2012). Then, many online technologies facilitate interest-based connection with others and reduce the burden of unnecessary communication at school: this, in turn, can affect students' subjective sense of well-being.

First, communication apps changed how people interact at school, especially for business matters. For many interpersonal interactions, N High School uses Slack (*Figure* 21), the communication app used in some companies in the U.S. and globally. Similarly, Slack was an essential communication tool at C High School, too. At the morning and end of the day, C High School teachers make important announcements to students on Slack; additionally, there are various channels (groups) such as teachers-only, teachers and teaching assistants, and staff only. As a teaching assistant, you need to check your Slack from time to time as sometimes important agendas are being shared on the platform. At the same time, you should not check Slack too often because you also need to pay attention to students and others who are present in the space. Students could come up with their own nickname on Slack, but teachers and teaching assistants must use their real names, preferably with their faces. Your use of Slack—whether you use your own photograph; how often you use the platform; how you use it—lets others form an

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[100] For example, the literature discusses ways that interest-based communities make individuals happier than forced, place-based community, starting from discussions of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (Tunnis 2001), community and association (Macivar 1917), formations of urban community (Jacobs 1961), and third places (Oldenburg 1999).

impression of you. Aside from becoming a factor in one's impression management, Slack plays

an important role in sharing records of what happened every day. While some topics are

censored, such as students discussing sexual matters, members of the school staff find it helpful

to see a record of the topics that have been previously discussed on Slack.

Figure 23: The model image of Slack conversation at N High School

Referring to past communication logs is an important way to share work, especially in

this newly built school. As C High School was freshly established when I was working there,

new rules and systems were created almost weekly, sometimes daily. Teaching assistants were

required to work at least two full days in a week as there would be many things to catch up. In

order to do this, teaching assistants needed to follow discussions and reports on Slack. Indeed,

the school management relied heavily on Slack, as it was a useful platform for sharing the

information instantly among several different teams and groups in an organization.

The use of Slack also complicated how information is shared and for what end. For

example, when you make mistakes, depending on what you did, the accuser decides on which

channel it would be shared. For example, one teaching assistant forgot to attend an end-of-the-day meeting. When we tried to contact him, the teacher who is in charge of teaching assistants specifically instructed that we need to share it in a school-wide channel, rather than sending a direct message to him, possibly intending to publicly shame him. By using Slack, teachers and teaching assistants could always be connected with others immediately, but it complicated the process of how information is directed and shared with whom.

For peer-to-peer communications, messaging apps such as LINE or Instagram played bigger roles than Slack, which was designed for workplaces. For example, while it was an important tool for official communication at school, Slack still remained a top-down communication tool. Some students told me that they prefer using LINE (a messaging app popular in Japan) among their close friends. In Slack channels for homeroom classes, most of the posts were made by teachers regarding administrative issues or by students posting about being late for school. Sometimes, students would share their group project work on Slack, but those posts were also under instructions by teachers. Slack changed the way school staff members communicate among themselves, but it still remained being top-down communication tool between teachers and students: students retreated to their private circles of friends using LINE.[101]

<center>Technology as a Tool and a Learning Subject</center>

Learning technology changes both what students study and how they express their thoughts. For example, the curriculum at C High School devotes a significant amount of time to group project work. To that end, students need to learn skills such as how to use Photoshop,

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[101] As for peer-to-peer connections, I did not have access to students' LINE so the details of student-student communication at C High School are not discussed in this dissertation. I discuss peer-to-peer communications more in depth using my data at KIS.

<center>212</center>

Google Docs, and PowerPoint. Similar to learning foreign languages, these digital tools are not merely tools for delivering thoughts, but impact thoughts themselves. Learning new skills for communication is similar to the way that case studies contribute to the development of theories about learning: the specific cases and theories relate dialectically to contribute to knowledge production in each discipline. Therefore, the tools used to deliver communications affect the form and content of the original thesis or thoughts.

Learning technology is also well connected with the current social contract which I discussed in Chapter 2.[102] At this school, "survival" is a key buzzword for learning. As the founding team of C High School mentioned regarding online education and school refusal populations, learning is promoted as an essential skill for surviving in Japanese society. For example, lessons teaching students how to use Photoshop were framed in a slogan of "survival": "Let's gain the skills to survive the 21st century. Let's gain the power to implement your ideas. Let's make and propose things in better ways in better ways. To achieve those goals, the Adobe series will be your powerful weapon." [２１世紀を生き抜く力を身につけよう。アイディアを実行できる力を身につけよう。モノづくり、提案をする際の表現力を上げる。Adobeシリーズは超強力な武器になる]. This exhortation is very catchy and contains several significant keywords, such as "survive [生き抜く]" and "weapon [武器]." In the school administrators' logic, if students learn these sets of skills, they will survive (i.e., find a job to earn money) in the future. In other words, this school presents a new variation, in content, of the existing social contract of education.[103] Programming and knowledge of technological tools such

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[102] As education is designed to produce ideal citizens for the nation, each individual is promised that achieving excellence will secure a better way of living (i.e., going to good schools leads to securing a better job, which results in having a stable life).

