

Writing Ashida Enosuke Out: A Social History of the “Voluntary Composition Dispute” (*zuii sendai ronsō*) in Japan, 1918 to 1923

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Between 1918 and 1923, hundreds of schoolteachers disputed with each other. They attended (and some delivered) lectures, read (and some wrote) pedagogical journal articles, and met for study groups. They discussed which pedagogical method was more effective for an elementary school subject known as “composition” (tsuzurikata), i.e. “voluntary composition method” (zuii sendai shugi) or “assigned topic method” (kadai shugi). The event is known as the “Voluntary Composition Dispute” (zuii sendai ronsō).

The dispute was essentially based on two composition methods, but what seems incomprehensible to us today is that the dispute’s participants exaggerated the pedagogical divide of the two methods. In particular, schoolteachers critical of the voluntary composition method ignored important nuances that the method’s proponent, named Ashida Enosuke, delineated and instead portrayed his method reductively as an extreme method that was of little use in the classroom.

What made these teachers inflate the pedagogical binary? Answering this question requires analyzing the unique situations in which these teachers were placed around the time when the Voluntary Composition Dispute started, namely the rise of professionalization, bureaucratization, and standardization that dominated the circle of schoolteachers. While many teachers gradually accepted this new trend, Ashida looked upon this negatively, which in turn these teachers took as destructive and unproductive to their collective effort to professionalize, bureaucratize, and standardize themselves and their teaching. As this paper shows, the way these teachers understood Ashida’s criticism contributed to their reductive, simplified gaze on Ashida’s pedagogical claims. In this sense, at stake in the Voluntary Composition Dispute were what the role of schoolteachers should be in relation to each other and their society, as well as what and how teachers should teach pupils in composition classes.

Keywords: Voluntary Composition Dispute (*zuii sendai ronsō*); social history of schoolteachers; professionalization; Tomonō Tomojirō; Ashida Enosuke

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1. Introduction

It was January 1921. Hundreds of elementary schoolteachers—roughly six hundred in number—flocked to a lecture hall in Kokura, in northern Fukuoka, Japan. These teachers listened, over a span of five days, to two elementary schoolteachers discuss pedagogy of one school subject: composition (*tsuzurikata*). One audience member, Shiratori, who was there noted that the event was “unprecedented” in the history of elementary education, in terms of its scale and the attention it attracted from the teachers’ community. The discussion between these two teachers was so tense and fascinating that many participants, including Shiratori, drew an analogy between the debate and the historic swordfight between Miyamoto Musashi and Sasaki Kojirō during the Tokugawa period (1603–1867) on the island of Ganryū, a few kilometers away from the venue of the pedagogical fight (1975, 365–366). This debate was the culmination of the so-called Voluntary Composition Dispute (hereafter called “the Dispute”) that dominated the pedagogical community between 1918 and 1923.

The Dispute was a series of debates in pedagogical journals and conferences between two allegedly pedagogical factions of schoolteachers. Each faction was led by a schoolteacher, who served as both spokesman and intellectual architect of the respective faction’s pedagogy. Ashida Enosuke (1873-1951) led the group favoring the “voluntary composition method” (*zuii sendai shugi*). The method valued the unforced expression of internal feelings and thoughts. The other faction put forward the “assigned topic method” (*kadai shugi*), which presumably emphasized learning grammar and stylistic forms by writing on topics assigned by teachers. A schoolteacher named Tomonō Tomojirō (1878–1945) led the latter group (Karasawa, 1984, 680–681; Hiraoka, 2011, 23–24).

The Dispute was essentially about two composition methods, but what strikes us as apparently inexplicable about it is that its participants portrayed its pedagogical disagreements as even more clearly divided than they actually were. In particular, schoolteachers critical of Ashida’s voluntary composition method ignored important nuances that he delineated and instead considered it reductively as an extreme, unstructured composition method that was of little use in the classroom.

Why did the teachers do this? This is the central question of this paper. Answering it requires analyzing the unique situations in which these teachers were placed around the time when the Dispute started. Namely, many pedagogues in the late Meiji and Taishō periods faced the rise of professionalization, bureaucratization, and standardization that forced them to re-define their relationship with one another as members of the same teaching community and with their society as well as with their students. Many teachers gradually accepted the above new trend. However, Ashida looked upon such acceptance negatively, which in turn these teachers took as destructive and unproductive to their collective effort to professionalize, bureaucratize, and standardize themselves and their teaching. The way these teachers understood Ashida’s criticism contributed to their reductive, simplified gaze on Ashida’s pedagogical claims.

