Foundation of the Ministry of Education
(Mombusho) in Japan

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At the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, before peace in our country was established, the new government of Japan attempted to institute new cultural movement by creating universities in Kyoto and Tokyo.

The movement to establish a university in Kyoto was suspended as the new government moved to Tokyo. Contrary, the effort to establish a university in Tokyo was carried on in 1868. The Shoheiko (Research Institute for Confucianism), which was created in the Tokugawa period, was revived on June 29th; the Kaiseisho (Research Institute for Western Learning) was revived on September 12th ; the Igakusho (Research Institute for Medical Science) was revived on June 26th. These were made the highest seats of learning, though they had been closed due to the civil strife accompanying the Restoration. Of these three, the Shoheiko occupied the most important position and this institute, besides carrying out education, also worked as an organization for educational administration (cf. The 50 Years' History of Tokyo Imperial University, Vol. 1, pp. 14, 113).

This is obvious from the fact that in the Shoheiko educational administrators were appointed in addition to the professors (cf. op. cit. p. 114). Our central administrative office of education, therefore, was in this highest seat of learning.

In March, 1869, Emperor Meiji moving to Tokyo, the new government was transferred to this new capital, and the undertaking to establish Tokyo University was given impetus. A university was established with the Shoheiko in the centre, with the Kaiseisho and the Igakusho on both wings (cf. op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 14, and Okubo, Universities in Japan, pp. 219-222). This was on June 15th, 1869. On July 8th, the official system of organization was established and the offices in this institute were made clear. The duties of the Betto (the President) were:

1: To supervise the University, Medical School and the Hospital.
2: To take the editorship of National History.
3: To supervise local educational administration.

This president, therefore, was to act as the central administrative officer as well as to manage the university (cf. 50 Years' History, p. 22, and Okubo, op. cit. p. 225).

In February, 1870, the regulations of University and Middle and Primary Schools were promulgated, but as before, the University was considered as the central
administrative office and it was stated in these regulations that local middle and primary schools should observe the regulations laid down by the University (cf. 50 Years' History, p. 60).

About 1869, difficulties began to arise due to the question of whether the education and operation of the university should be given on Oriental basis or on Occidental basis. Because of this quandary, the government closed the University in July, 1870 and created the Nankō (Southern school) for the study of western learning and the Toko (Eastern school) for the study of medical science, both independent of the University. Though the University was closed, the business of educational administration continued to be managed by it (cf. 50 Years’ History, p. 90).

As we have seen so far the University in its early days was the central administrative office as well as an institution for the study of education, and president managed the office of the University, at the same time holding the office of the Minister of Education. Of course boards for the improvement of local educational administration and others were organized in the University and they stimulated local public schools and helped to establish them. This responsibility was soon transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs (the Mombusho) and the University became undirected and ineffective in its activities as the central educational office, as it became occupied in its own operation, which resulted in many more difficulties.

Thus it was proved that the university was improper as central administrative office of education, and the new government keenly felt the necessity of advancing education and diffusing civilization for the general public. The government apparently thought at that time that in order to spread the civilization of the more advanced nations rapidly throughout the barbaric and feudal society of Japan the proper and most effective method was to centralize educational administration so that the government could operate positively and firmly. The government therefore decided to establish the Mombusho to supervise all the central and local schools. Thus on July 18th, 1871, the Mombusho was born (cf. 50 Years’ History, p. 107. Selected History of Mombusho, p. 3).

Because of the foregoing circumstances, it must be admitted the Mombusho was created to enforce a policy of central educational administration, but it was absolutely necessary to establish schools all over the country and to carry out a new education to diffuse western culture throughout Japan, which was far behind advanced western nations, and to create both a public and an officialdom fitted for the life of modern state. The Japanese people at that time were entirely feudalistic and there was no prospect whatever they could see for themselves the necessity of such education. Left to themselves the Japanese people would never create a modern nation, so the government itself resolved to enforce a policy of centralization. At the outset
government leaders in the field of education were faced with problems ten times more difficult than those which Horace Mann and Henry Barnard faced during the establishment of the American public school system. In the United States popular support and enthusiasm were developed for educational reform measures before the establishment of the public education system, but Japanese statesmen who devoted themselves to the problems of education were so pressed with the urgency of the problem they had no time to spare for the persuasion of public opinion.

