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The History of Actual School Lives and the Perspectives of "Learners" —Sickness of secondary students and their dropping out, in the age that Lafcadio Hearn observed—

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Numerous historical studies have been done regarding education in modern Japan from a great diversity of viewpoints. It is true that studies of educational systems and history of educational policies have made considerable progress. Still, there remains great room for improvement in terms of both quantity and quality for studies of everyday educational activities that actually took place in school or of actual school lives of "learners."

Then, what approaches are available to capture the history of the experiential world of the "learners"? Indeed, there are various difficulties related to historiographical theories. For instance, historical sources describing regular education in middle schools are in most cases not recorded as historical literature or they no longer exist.

This paper is one approach to explore the history of the reality of "learners" in the Meiji era. Using the circumstances of illnesses in middle school students and withdrawals from school observed by Lafcadio Hearn, an English teacher in Japan, as a starting point, this study discusses the serious problems and fundamental issues in middle school education at the time.

Introduction

Numerous historical studies have been made regarding education in modern Japan, from a great diversity of viewpoints. It is true that studies of educational systems and the history of educational policies have made considerable progress. Still, there remains great room for improvement in terms of both quantity and quality for studies of everyday educational activities that actually took place in school, and of actual school lives of "learners."

Needless to say, the objectives of studying history of education, especially that of modern Japan, are to discover vividly what people experienced at the sites of education and to clarify what those experiences meant. Also, such studies are inherently meant to deepen recognition of those experiences and to facilitate the development of historical awareness (educational awareness) concerning such experiences. This means that we, who are involved in historical studies of education,

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must carry out specific analyses of how pupils and students lived at the sites of education and the circumstances of everyday life at schools.

Now, what are the methodologies to discover history of the world experienced by "learners?" In the process of conducting research, we face many hardships in terms of sources. For example, much information regarding everyday teaching and instructions have simply disappeared, without being recorded. In most cases, there is no documented record of what actually took place in educational activities at Japan's secondary schools or *chugakko*, Even if such records had been made, many are now lost.

Of course, it is important for us to pay attention to records and documents made by the Ministry of Education (today's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) and municipal agencies. Still, depending on these sources alone would not enable us to clarify the above-mentioned task. In addition to these sources "of central agencies," we have to carefully watch at sources which reveal what took place everyday at individual schools. Our mission is to investigate, in specific terms, what actually took place everyday in education provided at schools of the targeted age.

So far, this article has discussed only on general methodology. Now, if the methodology is brought into our field of research, namely, the history of secondary school education in modern Japan, what kind of specific research should be needed? Undoubtedly, we cannot be satisfied with simple presentation of some abstract terms and words. This article discusses below one specific subject of research which we are currently studying. Here, we choose one specific subject and will carry out actual analysis.

1 Surprises of Lafcadio Hearn as a School Teacher in Japan

Lafcadio Hearn, who later became famous as a scholar of Japanese literature and folk culture, was employed as a foreign teacher by Shimane Prefectural *Jinjo Chugakko*, literally, ordinary secondary school, in 1890. As a teacher of English, he spent time together with secondary students everyday. Moreover, he experienced many surprises. We can read about such experiences in his diary entitled "From the Diary of an English Teacher."[i]

> Shida will never come to school again. He sleeps under the shadow of the cedars, in the old cemetery of Tokoji. Yokogi, at the memorial service, reads a beautiful address (*saibun*) to the soul of his dead comrade.
> But Yokogi himself is down. And l am very much afraid for him. He is suffering from some affection of the brain, brought on, the doctor says, by studying a great deal too hard. Even if he gets well, he will always have to be careful. Some of us hope much; for the boy is vigorously built and so young. Strong Sakane burst a blood-vessel last month and is now well. So we trust that Yokogi may rally.
> But the rally never comes. Some mysterious spring in the mechanism of the young life has been broken. … Yokogi will be buried tomorrow evening beside his comrade Shida.

Shida was a master student of art who won an appreciation from Hearn, "a boy whose soul is full of art." Yokogi was the best student in the class, and Hearn described him as "He never ceases to ask until the explanation is quite satisfactory to himself" and "He has extremely strong

character." A student named Senoo also passed away in the same year. Thus, Hearn's students passed away one after another.

If we attempted to analyze this situation, we may ascribe it to chance without a second thought. This would be our normal perception today. In short, we may believe too easily that Hearn's class coincidentally consisted of sick students.