In other words, the paper aims to provide a social history of the Dispute. For this purpose, this paper is composed of four sections: in “Historiography and the Central Question for this Paper,” I will first contextualize my analysis in the scholarship on the topic and show how my essay builds on and contributes to the prior academic achievements, in addition to discussing why a sociohistorical analysis of the Dispute is worth pursuing. In the ensuing section, “Professionalization in a Quandary,” I will take a few steps back from the Dispute and provide the

broader context in which schoolteachers tried to make sense of themselves and their roles. In the next part, “Ashida the Maverick,” the essay will discuss how Ashida challenged the new norms among schoolteachers and how they responded to Ashida’s challenge. In “Conclusion: Why did the Dispute Matter?,” I will try to redefine the Dispute based on what I will have shown.

Lastly, I argue in this paper that the Dispute started in 1918 and ended in 1923. While some teachers did discuss composition pedagogy before and after the designated period, 1918 was when most participants began to recognize and argue along the lines of the dichotomous nature of the discussion on composition pedagogy, as Nakauchi argued (1970, 114). I end the Dispute in 1923 because it was when Tomonō’s faction won the Dispute and Ashida’s name and his ideas were generally expunged from the mainstream discourse on composition pedagogy (Takamori, 1989, 8–10).

2. Historiography and the Central Question for this Paper

Research on the Dispute abounds. For decades after the event, many scholars revealed significant characteristics of and differences between the pedagogical arguments of the two groups (Inoue, 2009, 237–249; Kuno & Tsurumi, 1956, 76–81; Kuwabara, 2004, 12–16; Nakano, 1968, 276–282; Nakauchi, 1970, 47–146; Namekawa, 1977; Noji, 1998, 84–91; Tanaka, 1998, 92–99). Hatano was the first of these. In his article published in 1935, Hatano defined the event as “a philosophical dispute” in which “those interested in composition pedagogy all over Japan split themselves decidedly into two factions, and confronted each other on just one topic, both sides fully ready to battle it out for the duration of five years.” Hatano’s essay then analyzed the ideas of the two schools and concluded that the ideology of Tomonō’s faction was inspired by the need for pupils’ socialization/homogenization and that of Ashida’s by a cry for unrestrained freedom and individualism—a principle that gained special currency in the modern era, Hatano wrote (1935, 364, 368–373). Some of these historians looked particularly at Ashida’s ideology and pedagogy approvingly as alternatives to what they saw as education by the stifling bureaucratic modern nation (e.g. Karasawa, 1984, 683; Kuno & Tsurumi, 1956, 76–81).

Criticism against such historiography emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century. Informed by post-colonialist critiques of the subtle power of modern nation states, scholars investigated the attempts by the state and its teachers in modern Japan to standardize and naturalize Japanese as the “national language” (*kokugo*) and inculcate it into pupils (Hansen, 2014; Lee, 1996; Takahashi, 1997). Kawamura, in particular, applied this framework to Ashida’s ideology and argued that the unconstrained expression of independent selves which he emphasized for composition education was in fact an insidious way of subjugating pupils’ subjectivities to the logic of a modern nation and empire. Kawamura concluded rhetorically: as for the composition education, “didn’t it eventuate in forcing children’s internal feelings, thought, and selves under the supervision and control of the ‘empire’?” (2000, 62).

Motomori (2008) turned such post-colonialist perspectives into an object of her analysis. Her essay identified Ashida’s composition pedagogy as the first one in modern Japan to put forward pupils’ autonomous selves as expressing subjects that should be cherished and cocooned from the societal expectations imposed by adults. To Motomori, this is why Ashida took issue with Tomonō’s assigned topic method, because Ashida perceived Tomonō’s pedagogy as hampering the pupils’ autonomous selves. But Ashida himself was soon denounced by other

educators as impeding the true selves of children that were allegedly more vivid and varied than Ashida imagined. Such condemnation of Ashida's pedagogy arose in the early Shōwa period, and also in post-colonial writings like Kawamura's; post-colonial criticism revealed, according to Motomori, that its writers, too, were unwittingly premised upon the existence of pure independent selves in children that, according to post-colonial criticism, should not be appropriated by the logic of a nation-state or empire (2008, 45–46). Both Ashida and Kawamura are in the same continuum where one finds in another's pedagogy constraints (whether assigned topics or nation-state/empire) on one's respective version of autonomous expressive selves. This continuum, said Motomori, never ends because power relationships inhere invariably in education, and such power relationships inevitably run counter to the autonomy of expressive selves. In part of the conclusion, Motomori redefined the composition methods of Ashida and Tomonō as both presuming vivid independent selves in children distinct from adults.' The difference between the two factions was to what degree adults as teachers should intervene in the development of pupils' independent selves.

