



University life in East Asia between the 19th century and 1945

The influence of nationalism and occupation on Japan, China, Korea and Taiwan

Created by: Javlon Dusimatov, Iana Iakovlev, David Rossak, Jing Wang



Topics and Questions

This topic tackles the changes in the education systems of Japan, China, Korea and Taiwan during the period between the 19th century and 1945.

The studied time was one of great change in the form of modernization and westernization. Especially Japan had great impact on neighboring countries, invading them and enforcing changes. China had its revolution during that period as well, transitioning from a country led by a dynasty, the Qing, into the Peoples Republic.

Our aim was to compare the changes and figure out the differences, similarities and main tendencies in educational policies.

Therefore, our questions were: What influence did Japan have on its colonies, Taiwan, Korea and Manchuria? What subjects were studied? Who were the teachers and the students?

Imperial Japan



Fig. A: Military training courses at Keio University

With the start of the *Meiji era* Japan strove towards a radical modernization of the country. It was decided that a reform of the educational system would be an important step towards a modern Japan.

The educational system was **western orientated** with **English**, German, **French** and **Japanese** as used languages. Foreign specialists were invited to work as educators, bringing their ideas and views with them. Books and materials were also taken from the west. The first Imperial University was founded in 1877 in Tokyo. The faculties of law and medicine were the most prestigious while

economics and engineering were important for the economy.

This western friendly approach would change as soon as 1879. The *Tennō*, Japan's emperor, issued a decree on the “*main principals of education*” with a second important “*imperial rescript on education*” following in 1890. He called for a nationalistic approach in a Confucian manner with a focus on loyalty and obedience. Western morals were also questioned.

Together with nationalism the military gained more and more influence on the educational system. Military offices were attached to universities to perform military drills and prepare the students for their time in the army. The officers also had the power to have educators and students alike expelled if their moral views weren't in line.

Universities were expected to produce the specialists and leaders the country needed for its further expansion.

China

During the late Qing period in 1872 a *Tongwen Guang* (同文馆), a school for the learning of western languages was established in Beijing. Translators were mainly trained in **English**, **French** and **Russian**. Increasing needs for diplomatic professionals dealing with western countries after the Opium Wars influenced its establishment.

During the “*Hundred Days Reform*” (戊戌变法) the Imperial University of Peking (京师大学堂) was established in 1898, teaching traditional Chinese subjects and also introducing **western subjects** like advanced mathematics, politics, engineering and geography.

Under the Qing's “*New policies*” in 1901 the Imperial Examination System was abolished and many three-year colleges were opened. There, additional disciplines like finance, business and medicine could be studied.

With the establishment of the Republic of China, the system was altered between 1912 to 1925. It switched from a narrow pragmatic approach focused on militaristic and technical modernization towards a more open, universal system.

A heavy emphasis was put upon the **English** language and a wider quantity of specialisations was made available for students. **Western** and particularly English literature was in favour. Study materials were translated from **English** or **Japanese**.

Education in Manchuria after the Japanese invasion

The development of the education in the Manchuria can be divided into two periods: before the Japanese invasion and after.

Before the Manchurian incident in 1931 the territory was strongly influenced by the Soviet Union, starting from the language of instruction, which was **Russian**, ending with teaching materials and Russian teachers.

After the incident, which was a staged event for the invasion of the north-eastern part of China the influence of the Soviet Union had deviated. Instead of the Russian teachers and language came the **Japanese** ones. The length of courses was cut down to three years from four years. No new Russian were accepted at the university and the old ones were made to finish as fast as possible. The Japanese fully abandoned the previous methods of teaching as well as the curriculum and implemented their own system of education in Manchuria.

Korea

The whole Korean peninsula was annexed by Japan in 1910. Following the annexation to Imperial Japan, the educational policies of Korea also had to change.

Under Japanese colonial rule, the emphasis of education shifted from Korean culture to assimilation and the instruction language in all government-approved schools was made **Japanese**. The colonial authorities also banned universities. Nevertheless, under Japanese rule there were some specialized schools of college level. These schools mainly prepared for a career with specific skills needed. Subjects taught were limited to law, medicine, industrial subjects, business, forestry and agriculture. These schools were, however, mainly for Japanese

students studying in Korea. Koreans were only seldom admitted to these schools.

Under such harsh educational conditions, patriotic Koreans managed to establish three colleges, namely Bosung College, Yonhi College and the Severance Medical College. These colleges taught **modern subjects** like law, finance, business, physics, applied chemistry, politics and more. Those colleges established under Japanese rules became the predecessors of modern Korean universities and made a great contribution towards the modernization of (South) Korea.

To offset the campaign by the patriotic Korean Leaders to establish universities in Korea Japanese colonial authorities opened the Keijo Imperial University (now evolved into Seoul National University) in 1924, which included the departments of medicine, law and literature.

The main influences on the curriculum taught at that time were mainly assimilation policies by the the Japanese occupiers and the resistance of Koreans to these policies.

Taiwan

Soon after Japan's occupation of Taiwan a policy of assimilation (Doka)



Fig. B: Taihoku University was launched by the “Japanese Ministry of Education”. This literally meant Japanizing the island through education. The educational policies pursued and imposed on the islanders was in essence an emulation of **western type educational systems**.

Apart from colleges the most well known institution was the Taihoku Imperial University in Taipei city, which was

established in 1928. From the outset the Imperial University was established as a research and development center. The main research areas were within the sub-tropical areas of South China and the Pacific. Most students were Japanese. The main faculties were literature, political science and medicine, the teaching language **Japanese**.

A majority of the degrees in higher education earned by the Taiwanese were in the medical studies, where the Taiwanese also outnumbered the Japanese in the number of attendees in 1944 (80 Taiwanese students vs. 77 Japanese Students).

Medical studies were intensely promoted for Taiwanese students by the government, as were teaching studies. The least attended studies remained within the areas of agriculture and engineering. In addition to hard science such as mathematics, science and economics the university included traditional teachings – first and foremost Confucianism.

Conclusions

The late 19th century witnessed the transition of the East Asian educational systems from a traditional to a (pre) modern one. The subjects and students of higher education unavoidably reflected the changes the countries were going through.

All countries were afflicted by **western ideas** and designed their system after **western standard**. Those standards were gradually changed to better serve the countries needs or to further the governments goals.

In China the campaigns to learn from the West, the awakening of nationalism as well as the founding of the Republic of China have played a critical role in the changes of subjects that were introduced and taught at colleges and universities.

Japan went through a phase of modernization, nationalism and militarization. While being influenced by the West itself it brought its ideas and system over to the countries that were invaded. The focus of transforming those countries into a loyal part of the Japanese empire had far reaching consequences on the curriculum taught

and the availability of places for students at universities, especially with higher education of local students being only of secondary interest.

Selected

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-Fig.A:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Military_training_courses_at_Keio_University.jpg

-Fig. B:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%3ATaihoku_Imperial_University.JPG