[103] One of the teaching assistants mentioned that C High School actually manages student's educational trajectories (guiding and controlling students) significantly [実際、Ｃ高校はレールをかなり敷いていると思う].

as Zoom are essential skills for survival—or, at least, they are promoted as essential for one's survival. One difference from the previous, state-sanctioned social contract is that these newly-introduced skills are more closely tied with the discourse of expression: communication and creativity. These technologies enable students to learn by themselves and also facilitate communication essential to completing assigned tasks.

Friendship Needs Attention

For peer-to-peer communications, real-time video recording was one of the most popular ways among students to communicate. At KIS, most students, especially high school girls, constantly checked their smartphones. Although I did not video-record the classroom, I could watch what students uploaded to Instagram Stories by being "friends" with them on the social networking platform. Indeed, I could see that some uploaded their "Stories" even during class time.

Being "inside" the (online) friendship circle requires relentless attention to one's phone and in-person communications. Some students uploaded posts to their Instagram Stories[104] multiple times in a day. Those Stories were mainly about their daily lives. They mention each other often in their Stories and sometimes set up "Close Friends" categories to control who can view those stories (*Figure 4*). As the Instagram Story feature is interactive, we sometimes commented on each other's posts. Observing students' Instagram use helped me understand students' daily lives outside school and what they are interested in—or, more specifically, what they are interested in presenting to others.

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[104] The Instagram Story feature allows you to upload videos, pictures, or text to your Instagram profile. It is a limited-time feature: posts disappear after 24 hours. The feature offers more tools for interactions than regular posts or direct messages: one can add GIF images and stickers that are not available except in Stories.

Similar to behavior around Slack, the Instagram app creates a complex structure of communication among students (and teachers): it matters whether you add someone to your friend list, and how much a given person can access your content. Students carefully arrange others' levels of access to their Instagram content. In particular, permission settings that determined how much content you could access indicated the depth of a given friendship. For example, in left most image in Figure 4 shows a post from an Instagram Story labeled "Close Friends" in green. When you are in the list of someone's "Close Friends," you can see all of their uploaded Stories. If not, you cannot see those posts in the Stories feature that have been restricted to a "Close Friends" list. Thus, students consider it a big deal whether they have access to other students' Instagram Stories or not. Many students, especially female students, arranged their Instagram privacy setting to allow 1) their close friends to access all Stories and Posts, 2) their regular friends to access only some Stories and all Posts, and 3) their teachers to access Posts only.

Figure 24: Instagram Stories by students

Screenshots, from left to right: Girls posing. The caption is addressed to one of their friends who is not in this picture, saying "let's hang out together next time." This Story is visible only to those who are "close friends" of the girl who uploaded this. On the center, you see one boy sleeping during the class. The caption means "President, I was disappointed" (the boy sleeping is president of student council). The last one (pink color) says, "I am bored, help me. I am waiting for your direct messages or LINE messages…"

One of the students mentioned to me that she needs to be careful about whom to include in her "Close Friends" list. This is because she sometimes shares sensitive information through her Instagram Story posts. Once, she went to karaoke instead of going to school and posted about it on her Story. Although she showed it only to her "Close Friends" category, somebody reported it to school, and it became a big issue. When I asked why she posted it, even knowing the potential risk of it becoming public, she said:

> "If I do not upload anything, they might forget me and…it's not good. I also just wanted to upload it too see how others react (even if it is potentially dangerous) …

[何もあげないと忘れられるっていうか、それじゃダメなんです。あとは
まあ、（危険性があっても）ちょっと載せてみたいかなって…どんな反応
あるかなって。]"

She oscillates between being "cool" and "safe," and considers it important to show her presence among her circle of friends. Students practice impression management (Goffman 1959) every day at school, and Instagram makes such management even more complex. In this case, she chose to look "cool" over being safe, and that somehow contributed to secure her position among her peers. While teachers keep talking about whether the school should prohibit students from using phones, few students talked about the pros and cons of having Instagram—because for them, it is not optional in their school life. This circumstance at KIS is different from that at the Forest of Freedom School, where much fewer numbers of students use Instagram. For better or worse, smartphones (and their social networking apps) are deeply integrated into students' lives as essential tools of communication.