The main question for this paper builds on the historiography so far. Past scholars have revealed that the composition pedagogies of Ashida and Tomonō were different in some ways but similar in their shared assumption of sure independent selves for pupils. This accounts for statements Tomonō sometimes made that do not necessarily fit into the dichotomous framework some prior historians have adopted in understanding the two methods of composition. Hatano, as we discussed, associated Ashida's pedagogy with freedom and individualism and Tomonō's with socialization and homogenization. But then we hear Tomonō say this:

I value absolute purity of expression (*hyōgen no shijun*) very highly. I revere dynamic individuality full of life (*kosei no nyojitsu na yakudō*), which makes absolute purity of expression possible. I desire, therefore, that this [absolute purity] mode of expression and its words reflect the unique characteristics of each individual (*kojin no tokushitsu*) (1975, 447).

Here a puzzle arises. The two composition methods were different, but overlapped in some areas. Yet it seems that many participants in the Dispute themselves disregarded such nuances and perceived the two composition methods reductively as two distinct, incompatible pedagogies. One teacher, Tagami, commented that Ashida's method was tantamount to "unprincipled laissez-faire" (*hōnin musessei*) (Namekawa, 1978, 269), and his acquaintance opined that it would be just "dangerous" for teachers in the classroom to teach with Ashida's methodology alone (Tagami, 1921, 75). But Ashida's voluntary composition method did not mean pedagogical anarchy. Far from "unprincipled laissez-faire," he repeatedly acknowledged that certain systematic frameworks were necessary (1987 [Vol. 3], 62–232, 523–573; 1918, 12–21). He once said that "the way composition is taught should not be uniform among different grades" (1913, 54). He also had this to say elsewhere: "Teachers must compose a detailed pedagogical plan (*kyōju saimoku*) and select and present teaching materials according to pupils' development" (1987, 15). How should we explain the reductive understanding that Ashida's critics showed towards his method? To understand this, let us now examine the broader context within which these teachers participated in the Dispute.

3. Professionalization in a Quandary

Since the 1880's, a number of historical developments occurred that led to a high degree of standardized professionalization for schoolteachers. The term "professionalization" is defined in a textbook account as the transformation of a given occupation into one "that is based on theoretical and practical *knowledge in a particular field* [...which] tend[s] to be *credentialed* and regulated in relation to certain *standards of performance* and *ethics*" (emphasis mine) (Johnson, 1995, 216). One impetus for teachers' professionalization at the turn of the twentieth century was a rapid increase in the number of normal schools and the concomitant standardization of professional behavior and thinking among teachers. Since the 1880s, the Ministry of Education was dedicated to expanding normal school education that systematically provided standardized teachers, and accordingly issued many edicts, such as *The Normal Schools Ordinance* (*shihangakkō rei*; 1887) and *The Regulations on Normal Schools* (*Shihan gakkō kitei*; 1907). The number of normal schools proliferated roughly threefold between 1887 and 1913, and as a result, by the 1910s—around when the Dispute started—the teaching community was dominated by *credentialed*, normal school graduates. Since they went through standardized state-guided education, their behavior and ways of thinking in their workplaces, too, became uniform (Karasawa, 1989, 40–70).

Normal school-educated teachers at this time became more committed to formulating *standards of performance* within the teaching community that collectively developed pedagogical *knowledge*. As Mizuhara empirically showed, from 1910 and 1918 alone, the quantity of knowledge that teachers were required to teach at elementary schools approximately doubled due to the increased number of school subjects (1977, 23–25). Thus there was more need among these schoolteachers to develop together standardized pedagogical *knowledge*, which they could apply to their respective classroom teaching uniformly and effectively. The need for concerted knowledge production crystallized in 1913 into the All-Japan Conference for Elementary Schoolteachers (*Zenkoku kundō kyōgikai*, 1913), the first nationwide meeting for elementary schoolteachers for scholastic exchange. With the need for effective, systematic teaching, teachers also recognized a need to develop collective standards of behavior. This concerned many teachers and was at the top of the normal school principals' agendas for the national meeting in 1913 (Mizuhara, 1977, 24–25). Thus, from the 1880s through the 1910s and 1920s, the schoolteachers' community became increasingly professionalized, characterized by *credentials*, *shared knowledge* in pedagogy, and *standards of behavior*.

