

# The Vestiges of British Education Systems in the United States and Japan in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: With a Focus on the Lancasterian System

Shutaro Suzuki

## Introduction

In his renowned 1975 book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault investigated “docile” bodies in the modern age. He argued that a body is docile when it is “subjected, used, transformed and improved.”<sup>(1)</sup> In this context, he focused on “discipline” that imposes a relationship of “docility-utility” on our body. That is, it is important to see the process in which we are made into something obedient and useful by some power. One of the disciplinary institutions is school. According to Foucault, the educational space could be the arena that ensured “the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all.”<sup>(2)</sup> Then he dealt with the schools established by Joseph Lancaster in early-19<sup>th</sup>-century England.

From the seventeenth century to the introduction, at the beginning of the nineteenth, of the Lancaster method, the complex clockwork of the mutual improvement school was built up cog by cog: first the oldest pupils were entrusted with tasks involving simple supervision, then of checking work, then of teaching; in the end, all

the time of all the pupils was occupied either with teaching or with being taught. The school became a machine for learning, in which each pupil, each level and each moment, if correctly combined, were permanently utilized in the general process of teaching.<sup>(3)</sup>

In this argument, Foucault examined the system in which students supervised students and students disciplined students. He took special note of the efficiency of the Lancasterian system. He quoted the following from a report by Samuel Bernard to French educators about the Lancasterian schools.

In a school of 360 children, the master who would like to instruct each pupil in turn for a session of three hours would not be able to give half a minute to each. By the new method, each of the 360 pupils writes, reads or counts for two and a half hours.<sup>(4)</sup>

As this reference to the Lancasterian system in France suggests, the system had a widespread influence beyond Britain. The country most receptive to it was the United States. In the United States, lively discussions on public education began in the 1790s, when the nation was solidifying after the enactment of the U.S. constitution. The idea of public education, which is to provide education to all children by using public funds, was controversial; the debate involved differing visions of the state and of the citizens. The nature of American society changed dramatically at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The urban population increased and, albeit gradually, the working class began to form. In the process, the importance of public education increased. For example, in the state of Pennsylvania, the state constitution called for schools to be built as quickly as possible throughout the state to allow poor children

to study for free. A law to this end was passed in 1802. There it was stated that parents and guardians who were judged “to be unable to pay their schooling” had “a full and free right to subscribe at the usual rates and send them to any school in their neighborhood.”<sup>(5)</sup> The aid was not only for tuition fees but also for textbooks and stationery.

In Japan, the establishment of school education modeled after Europe and the United States was explored upon the Meiji Restoration in the second half of the 19th century. The school system decree promulgated by the new government in 1872 stipulated that equal opportunities for education be provided to all citizens and that it was a high priority to help citizens acquire the basic academic abilities necessary for daily life. Teachers brought to Japan from the West contributed to this rapid establishment of the school system. In terms of their countries of origin, the majority in higher education were from Germany, while the majority in secondary and lower education were British or American.<sup>(6)</sup> For this reason, school education in the early Meiji era was a patchwork of various borrowed school systems and educational philosophies of the United Kingdom and the United States.

Looking at the process of establishing public education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States and Japan, we can see that the flow of thought goes more than halfway around the earth, from Europe to the Americas and then to Japan in the Far East. The educational philosophies and teaching methods that traveled in this way ended up adapting in accordance with the traditions and demands of the places they went. In this essay, I will examine how the educational method of simultaneous teaching, which was promoted by British educator Joseph Lancaster and others in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, influenced school education in the United States and Japan. Many researchers have shown that the Lancasterian system spread rapidly in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in

the United States.<sup>(7)</sup> Likewise, in recent years, researchers also began conducting studies that focus on the Lancasterian system as one of the roots of the simultaneous teaching method in Japan.<sup>(8)</sup> I would like to focus on the acceptance of such an educational method, and particularly on the historical background of the recipients.