In this, of course, Japanese national educators, should not be judged too harshly when reflects upon the desperate educational needs of the time and the ignorance of the mass of the Japanese people. Yet one cannot help regretting that some forty or fifty years later, when the Japanese people had reached the stage when they could think intelligently, that the Government did not adjust to the situation by decentralizing the country's educational system.

When the militarists and ultra-nationalists began their rise to power in the 1930's they found in the Japanese centralized educational system a ready tool for their fanatic and perverted ambitions.

In the Mombusho which was established in July, 1871, there were at first two kinds of government officials; administrators, who handled the actual administration of education, and professors, who undertook the actual instruction. The latter was soon attached exclusively to the university. The duties of the Minister of Education at that time were to supervise the business of education and to superintend universities and middle and primary schools. He was also responsible for general public education (cf. Association for the Compilation of Educational History of Japan, The History of the Development of Educational System, Vol. II, p. 1 and Kaigo,—The History of 70 Years of the Educational System of Japan, p. 10). There were thirteen higher officials to assist the Minister. The Ministry was subdivided on September 29th into the Teacher Section, Accounting Section, Personnel Section and Recording Section. In December these were changed to the Educational Affairs Section, Recording Section, General Affairs Section, Supplies Section, Book Section and Information Section (cf. The History of the Development of Educational System, Vol. II, pp. 4-5).

It is important to note that the school-inspector system had not yet appeared, but the system was soon established and became the root of various evils.

The Mombusho came to possess full powers over local authorities regarding education, and the centralization of the Japanese educational system took place. It was the great contribution of the early Japanese educators that in only scores of years they accomplished a diffusion of education with thoroughness almost unique in world history. Their great and tragic irony of their efforts, however, was that the system which they had constructed was perverted by and contributed to militarists and ultra-nationalists and the causes of World War II.
As part of the centralization, the first Law of Education which was enforced throughout the country was promulgated in 1872. This new Law of Education is one which is worth the deepest attention in studying the history of education in Japan and according to this law the education of Japan came practically under complete control of the State.

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July 16th, 1871, is of profound importance in the history of modern Japan, for on that date the feudal clans were abolished and prefectures established. The feudal system, which had long affected our social life deeply, at last went out of existence and the prefectural system, as reflecting the general governmental organization of modern states took its place. Local government was wrenched from the hands of hereditary feudal lords and put into the hands of governors who were officials of the national government. Thus when the general governmental system was unified throughout the country, the administration of education was also unified, the Mombusho established, and uniform educational regulations set up throughout the country.

That studies of educational systems of western countries were already being made at that time can be seen from such contemporary books as “Educational System of Holland” by M. Uchida (in 1869), “Schools in Western Countries” by J. Obata (in 1870) and “Educational System of France” by Kawatsu (in 1873). Yūkichi Fukazawa, the founder of the Keio Gijuku University, one of the foremost private universities in Japan, had also returned from his studies in America and was exerting himself in the spreading of the liberalism, democracy and utilitarianism of England and America and in the enlightenment of people in general. The officials of the Mombusho became familiar with western ways of thinking.

In such an enlightened atmosphere, the Mombusho, in December, 1871, established a Drafting Committee for the Educational System, consisting of twelve progressive members. The chairman of the Committee was an outstanding student of French administrative regulations and among the members were Kawatsu and Uchida, mentioned above. Fukazawa was not among the members as it was his resolution not to become a governmental official, but it is clear that this Committee was under his influence to a certain degree. In a very short time they completed a draft and in August, 1872, the first statute was laid down for uniform education throughout the country: the Educational Ordinance of 1872. The entire context of this Ordinance is quoted in Vol. 1, pp. 276-332 of The History of the Development of Educational System of Japan mentioned above. By this Ordinance the Mombusho stabilized the legal basis of control over the educational system of the entire country. The Ordinance divided Japan into eight Academy Districts (Daigakku), which were subdivided into Secondary School Districts (Chugakku), which again were divided
into Elementary school Districts (Shogakku). In Academies, Universities were to be established, and in the main offices of universities, a Board of Supervisors was created. The supervisors supervised the education in the Academy District. In the Chogakku there were several Gakku torishimari (District Superintendents) who administered the educational business in the Shogakku. The Mombusho could control the educational administration of the country through this dexterous system of Boards of Supervisors and in these respects the influence of the French system of education can clearly be seen.