However, were these circumstances, which greatly saddened Hearn, just an extraordinary case of coincidence in Japan in those days? How many students during the Meiji Era had to face health-related problems? What were the major causes of those health issues? Also, what influence did those problems have on their intentions of learning? We need to extend our imagination to consider these aspects of their reality.

In this respect, Hearn conducted an investigation into the background behind these heath issues. As a teacher, he took the situation quite seriously, First, Hearn looked at the numerous and difficult subjects that Japan's secondary students were required to learn. He wondered, "what is the waste entailed upon the Japanese schoolboy's system by study? It is certainly greater than that which the system of the European or American student must suffer at the same Period of life."

Based upon this recognition, Hearn pointed out as follows:

> "He must learn all this upon a diet no English boy could live on; and always thinly clad in his poor cotton dress without even a fire in his schoolroom during the terrible winter, only a *hibachi* containing a few lumps of glowing charcoal in a bed of ashes. It is to be wondered at that even those Japanese students who pass successfully through all the educational courses the Empire can open to them can only in rare instances show results of their long training as large as those manifested by students of the West?

Hearn saw the cause of his students' health problems in the synergy generated by the too heavy curricula they were required to learn and their malnutrition and poor learning environment. In short, Hearn saw serious problems in the secondary school educational system itself of his days.

2 Whole Picture of Students Dropping out of School

While Hearn was writing this diary, many students, close to 20,000 in number, dropped out of school each year, for a great variety of reasons including health problems, as shown in Table 1. This was a very important fact, since those dropouts far exceeded the graduates in number.

Table 1 Numbers of graduates and dropouts from secondary schools in entire Japan

	Graduates	Dropouts
1900 (33rd Year of Meiji)	7,747	11,178
1901 (34th Year of Meiji)	9,444	11,676
1902 (35th Year of Meiji)	11,131	16,099
1903 (36th Year of Meiji)	12,417	19,760
1904 (37th Year of Meiji)	14,215	17,824
1905 (38th Year of Meiji)	14,406	17,214
1906 (39th Year of Meiji)	15,556	18,937
1907 (40th Year of Meiji)	15,238	18,639
1908 (41st Year of Meiji)	14,605	18,827
1909 (42nd Year of Meiji)	15,790	18,582
1910 (43rd Year of Meiji)	16,763	17,653
1911 (44th Year of Meiji)	17,561	17,191

Prepared from the "Annual Reports of the Ministry of Education" for the corresponding years. All the figures above cover students of the secondary school regular course only.

For instance, the total number of dropouts from secondary schools between 1900 and 1911 reached as high as 203,580, well over that of graduates, 164,873.

Needless to say, "dropping out" means that student could not complete the whole course of learning. This was a severe experience for "learners." Why did so many students have to drop out? Finding the causes of this should also enable us to clarify what hardships secondary students back in those years had to overcome in order to continue learning.

In addition, what did secondary school faculties do, facing so many dropouts? Working on this question will enable us to find some important clues to clarify from the perspective of "learners" how everyday life actually was in the secondary education of this period.

Keeping these in mind, first we look at statistics shown in Table 2, taken from "Monbusho Nenpo" (Annual Reports of the Ministry of Education).

Table 2 Number of dropouts due to sickness

	Number
1904 (37th Year of Meiji)	2,041 (11.5%)
1905 (38th Year of Meiji)	2,053 (11.9%)
1906 (39th Year of Meiji)	2,264 (12.0%)
1907 (40th Year of Meiji)	2,248 (12.1%)
1908 (41st Year of Meiji)	2,300 (12.2%)
1909 (42nd Year of Meiji)	2,288 (12.3%)
1910 (43rd Year of Meiji)	2,269 (12.9%)
1911 (44th Year of Meiji)	2,278 (13.3%)

( ) denote the ratio of dropouts due to sickness among all the dropouts.

As the Table indicates, during this period more than 2,000 secondary students dropped out each year for sickness, accounting for approximately 12% of all the dropouts. In other words, dropping out was not an extraordinary issue limited to some students alone.

Now, these are only statistic figures concerning the whole nation. Behind these figures lay specific realities of sickness suffered by students. And it is precisely such realities that we have to discover.