## **1. From the Lancasterian System to Simultaneous Teaching**

In 1798, at the age of only 20, Joseph Lancaster started a school in the London borough of Southwark. The many impoverished children who lived in the neighborhood all rushed to learn at his school. Lancaster thus explored teaching methods that allowed him to teach many students with few teachers. This is the Lancasterian system, also called the British system.<sup>(9)</sup>

His educational philosophy and method are detailed in his *Improvements in Education*, which has been published repeatedly since the first edition in 1803. The most notable characteristic of his teaching method was the monitorial system, a style of teaching where students designated as monitors teach other students. The teacher chooses the oldest or the brightest of all students, teaches that monitor the lessons, and has him/her teach other students. The scope included the core subjects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, and one monitor was put in charge of about 10 students to instruct them to recite spellings and mathematical formulas. In the rectangular classroom designed by Lancaster, a podium for the teacher to stand on was placed in the center of the back, and students sat at long tables placed parallel in the center of the classroom or gathered in a semi-circle around the monitor on the side of the classroom. It was also characteristic of the Lancasterian system that the monitor was responsible for maintaining the entire class

along with his classmates.

The whole school is arranged in classes; a monitor is appointed to each, who is responsible for the cleanliness, order, and improvement of every boy in it. He is assisted by boys, either from his own or another class, to perform part of his duties for him, when the number is more than he is equal to manage himself.<sup>(10)</sup>

Lancaster invented such a class system because his primary goal was efficiency. Increasing the number of monitors could significantly increase the number of students taught at the same time. As part of establishing school education in the modern era, one objective was to cheaply and quickly teach large numbers of students to read and write. In the United Kingdom, where the working class—and thus the poor—was rapidly growing while modernization advanced, the monitorial system proposed by Lancaster met the demand of the times. The division of labor system that left the actual teaching of each subject to the monitor was highly compatible with industry, which was promoting mechanization and efficiency at the time.<sup>(11)</sup> The following statement demonstrated Lancaster's emphasis on efficiency.

In education nothing can be more important than economy of time, even when we have a responsible prospect of a good portion of it at our disposal; but it is most peculiarly necessary in primary schools, and in the instruction of the poor: —cases wherein the pupil seldom has too much on his hands; and very often a fine genius or noble talents are lost to the state, and to mankind, from the want of it. If we wish to do the best for the welfare of youth, and to promote their interest through life, it will be well for us to study economy of

their precious time.<sup>(12)</sup>

The educational system advocated by Lancaster ended up spreading rapidly. He met with King George III of the United Kingdom in 1805 and was promised economic support.<sup>(13)</sup> He continued traveling throughout the United Kingdom and engaged in lectures and school construction. He then expanded his activities to Europe, the United States, and Africa, rather than remaining in the United Kingdom. The British and Foreign School Society (BFSS), established in 1814, with the Society for Promoting the Lancastrian System as the parent body, engaged in the promotion of the educational system created by Lancaster and others through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, Lancaster's educational philosophy gradually became obsolete. One of the reasons was that a very religious school system centered on the national church was sought in order to hold out against the Lancastrian system created by nonconformists led by Lancaster, who was a Quaker.<sup>(14)</sup> That said, a larger driver for the decline itself was the fact that the essence of the monitorial system was memorization, and such mechanical cramming later came to be criticized. Once geography, history, natural science, physical education, and music were incorporated into the basic school curriculum, the system based on the repetition and memorization developed by Lancaster was no longer suitable for required education. However, the "packaging of teaching activities" such as the classroom as a methodically divided space, standardized teaching materials placed on the walls and desks, and orderly lessons conducted via monitors made a great contribution to the establishment of the simultaneous-teaching lesson system after the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>(15)</sup>

## 2. The Influence of the Lancasterian System in the United States

The Lancasterian system was highly influential in early-19<sup>th</sup>-century America.<sup>(16)</sup> *Improvements in Education* was published in New York in 1807 and became known in the United States as well.<sup>(17)</sup> As urban problems like growing numbers of the poor, drinking, and crime were becoming serious, particularly in metropolitan areas such as New York and Philadelphia, public education began gaining attention as a solution to those problems.<sup>(18)</sup>

For example, the New York Free School Society, founded in 1805, and DeWitt Clinton, then mayor of New York and the society's first president, incorporated the Lancasterian system for the efficient education of poor children. Since states in America at that time had not established a consensus on the idea of directly allocating the state's budget to public education, schools had to operate with a small budget funded mainly by donations.<sup>(19)</sup> The monitorial system, which minimized the number of paid faculty, was a very desirable system. The following is an editorial comment attached to the manual of the Lancasterian system appearing in the *Raleigh* (North Carolina) *Register* of April 1, 1814.