According to the regulations of this Ordinance, the offices of Dai-Tokugaku (Major Supervisors), Chu-Tokugaku (Senior Supervisors) and Sho-Tokugaku (Junior Supervisors) were established in 1872 and in Tokyo there was created the Board of Supervisors of the First Academy District. The Board was to be established at eight places throughout the country, but as this was soon seen to be impossible due to various circumstances at that time, they began their functions together in the Mombusho and soon were combined and unified, becoming a single board in the Mombusho. In the meantime the office of inspectors was created. Through these supervisors and inspectors, the Mombusho commanded control over education throughout the country.

In 1877 the Board of Supervisors was abolished, but the reason does not appear clear to this writer, though he currently has this question under investigation.

At this period, the Mombusho undertook two important tasks: one was the training of teachers and the other was the editing new text-books. Under the new system of education, new schools were established, but there were no newly-trained teachers. In 1872, the Mombusho created a Normal school and made Mr. M. M. Scott, an American, sponsor the school. Scott trained the teachers, who came from all parts of Japan, through American-style teaching materials and courses of study. They brought back this training to the normal schools established in various districts and passed it on to the teachers in each district. The educational tradition which deemed it correct to carry out faithfully and unquestioningly the instructions of the central government as regarded teaching philosophy, teaching methods, and teaching materials, was established at this period and influenced with undesirable effects upon our normal school education. The Mombusho, too, encouraged this tendency until the end of World War II.

The next problem which confronted the Mombusho was the lack of text-books to be used in the new schools. For the time being new progressive books published from non-governmental sources were used, (including those by Fukuzawa), but as there were not enough books, the Mombusho created a new section for the compilation of text-books in 1872. Tokyo Normal School also published text-books. Though these books were translations of American books and were not really applicable to Japan, every prefecture reprinted them and used them in their schools. Such being the
case, the contents of text-books were wholly decided by the Mombusho.

The Mombusho therefore controlled the education throughout Japan, legally through the Educational Ordinance of 1872, in the field of educational control through the system of supervisors, in respect of teachers through the normal school system, and regarding the contents of education through the publication of text-books.

The centralization of education which was from that time observed had its groundwork laid at this time. Though it served not a little in developing educational system rapidly in this country, it nourished the roots of future calamity.

Two important events may be noted in this period. First, in 1872, an American, Mr. David Murray (1830-1905) came to Japan and became an adviser to the Mombusho and gave various advice about our educational policy. He was at his post till 1878 and his influence was very great, but as it was keenly felt after 1879, further description of his work will be given later.

Second, in 1877, Tokyo Imperial University was created on the basis of the Nancho and the Toko, mentioned above, both under direct control of the Mombusho. There were four departments in the University, namely, Law, Science, Medicine and Literature. The University became the highest seat of learning of Japan.

The Educational Ordinance of 1872 was a plan imitating the educational system of France which looked splendid on paper but, when it was put into practice, did not fit actual conditions. The ordinance compelled every school district to establish schools and all children to enter these schools. As a result there arose an immense educational expense to be borne by the people and a considerable amount of labour to be sacrificed. Accordingly the people began to feel uneasy about public education, but in Japan where there is a strong tradition to observe the command of the government unquestioningly, there immediately appeared in towns and villages elementary and secondary schools in foreign style buildings and the percentage of school attendance was quite good.