In this respect, we first need to clarify situations at individual secondary schools. In this

clarification, we can utilize "synopses of schools," "directories of schools," "annual reports of schools," etc. prepared and published by secondary schools nationwide as basic historical sources. Below, Table 3 lists up the numbers of dropouts due to health problems at three secondary schools, namely, Toyama Prefectural Toyama Chugakko, Gunma Prefectural Maebashi Chugakko, and Tokyo Metropolitan Fourth Chugakko.

Table 3 Number of dropouts for sickness at each secondary school (Unit: Number of Students)

	Toyama Chugakko	Gunma Prefectural Maebashi Chugakko	Tokyo Metropolitan Fourth Chugakko
1901	8 (2)	15 (2)	23 (1)
(34th Year of Meiji)	(11.2)	(24.2)	(19.7)
1902	21 (3)	16 (0)	18 (4)
(35th Year of Meiji)	(16.7)	(17.4)	(18.0)
1903	14 (4)	9 (2)	14 (3)
(36th Year of Meiji)	(16.5)	(13.4)	(13.9)
1904	8 (4)	14 (0)	8 (0)
(37th Year of Meiji)	(8.0)	(16.9)	(6.3)
1905	5 (3)	12 (0)	15 (0)
(38th Year of Meiji)	(5.5)	(11.8)	(21.3)
1906	10 (5)	16 (1)	20 (0)
(39th Year of Meiji)	(10.6)	(21.3)	(20.0)
1907	9 (5)	11 (1)	7 (0)
(40th Year of Meiji)	(12.2)	(13.9)	(11.1)
1908	2 (0)	11 (1)	17 (3)
(41st Year of Meiji)	(3.0)	(11.5)	(16.7)

1) ( ) parentheses on the right of the top figure denote the number of dropouts due to death.
2) ( ) parentheses for the bottom figure denote the ratio of dropouts for sickness among all the dropouts.
This table was prepared from:
3) "Tokyo Metropolitan Fourth Chugakko Report" 1910
4) "Gunma Prefectural Maebashi Chugakko Report" 1911
5) "Toyama Prefectural Toyama Chugakko Report" 1911.

At Toyama, Maebashi, and Fourth schools, a total of 77, 104, and 122 students respectively, dropped out due to health problems in a span of 8 years. The annual average stood at 9.6, 13.0, and 15.3, respectively. At these secondary schools many students had to drop out due to health problems.

The number of fatalities over the same 8-year period was 28, 7, and 11, respectively. The annual average again was 3.5, 0.9, and 1.4, respectively. Considering that each of the three secondary schools had some 500–600 students, these ratios of dropouts due to sickness or death were considerably large.

Especially notable is Toyama Secondary School, where 3.5 students on the average died each year. Table 4 shows the causes of deaths at the school.

Table 4 Causes of students' deaths at Toyama *Chugakko*

	Number of deaths	Cause
1903 (36th Year of Meiji)	2	Beriberi 2
1904 (37th Year of Meiji)	4	Beriberi 2, cerebral meningitis 1, pneumonia 1
1905 (38th Year of Meiji)	3	Beriberi 2, appendicitis 1
1906 (39th Year of Meiji)	5	Drowning 1, appendicitis 1, heart failure 1, peritonitis 1, bronchial catarrh 1
1907 (40th Year of Meiji)	4	Drowning 1, heart failure 1, beriberi 1, intestinal tuberculosis 1
1908 (41st Year of Meiji)	1	Lung tuberculosis 1
1909 (42nd Year of Meiji)	6	Beriberi 2, pneumonia 1, chronic vesicular enteritis 1, brain spine problem 1, typhus abdominalis 1
1910 (43rd Year of Meiji)	4	Bronchial catarrh 1, pleural effusion 1, heart attack 1, cerebral nervous breakdown 1
1911 (44th Year of Meiji)	6	Cerebral meningitis 2, heart attack 1, peritonitis 1, pneumonia 1, pleurisy 1
1912 (45th Year of Meiji)	5	Valve disorder 1, heart problem 1, pleurisy 2, brain disease 1
Total	40	Beriberi 9, brain problems 6, heart problems 6, pleurisy 4, pneumonia 3, appendicitis 2, drowning 2, peritonitis 2, bronchial catarrh 2, tuberculosis 2, intestinal inflammation 1, typhus abdominalis 1

Except for two accidental deaths, the major causes included beriberi and brain and heart problems. Five died of pneumonia and appendicitis, which can be completed cured these days. This reveals the poor medical care available during the Meiji Era.