What was unique about the professionalization of schoolteachers at that time was its defiance of the conventional definition in an important way: perceived loss. In an orthodox sociological understanding, professionalization "produces a relatively high social standing for professionals, including relatively high levels of income, wealth, power, and prestige" (Johnson, 1995, 217). Just the opposite situation befell late Meiji and Taishō teachers, however. Schoolteachers in early Meiji, for example, had more political power than those who came later. In early Meiji, due to the state's urgent need to staff modern schools, state-run normal schools could not provide enough teachers, so fewer than 10% of the teachers were normal school graduates. More than 90% were jobless former samurai without normal school credentials. This was a double-edged sword for the Meiji state: their sufficient literacy and literary skills instantly qualified them to teach the basic ABCs of many elementary-level subjects, yet at the same time many former samurai's Tokugawa-inspired elitism could often get out of hand for the Ministry

of Education (Satomi, 1974, 14–15; Karasawa, 1989, 19–24). Yet due to a continued shortage of normal schools, the ministry had to rely primarily on these unmanageable erstwhile samurai to teach students. This allowed the latter to have the upper hand and even to challenge the state's authority sometimes (Karasawa, 1989, 36–39).

Alarmed, the Ministry of Education sought to de-politicize schoolteachers (Karasawa, 1989, 82–83). *The Revised Assembly Ordinance (kaisei shūkai jōrei)* (Gazette Bureau, 1882) for instance, enjoined schoolteachers from engaging in political activities. By the late Meiji period, the samurai-inspired elitism in schoolteachers had dissipated. As more and more people went through state-run normal schools, many teachers gradually became state-controlled bureaucrats or what some teachers called “standardized products” of the state (Jin'nouchi, 1988, 111).

Financial difficulties had also tormented schoolteachers since the mid-Meiji period. The average salary for full-time schoolteachers in mid to late Meiji compared unfavorably with those of artisans and carpenters (Gluck, 1985, 151). The situation only worsened. By the time the Dispute started, teachers' real wages had reached a nadir as nominally constant wages for teachers did not keep pace with Japanese post-WWI economic inflation (Jin'nouchi, 1988, 104). The extent of financial difficulty facing schoolteachers became one of the main concerns both for teachers themselves and for media such as newspapers and popular magazines (Nakauchi, 1969, 36).

Power and money for schoolteachers went into decline. So did the social prestige that early Meiji teachers used to enjoy. People no longer looked up to schoolteachers as self-sacrificing sages (Jin'nouchi, 1988, 109–110; Moriya, et. al., 1907, 98–116), or addressed them as “Mr. Teacher” (*sensei sama*), the honorific title commonly used up until early Meiji (Satomi, 1974, 41–43). Many teachers indeed internalized the low esteem for teachers that dominated society (Karasawa, 1989, 152–153). One former schoolteacher put the situation neatly:

When a schoolteacher tells people that he or she is a schoolteacher, they seem to think that his/her worth as a human is diminished by one notch...When people ask a schoolteacher “what do you do for a living?” he or she, too, would hesitate a second and, if possible, beat around the bush and get away from the conversation without answering (Mizuki, 1926, 1–3).

Professionalized schoolteachers in late Meiji and Taishō could not bank on the type of significance enjoyed by their early Meiji predecessors to valorize their occupation, politically, economically, or socially. Professionalized teachers, now mostly graduates of state-controlled normal schools, had not much to gain from their jobs other than the feeling, as one contemporary teacher observed, that they were mere employees of the state's bureaucratic structure with their hands tied by all sorts of governmental regulations and bureaucratic procedures (Shigaki, 1925, 102–109). Some teachers responded to these situations by accepting them constructively. Indeed, one contemporary schoolteacher, named Miura Shūgo, tried to do just so in his book *On Schoolteachers* published in 1917. Miura first laid out distinctions between what he called “schoolteachers” (*kyōshi*) and “educators” (*kyōikusha*). “Educators,” he continued, are the ones who teach “true education” (*shinjitsu no kyōiku*) with moral influences on students. On the other hand, “schoolteachers” gain their qualification via bureaucratic training, which has nothing to do with “true education.” None of the noble causes educators naturally possess is required of schoolteachers. The main cause that drives schoolteachers is “to make ends meet [...because

they] have no other choice. Thus they end up moving from one school to another for better pay” (106–107).