When the rapid increase of our population is compared with the means of procuring Education, it is much to be feared, that no distant period, a large proportion of the people, in many sections of the United States, will be destitute of this important blessing, unless private benevolence or public provision should apply the remedy. The Lancasterian System, as detailed in the above Manual, presents the best mode yet discovered of spreading the benefits of Education, either in the hands of individual Tutors or School

Societies[.]<sup>(20)</sup>

Aki Sakuma, a researcher who studies the history of education in America, examined the influence of Lancaster on girls' education in the United States. Mary Lyon, who later established the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, introduced the monitorial plan in 1826 when she was working as a faculty member at the Sanderson Academy. There, Lyon divided a class period into two to use a half as a monitorial class, and the monitors designated from an advanced class by teachers taught students to recite. It seems that Lyon adopted the monitorial plan because she was hoping the behavior and personality of students would improve as young women looked up to monitors who were senior students.<sup>(21)</sup>

Looking at the circumstances under which Lyon introduced the monitorial system, it seems that what lay behind the system's popularization in the United States was the motivation for developing teachers. The demand for teachers was very strong in the United States, where the national territory was vast and the area of settlement was continuing to spread westward. The Lancasterian system, which provided an easier path from being a monitor to the chief monitor and then to a teacher who could open a school, met U.S. needs from the perspective of teacher training as well.<sup>(22)</sup> In addition, the Lancasterian system's non-denominational nature—insisted on by promoters of the system in the United Kingdom—boosted demand for it in the United States.<sup>(23)</sup>

Lancaster himself decided to move his base of operations to the United States.<sup>(24)</sup> He arrived there in 1819 and endeavored to spread his idea of education there. However, he died in poverty in 1838.<sup>(25)</sup> Around the same time, the monitorial system—the core of the Lancasterian system—also began declining in the United States. For example, as the



content of education became more complex in the 1830s, supplementary teachers were increasingly introduced instead of monitors at the Lancasterian-style schools in New York City.<sup>(26)</sup> Furthermore, as the renovation and construction of schools were promoted in the 1850s, the large classrooms used in the Lancasterian system disappeared, and smaller classrooms became more common in schools.<sup>(27)</sup> As described, public schools in America gradually shifted from the Lancasterian system, in which the oldest served as monitors and taught the youngest, to the grade system, in which classes were divided into many grades according to age.<sup>(28)</sup>

Thus the monitorial system, which is the core of the Lancasterian system, mostly disappeared by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. What survived after the 19<sup>th</sup> century in America was Lancaster's educational philosophy of providing lessons to a large number of students, including children of the poor, by standardizing lessons based on the education manual that focused on efficiency.

### **3. The Influence of the Monitorial System on School Education in Japan**

Tetsuo Yasukawa studied the continuities and disconnections between the monitorial system, which was developed by Joseph Lancaster and others, and the simultaneous instruction method, which was developed later, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Yasukawa identified an early form of simultaneous instruction in the teaching method and form of the monitorial system, where several monitors simultaneously teach reading and writing, or arithmetic, to different groups of students. However, he also stressed the considerable differences between the existing monitorial system and the graded system of simultaneous

instruction, where students are subdivided into classes according to age and ability level and each assigned a teacher. Yasukawa argues that what mainly differentiates the monitorial system from the simultaneous system of education is not whether a lesson is delivered to a group, but rather what kind of lesson is delivered to the group.<sup>(29)</sup> In other words, there is a considerable gap between the Lancaster method of groups of students in a large classroom being assigned to monitors and being taught different subjects such as reading or writing at the same time, and the simultaneous method of a single teacher simultaneously instructing the entire class in the same subject.