For teachers, smartphone use was a big obstacle to student focus in class, and this challenge became more serious after the school officially allowed students to use smartphones after 2019. In every class, I observed teachers having a hard time compelling students to listen to their lectures and participate in discussions because students were distracted by their phones. While smartphones disrupted some educational communication, they were essential for social communications and maintaining peer relationships at school. Outside the class time, smartphones play a very active role in communication among students. During the breaktime, some boys would get together in the corner of classroom, playing online games together. Some girls would show each other their favorite Instagram celebrities or comment about their previous stories and posts, joking about what they had shared earlier that day.

Being Out of Network—Do We Miss Analog Style of Interaction?

A school's location also affects how technologies are integrated into school life. Compared to what I observed at C High School and KIS, the Forest of Freedom School showed more analog styles of communication. As the school is located in a forest in the mountains (the school's name literally represents its location), my LTE network became unreliable while at school.[105] Teachers could use their own Wi-Fi connections, but I rarely saw them using the internet or smartphones, even in teachers' room. Many computers were connected to the internet through hard-wired cables, rather than wireless networks. This sort of network isolation was distinctly different than the situation at C High School, where each student and school staff member receives a MacBook Air, has a speedy Wi-Fi connection at every moment, and is expected to use it whenever needed.

This difference in network availability affected how students use (or do not use) technologies in their daily lives. After I spent some time at the Forest of Freedom School, I found that few students would play games either on their phones or Nintendo Switch devices. When I commented on this one boy, he told me:

> "We cannot play online games with their players. The internet speed here is too slow—if it's not a battle-game (with other players), we don't do it much."
> 「ここじゃ対戦ゲームできないんすよ。（インターネット通信の）データが遅すぎて。対戦じゃなかったらそんなにやらないし。」

He points out the lack of high-speed Wi-Fi inhibits certain types of online activities. According to him, students cannot engage with online games that involve cooperation and battles with other players [対戦型ゲーム] because these games consume a large amount of cellular

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[105] In Japan, people often use mobile Wi-Fi routers called "pocket Wi-Fi": turning one on connects you with Wi-Fi almost everywhere in Japan except geographically isolated areas. During my fieldwork, I had to go down the mountain to send/receive large data files or use Google Drive, etc.

data; the school does not offer Wi-Fi for students and using cellular data at the requisite rates for these games is too expensive (or even impossible, given limited cellular reception). This type of game is especially popular in Japan, and, in many cases, smartphone games require a high-speed internet connection regardless of the play style.[106] The geographical isolation of the school, which the students sometimes jokingly call the "jail of Hanno [飯能の監獄]" (Hanno is the name of the district where the school is located), limits their online activities because of its internet connectivity limitations. The limits of online activities seem to facilitate more analog interpersonal interactions, but this point needs to be investigated further.

Therefore, what I observed was a more analog mode of communications and self-expressions among students than I had observed at the digitally-integrated schools. During lunch breaks, I sometimes joined students in card games such as UNO. After school, some students drew on paper for fun or played musical instruments such as traditional Japanese guitar (*Shamisen*) (*figure* 4). I observed these rather analog ways of spending time more frequently when I visited some schools in Japan's countryside during my preliminary research. In chapter 4, I introduced a student's observation that, at this school, students are "required to attract (mobilize) others by doing something [ここでは（何かをして）人を集める力が必要なんです]." But these necessary abilities—the capacity to engage each other in activities —are not embodied and communicated through online profiles or gaming skills at the Forest of Freedom School.