This description of “schoolteachers” might look grim, but, Miura argued, is in fact not really so. “Schoolteachers” cannot, nor are they expected to, do anything except imparting pre-packaged curricular knowledge to children. School teaching is not a uniquely sacred business, but that is unimportant. A “schoolteacher” gets paid for his or her labor, meaning that, as a teacher, he or she makes a contribution to society. In this sense “school teaching” is as indispensable and admirable as other jobs such as running businesses or carpentry. “Schoolteachers” should find vocational pride in the fact that they play a part as members of society. It would be wrong, therefore, for “schoolteachers” to subscribe to romanticized views of “educators” and, as some did, to try to model themselves after that ideal. Such true “educators” exist only in books. For “schoolteachers” to try to become like them is tantamount to “building a castle in the air” and thus provides no meaning for real life school teaching (1917, 119, 132–136). Miura’s general attitude was to accept that teachers live within bureaucratic and structural limits and yet find self-worth within their constraints.

4. Ashida the Maverick

Ashida Enosuke was critical of the mainstream trends in the teaching community. While many teachers started to accept working within bureaucratic frameworks, he expressed concern that this attitude would generate pedagogical passivity. For instance, he underlined over and over again how important it was for schoolteachers to proactively reflect on and, if necessary, actively and aggressively modify or revamp any kind of system or rule ranging from the educational bureaucracy itself to pedagogical manuals. It would be simply unacceptable for teachers to spend the entire day doing only what they were asked to do as a matter of routine. To Ashida, such teachers were little more than puppets of their surroundings (Ashida, 1987 [Vol. 5], 205; 1987 [Vol. 6], 561; 1975, 408; 1987 [Vol. 3], 519). His belief is manifest in his detailed pedagogical plans. Whenever Ashida illuminated their importance in composition education, he did not forget to add that they should be used only to *assist*, but never to *dictate to*, teachers in the classroom:

Detailed pedagogical plans (*kyōju saimoku*)...are convenient [for effective teaching]. But [teachers] must not forget that they are no more than items of expedience (*hōbenbutsu*). It would be a misuse of the items of expedience if they hindered the achievement of teaching objectives. I have heard that in some [schools] those who are supposed to supervise teachers judge their performances in the classroom by examining how accurately they teach according to what detailed pedagogical plans stipulate. But that is highly liable to result in misuse [of detailed pedagogical plans]. That is almost like putting the cart before the horse...Out of the human vice of sloth, some [teachers] blindly obey what [detailed pedagogical] plans say with no motivation to do their own research [proactive thinking] to improve them (1987 [Vol. 3], 519).

His negation of standardization went even deeper, and touched upon some of the very ways the professionalizing teaching community strove to collectively generate knowledge. In the

Kokura lecture, Ashida made what can be construed as a destructive statement:

I am so bad at debating. Whenever I try to win a debate, I inevitably lose. So I keep saying to myself: rhetoric [debating] is useless, because truths [his argument] are authoritative and therefore shall triumph over [the pedagogy of Tomonō's faction] eventually" (1975, 387).

In another occasion, Ashida asserted:

My voluntary composition [method] (*yo no zuiisendai*) can be understood only by myself... If there is anyone who endorses my voluntary composition, it adds nothing [positively] to my voluntary composition. And no matter how many people object to [my voluntary composition], it does not detract from my voluntary composition at all (1987 [Vol. 6], 509).

Whatever his true intentions may have been, this could sound as though Ashida deemed pedagogical discussion fruitless. One teacher responded to the above speech:

Teachers at this school [in this context, Ashida] don't position themselves as leaders of other [teachers at other institutions]. In the name of their firm conviction, they claim that "my [i.e. Ashida's] voluntary composition [method] can be understood only by myself"... [what they said] is too subjective. With this attitude of theirs, I don't think there is any need for a conference like today's to be held (Takamori, 1989, 5–6).