Nevertheless, Yasukawa recognized the budding signs of modernity within the monitorial system, namely the process of individuals being regulated by power with a framework of rules and discipline. Yasukawa used Foucault's theory of power to locate the Lancaster method of education within the historical process of the formation of a disciplinary society.<sup>(30)</sup> Hisaki Toyoda, who had a similar research background, also studied the Lancaster system. When students were punished in Lancaster schools, the punishment extended to their monitor. This led to the monitors observing their students more intensively in an effort to avoid being punished themselves. Toyoda argued that teachers observing students as a whole via the monitors was a perfect example of Foucault's modern system of hierarchical observation coming into use.<sup>(31)</sup>

The modernization of education in Japan began in the 1870s, directly after the Meiji government was established. The Japanese government invited Marion McCarrell Scott from America to the Tokyo Normal School and used the American system as a model for primary education in Japan.<sup>(32)</sup> In America at that time, the monitorial system, which had rapidly taken hold in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, was in decline and had been replaced by schools using the graded system of

simultaneous instruction. The primary education system introduced to Japan was therefore also based on the new school system of simultaneous instruction, with the vestiges of the monitorial system evident at every turn. Mika Sugimura carried out a detailed study of how the simultaneous method of teaching, which was popular in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was accepted in Japan in the early Meiji period. This paper is informed by Sugimura's study and looks at where the remnants of the Lancaster method can still be found.

In 1872, the Japanese Ministry of Education announced that it was to establish the National Normal School, later renamed the Tokyo Normal School. The regulations enacted prior to the school's opening, which are recorded in the school's official history, reveal the original ethos of the school. The regulations stated that one Westerner should be employed as the teacher, 24 students should be engaged as assistant teachers, and a total of 90 children should be enrolled as students.<sup>(33)</sup> The 90 students should then be divided into six sets, with four assistant teachers assigned to each set. It was envisaged that lessons would involve the assistant teachers delivering content to the students that they had been taught in advance by the teacher, with the teacher supervising and giving directions as appropriate. This style of instruction is clearly heavily influenced by the monitorial system promoted by Lancaster and others at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Normal School was of course a teacher training institute, with neither the assistant teachers nor the students constituting the primary school children actually envisaged by Lancaster. Nevertheless, if we consider that the monitorial system in America was introduced into secondary education institutions by Mary Lyon and others as a means of training teachers, it should be noted that the monitorial system, which originated in Britain, was on the verge of being received in Japanese teacher training institutes via America.

However, the elementary school regulations published by the Ministry of Education in 1872 show that actual elementary school education did not include the monitorial system. Schools were directed to use simultaneous instruction to teach students divided into grades mainly according to age.<sup>(34)</sup> Lessons were to center on the teacher, who would use the blackboard to teach reading and writing simultaneously. Sugimura saw the text of the Ministry of Education's elementary school regulations as originating in the Philadelphia elementary school regulations, published in 1868.<sup>(35)</sup> The Quakers had set up a school using the Lancaster system in 1808 in the state of Pennsylvania; this system then spread to other schools across the state. However, such schools gradually disappeared after the public school system was established in 1836. This was followed in 1868 by the establishment of a graded system of public school education.<sup>(36)</sup> Thus we can see that elementary education in the early Meiji period was modeled on the most cutting-edge system in America at the time.

Some also argued that multi-grade classes were more effective than assigning a single teacher to each age-based class in the graded system. Yukimoto Yamada expounded his theory of multi-grade teaching in the November 1878 edition of the Ministry of Education's education journal. He argued that unless schools in sparsely populated villages combined grades in their classes, they would require a large number of teachers and would thus lose efficiency.

Unless schools in depopulated villages use an irregular type of method to reduce teacher numbers and contain costs by teaching classes combining students of several grades, they cannot possibly hope to actually deliver an education.<sup>(37)</sup>

Yamada believed that the graded system could not work unless a school had at least 40 students in each class. In this case, simultaneous instruction in grade classes might not be efficient. Let us then look at the kind of teaching that Yamada thought should take place in multi-grade classrooms with small numbers of teachers.