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[106] Some news (not academic research) in Japan such as this article (Yamamoto 2019) indicates that this type of games causes additions easily but addressing arguments regarding the danger of this specific type of gaming is beyond this dissertation's scope.
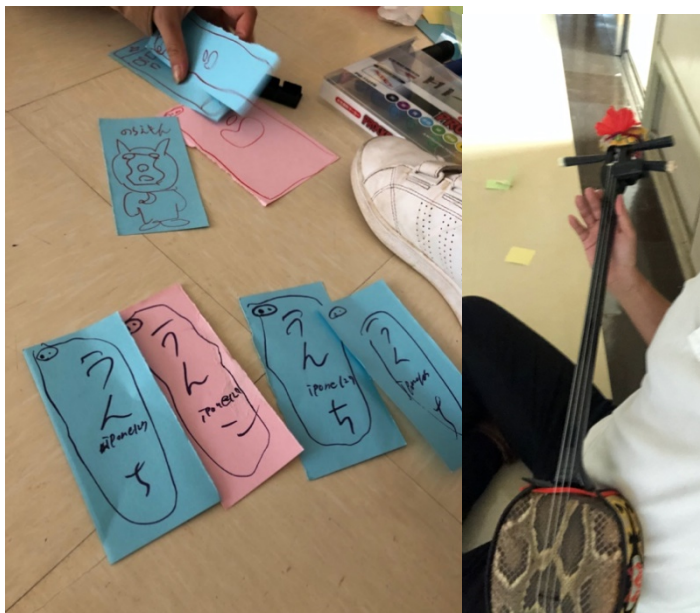
Figure 25: After School Activities at the Forest of Freedom School

In *figure 24*, two photographs show typical after-class scenes at the Forest of Freedom School. On the left, you see some paper strips of blue and pink. On the upper blue drawing, you see the sketch labeled as *noraemon* [のらえもん] which I assumed was a parody of *doraemon*, one of the most famous cartoon characters in Japan. In the lower part of the photograph, you see three blue strips and one pink one, each of which says "iPhone 127, 128, 129, 130" (numbered, respectively, from left to right) framed with the word poop [うんこ]. When I asked why he wrote that term, he said "well, no meaning but the term just came to my mind!" On the right is the *Ryukyu Shamisen*. The student who was playing it taught me how to play. These activities do not require digital technologies: students just use pen and paper or a musical instrument. As they gather and play around, other students stop by and ask what they are doing. Those analog modes of activity seemed to invite spontaneous communication and socialization with other students.

Based on observations in three schools, each with its own different network environment, I found that these technological environments affect how people interact each other and how they

craft their interpersonal relationships. Compared to spending time by oneself by playing games at C High School[107] or on one's smartphone, analog modes of communication at the Forest of Freedom School tend to require more on-site, ad-libbed in-person interactions. Of course, even in the Forest of Freedom School setting, it is possible to be connected by others via messaging apps and to engage in communal, online activities especially after students head home at the end of the day. But at least while at school, analog communications produced a different mode of interactions than those typical of schools that offer high-speed internet connections to everyone.

Generally speaking, people tend to value off-line communications as more authentic than online communications; this dissertation, however, does not participate in such discussions about morality. Rather, I argue that technological use diversified channels of communications, offering more and different opportunities for people to participate in learning and communication.[108] In the next section, I analyze how these new modes of communication require new knowledge of danger and safety.

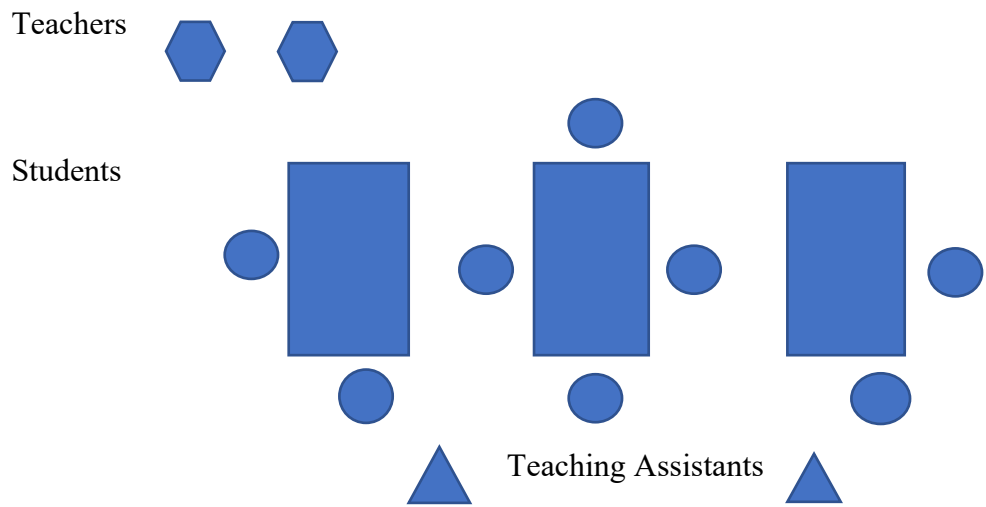The New Fields of Learning: Cyberspace, Safety, and Participation

Different spaces require different sets of behavioral norms and knowledge: online spaces are not exceptions. One afternoon at C High School, there was a special guest lecture; it was mandatory for students. The topic was cyberbullying. In the morning prior to the lecture, classes

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[107] Some games are designed to be played by multiple players. In this context, I am mainly referring to games played by solo players.