Such criticism toward Ashida's statements, as destructive for concerted knowledge production, was important because it influenced teachers to understand his pedagogical argument in similar ways that were sweepingly destructive and unproductive. One teacher had this to say about Ashida's pedagogy:

[It] looks ostensibly [full of hopes for] freedom and rosy, and convenient as a rhetorical device with which one could justify whatever one says (*benkaitonji ni kōtsugō*). But in actuality [Ashida's pedagogy] is far from [the ideal of] freedom and contains nothing of substance that one can be proud of (Iida, 1923, 48).

Here targets of the teacher's criticism went beyond Ashida's perspectives on how teachers should or should not engage with each other, but included his pedagogical argument. We saw earlier that Ashida's pedagogy was more than simply about freedom or individualism, but concerned practical ways of putting its ideas into effect, as evidenced by Ashida's qualified yet sure interest in detailed pedagogical plans applied according to different grades. Yet the comment here argued that Ashida's pedagogy had no practical use. Here we can sense the commentator's extension of Ashida's destructive opinions and behavior with professional knowledge production. The critic let his understanding of Ashida's stance on professionalism of the teaching community guide his understanding of Ashida's pedagogy, inevitably promoting the perception of it as unproductive. This is how the pedagogical nuances Ashida put forward were ignored by legions of teachers at the time. Ashida's unprofessional attitude stood out, and many of his colleagues projected it into his pedagogical claims and labeled them reductively as a distinct destructive extreme. With Ashida's pedagogical nuances missing, his method looked tantamount

to “unprincipled laissez-faire” to one pedagogue and “dangerous” to another.

Such criticism of Ashida was decorated with bureaucratic coloring. Actually, few teachers rejected their understanding of Ashida’s method in itself. When the aforementioned pedagogue called it “dangerous,” he meant it was dangerous if adopted as the sole method in composition classes (Tagami, 1921, 75). Tomonō articulated the same idea in a more analytical tone:

I am not of the opinion that the voluntary composition method is unacceptable in its core principles. As a method, I think it might work. But given the current [school] system with so many pupils [in one class], proper guidance [based on the method] is hard to achieve. It would work if it were practiced in one-to-one tutorials...but I think it is impossible in a classroom of 40 or 50 children (1975 [1921], 460).

Tomonō’s teacher-bureaucratic side is manifest here. Many contemporary schoolteachers, as already discussed, sought to accept a series of bureaucratic boundaries on their teaching activities. For teachers critical of their version of Ashida’s method, a crucial criterion for a given method was whether or not it would dovetail with the realities of schoolteachers as state bureaucrats—realities in which they had to face and manage forty or fifty pupils every day. Tomonō also wrote elsewhere that the voluntary composition method would be doable “nowhere other than Tokyo and its vicinities” (Takamori, 1989, 2). He referred to the favorable teaching conditions in Greater Tokyo where pedagogical and institutional resources were more easily available than other parts of Japan. For Tomonō, the voluntary composition method required reservations because it could not be nationally standardized easily and thus was not compatible with the state’s school system.

5. Conclusion: Why did the Dispute Matter?

This paper has proposed an enriched understanding of the Voluntary Composition Dispute through a sociohistorical lens and an examination of the unique process of professionalization with which many elementary schoolteachers were confronted. In this paper, I argue that Dispute schoolteachers critical of Ashida’s composition method ended up putting themselves in this critical position and playing down more nuanced elements of his pedagogical arguments because Ashida challenged the teachers’ attempt to professionalize, bureaucratize, and standardize their teaching community and practices. To such teachers, Ashida looked like a destructive nonconformist who complained but had little to contribute to their collective effort. These teachers, furthermore, projected this image of Ashida into his pedagogical claims as well, allowing the pedagogues to understand his pedagogy reductively as not suitable for the standardized school system.

Given my analysis, what was the Voluntary Composition Dispute all about? It was, first and foremost, a pedagogical debate among schoolteachers, as many scholars in the past have amply shown. But it was also a story of the changing situations that surrounded many teachers in the Dispute. Schoolteachers in the Dispute were never simply pedagogical beings concerned only with their relationship with their pupils and what and how they should teach them. Schoolteachers were also many others simultaneously: economic beings concerned with their financial

status; bureaucratic beings aware of the series of regulations and possibilities their state system afforded them; and finally, as this paper shows most vividly, social beings and colleagues who were struggling to define their relationship with each other as members of the same professional community. At stake in the Voluntary Composition Dispute were all of these components that made teachers' comments and behavior complicated and, above all, rich and fascinating.

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