If a class is divided into three or four sets, with the exception of penmanship, it is very complicated for a single teacher to teach the same subject at the same time. The teacher should therefore prepare different subjects for students to work on simultaneously. For example, in the first period, teach reading to one set, composition to the next, dialectics to the next, and arithmetic to the next. The subjects should then be rotated in the second period, teaching composition to the first set, dialectics to the next, arithmetic to the next, and reading to the next.<sup>(38)</sup>

Sugimura argues that Yamada's theory is informed by the monitorial system introduced by Lancaster.<sup>(39)</sup> For example, Yamada proposed the following practice of using assistant teachers to manage a divided class.

After delivering a lesson in the classroom on one subject, the teacher should move students to a revision room and have them work on revising texts or reading in groups, writing essays, or working on different arithmetic questions. In the revision room, a suitably able teaching assistant should be installed to manage the students.<sup>(40)</sup>

The elementary school system devised in the early Meiji period

was modeled on the American school system at the time, in which the influence of Lancaster was declining. However, as Yamada had practiced in sparsely populated villages in need of efficiency, remnants of the monitorial system can be identified at every turn.

In 1880s, many educators in Japan adopted the methods, such as “object lessons,” derived from Johann Pestalozzi. However, many historians have indicated that the educators introduced the Pestalozzian methods from the United States, and most of them had never read Pestalozzi’s original writings.<sup>(41)</sup> Thus we can still see how the flow of educational thought goes more than halfway around the earth from Europe to Japan via the United States.

## **Conclusion**

According to David Salmon’s biography of Joseph Lancaster, when Lancaster had an audience with George III in 1805, they had the following conversation.

George III: Lancaster, I have sent for you to give me an account of your system of education, which, I hear, has met with opposition. One master teach five hundred children at the same time? How do you keep them in order, Lancaster?

Lancaster: Please thy Majesty by the same principle thy Majesty’s army is kept in order—by the word of command.

George III: Good, good, it does not require an aged general to give the command—one of younger years can do it.<sup>(42)</sup>

As Foucault noted, there were similarities between the education introduced by Lancaster and the drill for the army. Foucault argued that

in the modern era, “the soldier has become something that can be made” and “ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit.”<sup>(43)</sup> In the same era, the same things occurred in schools. That is why Foucault regarded the Lancasterian schools as a sign of modernism. As I wrote, the Lancaster style of education, especially its monitorial system, gradually became obsolete, and those schools were disappearing in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the essential features of the Lancasterian system—standardization and efficiency in education—remained in the school systems of Britain and the United States. In Japan, especially from the point of efficiency, attempts had been made to include the methods of the system in the modernization of education in the early Meiji era.

In Japan, the *Imperial Rescript on Education*, which declared the government policy on education, was signed by the emperor in 1890. This document emphasized that the fundamental purpose of public education should be to pass the values of loyalty and piety from generation to generation.<sup>(44)</sup> This was the point when public morality took priority over other knowledge and skills in public education in Japan. Yet when we look at education as a process of producing a docile body, Japanese public schools under *the Rescript* were an extension of modern education, including the Lancasterian system.

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#### Notes:

- (1) Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 136.