[108] Different modes of communication produce different modes of behaviors. For example, at the Forest of Freedom School, it was sometimes necessary to "look for" somebody at school, such as classmates and teachers, as students do not always have each other's contact information. That happens less frequently at C High School because students know other students' Slack accounts, so they can easily be in communication and locate each other. At KIS the size of the school is much smaller and almost all classrooms face each other around an atrium in the center of school building. Therefore, the act of "looking for somebody" at school happens when school is of a certain size and, it is more often necessary when there is little online connectivity.

were spent for a discussion about bullying on the internet. Students were asked to complete online questionnaires, with questions such as whether they would intervene when they saw bullying on Twitter: the results were shared during the afternoon lecture, showing 60 percent of students chose "yes," and 40 percent "no." In the afternoon, two guest lecturers talked about their own experiences of cyberbullying. One was a victim of a false accusation of being a criminal, and the other was a YouTuber who broadcasts content about education. The event had a somewhat festive atmosphere, with some reporters photographing and interviewing students. The event changed the physical space, too. Usually, desks are arranged in groups but for this event, all were facing the lecturers (*Figure* 24). During the usual class time, teachers and teaching assistants will walk around the classroom. Therefore, this was one of the few moments when the classroom looked like a more conventional lecture hall (*Figure* 25).

Figure 26: Normal Seat Settings

The cyberbullying lecture exemplified how social spaces created by technology are not just learning tools but become a subject to be learned. One speaker talked about his experience of being mistaken for a criminal. When people first started to accuse him of being a criminal online,

he just ignored it. But the accusations escalated: he received death threats and ended up losing some job opportunities (he is a comedian who sometimes appears on TV) as his clients did not want to be negatively tainted by the accusations against him. He recounted the police response to his inquiries about the case: a policeman crossed his arms and said, "If you die, we can do the investigation for you." He talked about how some jokes could have disastrous consequences for someone's life. He also discussed internet literacy, the pressure to conform, and the legal system's current unpreparedness to punish cybercrime and harassment. The other speaker, who is a famous YouTuber specializing in educational content, talked about having a female sibling with cerebral palsy and being discriminated against by others. He discussed an incident that occurred when he was at the supermarket with his sister: referring to the speaker's sister, a mother told her kids, "don't look at her [見ちゃいけません!]" While his story was not directly related to bullying in online social spaces, his platform of choice for sharing his thoughts is YouTube, the emerging online social and broadcast space.

Figure 27: At lecture

The internet was an important mediator of the event. First, the talk was broadcast simultaneously for all C High School students (not only those who present in the classrooms), and audience members could submit comments during the talk. These questions and answers

were only accepted online, and the broadcast was available only to students of C High School. These student-submitted comments would pop up on the broadcast image in real time. Many comments were serious but students sometimes posted ASCII art and irrelevant comments.[109] After the session, I asked some students what they thought about the ASCII art and irrelevant utterances. To my surprise, they mentioned that it helped them keep listening to the talk. According to their explanations, those teasing comments mitigated the seriousness of the talk: students could not listen without them because it was "too serious." In addition to live comments submitted through official channels, some students wrote their thoughts on Twitter in real time in order to discuss the talk with their friends (Twitter discussions were not suggested by the school, but some students are active Twitter users). After the lecture, in-person discussions were held in small groups, and students were very actively engaged compared to the regular group discussion sessions conducted weekly.

This session exemplified the new online forms of learning in three ways. First, it was a showcase focused on how this new social space of anonymous online interaction could seriously harm individuals' real lives.[110] Secondly, to teach this, the school conducted a hybrid lesson: an in-person lecture broadcast online, with questions collected online only. Thirdly, audience members simultaneously shared their feedback with others by submitting comments to the broadcasting monitor itself or Twitter. Those who were on-site also undertook face-to-face discussions after the lecture. These three features of the event demonstrate how new online technologies became a subject for students to learn, were employed as tools for sharing thoughts

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[109] Many of those irrelevant comments mentioned the phrases of a character called SUUMO. SUUMO was popular among Twitter and other online spaces in Japan especially around 2018 (NICO NIVO Pedia 2021).