Here must be mentioned the name of Fujimaro Tanaka, a high Mombusho official, who exerted himself in reforming the centralizing and compulsory Educational Ordinance of 1872 into a more liberal one. He knew from his observations of education in Europe and America that the American educational system was superior. The advice given by an American adviser to the Mombusho, Mr. David Murray, encouraged him. Tanaka finally abolished the Educational Ordinance of 1872 and drafted a new ordinance in 1879. The new ordinance, the Free Educational Ordinance of 1879, was greatly influenced by the American educational system and was very liberal and less compulsory, but after its promulgation the percentage of school attendance rapidly declined and the school buildings under construction were left uncompleted. This was a clear indication of the popular apathy toward education.
at that time and the need for the Government constantly to stimulate enthusiasm for public education. This trying experience caused the Mombusho to adopt a more centralized and supervisory educational policy. In 1880 the new ordinance was changed into a more regulatory one.

In December 1880 the Mombusho consisted of such bureaus and sections as the Board of Official Schools, Board of Local School Affairs, Accounting Bureau, Editing Bureau, Report Bureau, Document Section, Music-Research Section, and Investigation Section.

In the Educational Ordinance of 1879, instead of school district system, local towns and villages administered school affairs, every prefectural office supervising towns and villages within its administration while the Mombusho supervised the prefectures. In 1881, the Official School Bureau and Local School Affairs Bureau were abolished and in their stead the Bureau of Special School Affairs and the Bureau of General School Affairs were created.

In 1884 the administrative regulations of the Mombusho were issued and the systematization of bureaus and sections and their administration was clearly defined, but there was no fundamental reform.

In the summer and autumn of 1878 the Emperor Meiji made an inspection tour throughout Japan. He was deeply interested in the educational conditions of every region and visited many schools with high officials of the Mombusho. On returning to Tokyo the Emperor asked Nagazane Motoda, one of his trusted subordinates, to write a report of what he had seen and felt during the tour. This report, which is called Kyogaku Taishi (the outline of education of Japan), is an important document for the study of educational history of the Meiji Era. In this document the Emperor's thoughts on education were set down. He feared there was a tendency in schools of Japan for the development of Western culture to undermine the characteristic morals of the Japanese and believed that the education of Japan should be based upon the teaching of chu (loyalty) and ko (filial piety), the characteristic morals of our nation, and that the teaching technical knowledge should be secondary.

It will be noticed from the above how Japanese education and the trend of public thought were then westernized. Motoda was a very conservative, moralistic scholar and exerted himself in defending Japanese thought throughout his life. It now became an important duty of the Mombusho to spread the conservative and "Japanese" thought, shown in his Kyogaku Taishi, into the education of Japan. This task had been carried out from that time up to the end of the Second World War. It often occurred that some trends of thought quite incompatible with this conservatism came into Japanese society and in every case the Mombusho put pressure on them for their elimination. This is one of the most important reasons for the oppressive character of the Mombusho, its strangle-hold on Japanese education, and its frequent collision with liberal tendencies of the universities. In order to carry this plan into effect,
the Mombusho regulated in 1881 the contents of elementary school education in
detail and made elementary education of the whole country follow the regulation.
The Mombusho also gave instructions regarding the views of society and the lives
of all the teachers of elementary schools. It issued a list of text-books published
from civil sources classifying what was desirable and what was not to be used, and
itself prepared and published new text-books based upon "Japanism", especially in
the text-books concerning moral education. Thus the Mombusho oppressed such
trends of public thought as encouraged the dignity of the individual and liberalism
and in their stead stirred up nationalistic thought. In spite of these efforts; Western
civilization rapidly flowed into Japan and many liberal scholars and progressive
statesmen appeared. Modern Western views of life and society were introduced to an
enormous extent together with Western material civilization—engineering, natural
science and medicine. This synchronous existence of occidental and oriental culture,
which are quite essentially incompatible, confused the people in their outlook. When
the confusion of social trends of thought increased, the control of education by the
Mombusho became stronger. In this atmosphere of the time the cabinet system was
created, the constitution was promulgated, and the Diet opened for the first time.
In 1885, when the cabinet system started, Arinori Mori was appointed the first
Minister of Education and gave an important effect on our education and the power
of the Mombusho became firm and decisive.

(I must appreciate the kindness of
Mr. Peattie and Mr. Ichii who
helped me in translating this report
into English).