- (2) *Ibid.*, 147.
- (3) *Ibid.*, 165.
- (4) *Ibid.*, 165–166.
- (5) “Pennsylvania’s Constitutional Provisions for Schools for the Poor, 1802,” in *The American Legacy of Learning: Readings in the History of Education*, ed. John Hardin Best and Robert T. Sidwell (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1967), 155.
- (6) Miho Hashimoto, “Kindai gakkō no shuppatsu” (The Beginning of Modern Schools), in *Kyōiku-shi nyūmon* (Introduction to the History of Education), ed. Terumichi Morikawa et al. (Tokyo: Foundation for the Promotion of the Open University of Japan, 2012), 106–107 (in Japanese).
- (7) Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Aki Sakuma, *America kyōshi kyōiku-shi* (The History of Teacher Education in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2017) (in Japanese).
- (8) Mika Sugimura, *Meiji shoki ni okeru issei kyōjuhou juyō katei no kenkyū* (A Study on the Process of Accepting the Simultaneous Teaching Method in the Early Meiji Era) (Tokyo: Kazamashobo, 2010) (in Japanese).
- (9) David Salmon, *Joseph Lancaster* (London: Longmans, 1904), 4.
- (10) Joseph Lancaster, *Improvements in Education, As It Respects the Industrious Classes of the Community* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1805), 37.
- (11) Haruo Yanagi, *Gakkyū no rekishi-gaku* (Historical Science of Classes) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2005), 46–47 (in Japanese).
- (12) Lancaster, *Improvements in Education*, 31–32.
- (13) Salmon, 18–19.
- (14) Joyce Taylor, *Joseph Lancaster and His Lancasterian Monitorial Schools* (Hitchin: Hitchin British Schools Trust, 2007), 25.
- (15) Yanagi, 50–51.
- (16) Joseph Lancaster Lancasterian Institute, *The Lancasterian System of Education, with Improvement* (Baltimore: Ogden Niles, 1821), xiv–xv; Thomas Woody, *A History of Women’s Education in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: Octagon Books, 1929), 532–538.
- (17) Taylor, 28.
- (18) Richard Pratte, *The Public School Movement* (New York: David McKay



- Company, 1973), 44–45.
- (19) “The New York Free School Society, 1805,” *The American Legacy of Learning*, 156–158.
- (20) “A Manual of the System of Teaching Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, and Needle-Work in the Elementary Schools of the British and Foreign School Society Also Lessons Adapted to the Lancasterian System of Education,” *The American Legacy of Learning*, 159.
- (21) Sakuma, 147–148.
- (22) Taylor, 17.
- (23) Kaestle, 41.
- (24) Charles Calvert Ellis, “Lancasterian Schools in Philadelphia” (thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1907), 43.
- (25) William Corston, *A Brief Sketch of the Life of Joseph Lancaster: Including the Introducing of His System of Education* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1840), 68.
- (26) Sugimura, 42.
- (27) *Ibid.*, 54.
- (28) In Philadelphia, the Lancasterian method was still used in schools for African Americans after it had been abandoned for whites. Kaestle, 176.
- (29) Tetsuo Yasukawa, “Monitorial school ha kindai-gakkō no genkei ka?” (Are Monitorial Schools the Model for Modern Schools?), *Forum on Modern Education*, 9 (2000), 89–90 (in Japanese).
- (30) Yasukawa, 88.
- (31) Hisaki Toyoda, “Lancaster-hō to issei zyugyō” (The Lancaster System and Simultaneous Instruction), *Journal of Pedagogics*, 21 (1995), 5–6 (in Japanese).
- (32) *Tokyo sihan gakkō enkaku itiran (The History of the Tokyo Normal School)* (Tokyo: Daiichi Shobo, 1981), 2 (in Japanese).
- (33) “Shōgakkō sihan-ka kaikō mae sōtei kyōsoku” (Elementary School Teachers’ Curriculum: Pre-opening School Regulations), *Tokyo sihan gakkō enkaku itiran*, 1 (in Japanese).
- (34) Sugimura, 118–120.
- (35) *Ibid.*, 129–130.
- (36) *Ibid.*, 72.
- (37) Yukimoto Yamada, “Gōkyū kyōju ron” (Theory of Multi-grade Teaching),

- Kyōiku zasshi* (Journal of Education) 81 (1878), 300 (in Japanese).
- (38) Yamada, 310.
- (39) Sugimura, 214.
- (40) Yamada, 310.
- (41) Yamazumi Masami, *Nippon kyōiku-syō-shi* (A Brief History of Education in Japan) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1987), 44–45 (in Japanese).
- (42) Salmon, 18.
- (43) Foucault, 135.
- (44) Yanagi, 143.