[110] In South Korea, idol singers and celebrities frequently suffer from pernicious comments that sometimes trigger deaths by suicide. In Japan, the female wrestler Hana Kimura committed suicide after viewers bashed her on Twitter about her behaviors on *Terrace House* [テラスハウス] in 2020.

with each other, and created a social space. Although those who were physically present in the classroom discussion received more immediate feedback on the topic, this event demonstrated that offering diverse means of communicating allows students to participate in multiple ways that in turn increase opportunities to experience a sense of belonging at school. Some students feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts online, while others prefer in-person conversation: this hybrid event accommodated participation according to both preferences.

The circumstances around learning about programming, Photoshop, and online harassment offer examples of how the incorporation of online technologies in school settings diversifies how individuals express themselves and how they connect with others. Such technologies offer more channels for participation in schools as a place, not just for students. While Slack did not facilitate many peer-to-peer interactions among students at C High School, it changed the mode of communication for those who work there. Other platforms, such as Twitter and Google Drive, changed how C High School community members shaped their professional communications. Those new technologies offer new social spaces, learning subjects, and participation methods. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the principal of N High School discussed the freedom to be alone. Digital technologies do make it possible to be physically alone to a certain degree, but learners cannot learn by themselves. One cannot be totally alone through the entire process of learning and school life, and the internet offered more remote opportunities to coordinate methods of learning and participation.

Conclusion

Digital technologies have changed the ways we interact, the subjects we learn, and the spaces where we interact in various forms. The emerging importance of technology caused the

Japanese government to add new technological subjects, like programming, to the category of mandatory education topics. While this curriculum reform did not drastically change overall content and pedagogy in mainstream schools, it enabled some private schools to assert more agency in tailoring their own curricula. Even with sharp differences in curricula from those taught in mainstream schools teach, the legitimization of technological subjects by the Japanese state meast that students who graduate from N High School, for example, still receive a certification of high school graduation endorsed by the government. The new reformed curriculum also enabled alternative school students, such as those enrolled at N High School, to study more topics and subjects according to their interests.

The incorporation of digital technologies diversified how people express their thoughts on ideal education. Although teachers at KIS felt having smartphones present undermines students' concentration significantly, for students, school life without smartphones was not realistic. How each school offers network environments and how those who are at school use technologies, or do not use technologies range widely depending on school's location and policy. At KIS, offering fast Wi-Fi and allowing smartphone use changed the educational landscape: Instagram became an essential communication tool among students, one that complicated some interpersonal interactions. At the Forest of Freedom School, on the other hand, the lack of internet connection affects how students spend their time and how they connect to each other: without constant internet, the students engage in more analog ways of expressing themselves and spending time with each other.

Internet-based communication apps such as Slack, Instagram, and LINE diversified interactions among staff, students, and parents at C High School, while also creating a new social space (cyberspace) around school. While online classes reduced the amount of time students are

required to be physically present in the classroom with teachers and classmates, this digital shift did not reduce the importance of interactions. Rather, some of these interactions moved online and gained different rhythms. People maintained the perception that interacting with others, such as through coaching, and experiencing a sense of belonging are important for learning: interactions and communications, even when digital, remain an essential part of how ideal education is imagined.

Chapter 7 **Conclusion**

Carpe diem? School and Social Life in a Close-knit Community

Suddenly, it started pouring heavily, and Kosuke-kun and I were stuck in the discount store where we had stopped to get some snacks after school. It was during the rainy season in June, and, once you stepped out of the store, you would be drenched to your skin. After waiting for a while, we decided to ask for help; there was a dormitory nearby, and a friend of ours, Jun-kun, lived there. I felt hesitant because, even with an umbrella, you cannot be free from rain when walking. I was afraid that it might be too bald to ask him to come all the way here. But Kosuke-kun made a phone call via LINE—I could hear Jun-kun teasing Kosuke-kun; he pretended he would not come and meet us. When Kosuke-kun said "Kuni-san is here, too! [クニさんもいるんだから！]," it sealed the deal. A few minutes later, Jun-kun showed up with one umbrella in his hand. While we appreciated his help, Kosuke-kun jokingly grumbled that Jun-kun only brought one extra umbrella for two people [てかお前なんで傘一個しか持ってこねーんだよ]. Followed by a casual response "oh, that's right [あ、そうだったわ〜]," Kosuke-kun and Jun-kun shared one umbrella, leaving one for me. After we arrived back to the dormitory, we played card games while eating snacks. Those who do not live there are not supposed to visit—but that rule was not strictly enforced. Then Kosuke-kun said, "I like the way things are, like this, I am glad that I am here [こういうのがいいなって思う。ここに来て]." Kosuke-kun's experience at a public school was not pleasant, as his classmates teased him for

being chubby and having a non-Japanese name. Even his teacher joined in. His parents worried that Kosuke-kun was quiet and depressed, and so they sent him to KIS from junior high school. While he is not particularly aware that this school is somewhat special, he enjoys his school life, surrounded by good friends and friendly teachers, takes classes seriously, and does some committee work in a students' organization. Now he is one of the students who is loved by everybody at school.

By conducting ethnographic studies on three alternative secondary schools, this dissertation explored how people imagine a better mode of education by refusing mainstream learning and living in contemporary Japan. Regardless of the schools' diverse philosophies and pedagogies, my research reveals that "alternative education" is the process of seeking better options for communication and relationships in safe spaces. Kosuke-kun's story represents a typical student experience in alternative schools: close-knit relationships in a safe environment. Students gain a second chance to participate in school life by coming to alternative schools that have different value systems and interpersonal dynamics. Although schools focus on how they treat students and what kind of curricula they offer, it is parents, not students who choose these schools—as Kosuke-kun's parents did. Parents' guidance, students' will, and broader societal circumstances and pressures on certain groups of people, such as school refusers, ethnic minorities, or those do not feel comfortable in mainstream school: these are all entangled in the choice to turn to alternative education.

Some aspects of Japanese education have changed over the last half century, but general attitudes toward it have remained the same. Reforms since the 1960s have sought to reorient education from cramming to become more individual-based, with reduced school days and class hours, while also advocating for alternative abilities and values (Chapter 1). However, despite

these changes—Saturdays became part of the weekend, at-home studying time has decreased, and fewer students opt to spend extra years preparing for college examinations—students' and teachers' narratives show that Japanese secondary education did not change drastically. Over the process of reducing class hours and internalizing the mindset of consumerism, the quality of Japanese mainstream education was undermined. At the same time, its pedagogy is still ~~For them, the system is still~~ authoritative, stressful, and exam-oriented, as Yoneyama (1999) observed at Japanese high school in the 1990s. Group life at mainstream schools requires students to care about what others think and behave accordingly. As a result of this group focus, they are sometimes punished for mistakes made by someone else in their group, as was the catalyst for Haruka's school refusal (in Chapter 3).

At the same time, some people proposed models for better education and created alternative schools to implement them. These schools' trajectories differ according to the time and policies of their founders. Some tried to present themselves as alternative by refusing authoritative pedagogy, Euro-American centric internationalization, or physical schooling. My target schools all embody different ideals in their figures of the ideal student students, as they offer their specific "better" ways to educate the next generation. The results of my long-term, in-depth ethnographic research in three locations and in three languages illustrate how diverse populations—based on their ethnic backgrounds or personal creed—in Japan seek to put themselves in better circumstances, especially regarding their relationships with peers and teachers. Alternative education is desired when people are not satisfied with relationships at mainstream schools.

Although my preliminary visits to several schools helped me craft a feasible dissertation proposal, this project evolved after I launched into actual fieldwork. In the beginning, I was

considering focusing on how people in alternative schools feel hope and anxiety for their futures. This discourse of hope and anxiety was popular in contemporary Japanese Studies in both English and Japanese, especially in the fields of anthropology and sociology. I assumed that students and parents might feel anxious about their futures because the students are located in institutions that do not always represent greater Japanese society in general—they might worry that they were "off-track." As I expected, some teachers were anxious about their students' futures, especially after graduation. But after spending time with students during fieldwork, I found that students were not particularly interested in their futures—they had opportunities to talk about it in some occasions, such as during English classes. But they did not take it seriously. In some cases, when I asked students about their dreams at the end of the semester, some even forgot what they had told me before. Even in their daily conversations, they did not talk about their future anxieties much. Instead, students were more interested in their ongoing social lives at school. In my opinion, the discourse of hope and anxiety, which was popular in English and Japanese academia, is rather how scholars give meaning to people's narratives, than what people—especially students are really talking about.

Alternative education in Japan is more characterized by how people desire for relationships than the uniqueness of curriculum. Although schools frame their uniqueness in terms of their educational practices, practically speaking, the ways that people build relationships in the context of their school's specific culture mattered more for how teachers, students, and parents practice their learning and education. Their specific school cultures are embodied by images of different ideal students, each engaged in the schools' own educational goals and ideologies. These ideal images affect how people choose those schools and narrate each other's choices. In other words, even if alternative schools try to be free from the ideologies of

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mainstream institutions, they cannot avoid creating their own ideologies to educate students at their school.

Whatever alternative models people seek for, they end up creating the mainstream culture in their own institutions. In order to participate in the space well, students and teachers need to internalize the dominant values in each school. This observation is supported by the fact that students who attend their alternative schools from junior high school are advantaged in their school lives, compared to those who enter at the high school level: the earlier you come, the more you know the people around you, and the more easily you can acculturate yourself into the new school culture. Some "alternative" curricula are not, in fact, so different from mainstream curricula; the alternative qualities sometimes depend on (or have grown distant from) the year of establishment and the composition of the student body. For example, Forest of Freedom School teachers lamented that having been alternative in the 1980s does not guarantee being cutting-edge in the 2010s (Introduction). But I do not write this to undermine the value of creating alternative education in Japan—because at their moments of establishment, all were clear about refusing mainstream educational norms and the values common at that time and were trying to create a better place for students uncomfortable in mainstream schools. The alternative levels and directions depend on the social contexts of each era.

In all schools, creating the safe space was the basis of their education. It is interpersonal dynamics which teachers spend their resources the most, and what students talk about. This study strongly demonstrates that concerned parents of students who experienced negative interactions in mainstream schools seek alternative options for their children. Teachers at alternative schools clearly have a sense that their school is special as regards to curriculum and pedagogy. But for students and parents, the more important factors are that the alternative school is a safer space.

Indeed, teachers spend significant amount of energy managing interpersonal dynamics at school. What these schools offer in common is a close-knit community of learning in which people think highly of participation and communication. My fieldwork data illustrates how teachers and school staff spend a great deal of effort on relationships with students and between students—in all three schools, even when mediated by technologies (Chapter 6). This further raises fundamental questions about safe spaces and learning. Is a safe space more important for leaning than the curriculum and content? In practice, these three schools seem to be suggesting a positive answer. The curriculum does matter, but feeling safe is essential for learning motivation in the long run.

To better understand Japanese education holistically, future research might look at how private education in Japan affects individual learning experiences. All my target schools are private schools; moreover, mainstream education has always been paired with private, shadow educational institutions—cram schools such as *juku* and *yobiko* supported a wide range of students (Chapter 2). From those who struggle to catch up in schoolwork to those who aim to enter top-ranked junior high schools, high schools, and colleges, many students learn in private educational institutions in Japan. This perspective on private shadow education playing a key role might be useful to understand education, family, and society in other countries such as Korea and China. There, too, cram schools could be the safe places for learning. Some students do not go to school, but they could go to *juku* at night. Therefore, school refusal does not always mean that those students lack academic foundations. As the young Japanese population decreases, the culture of college entrance examination changes. More and more universities accept using a recommendation system, making the broad process of college admission no longer equal to merely preparing for paper tests. In 2020, 56 percent of those who entered private

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universities did so through some sorts of recommendation system.[111] In particular, the experience of *ronin,* spending one or more years to prepare for college, might become a historical phenomenon rather than an actual, lived experience for future generations of Japanese students.

Some people frame their choice of alternative schools in terms of the risk of being in mainstream institutions—risks, for example, for students who are ethnic Koreans or had previous experiences of being bullied. My research avoids falling into dichotomies of structural force on the one hand and individual agency on the other, as people navigate to alternative schools. Instead, this dissertation analyzed the complicated process of coming to alternative schools and discussed how each actor—teacher, student, and parent—imagines the best education and spends their everyday lives in those schools. Schools focus on how to treat students, but it is parents who choose those schools or guide their children to go there. The selection of an alternative school for secondary education involves a mixture of students' motivations and the ways parents support and navigate their children's choices.

These ideals about "the best education" are imagined and narrated vis-à-vis what people already know or experienced as good or bad models. As with any type of social change, people do not come up with totally new models of education out of the blue. As long as gaps between ideal and reality exist, some people will imagine, create, and practice new alternative educations. Conflicts and upheavals are typical in newly built alternative schools. As time goes by, the meaning of being "alternative" differs depending on how mainstream education changes over time. Participating in alternative education represents individual refusals of mainstream Japan. But it is not an abjection from Japan and its culture. Even if one attends alternative schools, one

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[111] In national universities, 87.8 percent of incoming students still took paper examinations, and in public universities, the rate is 71.8 percent, being much higher than those who entered via a recommendation system The MEXT (2020).

still has to find future jobs and relationships in Japan. Instead, going to alternative schools is part

of a never-ending process of seeking better ways of living alongside mainstream Japanese

cultural norms.

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