Yet another important fact is that the most common cause of death was beriberi. Although the cause was unknown in those days, we now know that this disease is caused by malnutrition, i.e., lack of B vitamins. The most common causes of death at the time were pneumonia/bronchitis, tuberculosis, stroke, and gastroenteritis, in this order. Beriberi was not among them. Still, among the causes of death for secondary students, this particular disease topped the list. This deserves great attention, as the years during secondary school are when children grow at a remarkable pace. However, victims of the disease lived on very poor nutrition. On this issue, Hearn noted, "The student in Japan should study while taking a thrifty meal where any boy in Britain doesn't seem to be able to live by it at all. "

Another significant fact is that many children were lost due to brain problems. On this issue, Hearn, wrote in his diary "The doctor says that the brain was risked for excessive study."

3 What Made Students Drop out?

Including illness, what were the actual circumstances surrounding students' dropping out of school? Toyama *Chugakko's* "School Registers of Students Who Left before Graduation" reveal to us, though in a very limited scale, some of the specific developments leading to dropping out due

to sickness or death. The phrase "though very limited" is appropriate, since those records give only very brief description of the reasons behind students leaving school.

Therefore, we need to find new sources to complement this "limitedness." For instance, it may be helpful to integrate into our study grade reports showing students' grades for each school year, as well as school registers that describe each student's class attendance, behaviors, etc.. Combining fragmentary descriptions found in various sources, we are able to more accurately infer what actually took place with each student. Handling sources this way, it should be finally possible to examine students' school lives in more detail.

The following are aspects discovered about some of the students listed in the "Toyama School Register No. 2 of Students Who Left before Graduation" (1904 through 1911). This School Register was examined in combination with "Grade Records," "School Registers," and so on.

- Student No. 41—Entered the Secondary School in 1906. He was awarded a perfect attendance prize in his first and second years, as well as an excellent academic achievement prize in the second. We can assume that he was enjoying his steady school life in terms of both learning and health in these 2 years. Yet he left the school for sickness in his third year. His disease is described as "cerebral nervous breakdown."
- Student No. 61—Entered in 1908. In his first year, he won the perfect attendance and the excellent academic achievement prizes, holding eighth place among the 110 students of his year. In his second year, however, he was struck with bronchial catarrh. Later, he was instructed to repeat the second year, but he passed away later in the same year.
- Student No. 93—Entered in 1907. From his first through third years, he won the perfect attendance prize for three school years in a row, which let us assume that he was in excellent health throughout these 3 years. His academic achievement was also excellent, ranking the 23rd of all the 112 first-year students. Pneumonia, however, took his life in December of his fifth year, shortly before graduation.
- Student No. 98—Entered in 1908. He won the perfect attendance prize in his first year, with good academic achievement at the 32nd place among the 110 students of his year. In his fourth year, however, he had a "lung disease" and dropped out.
- Student No. 134—Entered in 1910. Won a "good behavior and academic achievement prize" in his first year, yet passed away in the following year. The cause of his death is described as "cerebral meningitis."

Described above is part of what emerged out of cross-examination of several sources about individual students' lives.

The question that may be asked is how did people in those days think of this disruption of education? We have no source of information on this from Toyama *Chugakko*. Therefore, we will consider the case of Shimane Prefectural First Secondary School, in which at least three students passed away every year, and was a major issue of concern among the general public. Incidentally, this particular secondary school was where Hearn taught and was formerly called Shimane Prefectural *Jinjo Chugakko* prior to the school system reform. After he left this school, students' deaths remained a serious problem.

Volume 220 of "Shimane-ken Shiritsu Kyoikukai Zasshi" (Journal of the Shimane Private Educational Association), published in March 1905, reported on this issue as follows

> "Our Prefecture's First Secondary School has lost ten enrolled students over the last three years.—Nothing is more miserable and economically damaging than premature deaths, for both families and the state. This is all the more so, if someone in the process of education passes away. Parents and older siblings work so hard to send them to school. If a child dies before finishing school, who can succeed the family?"

As mentioned above, deaths and sickness of secondary students, who were their families' hope, were major calamities putting their families' very continuance at risk. Also, such deaths were considered a major threat to "economy of the nation".

It is necessary to examine the specific details of how and why individual students died or became sick. This search, however, presents a difficulty to the researcher. We cannot easily find information or records describing each student's personal history in the documents kept by their schools. Therefore, we need to carefully consider what sources of information we should examine.

4 Considering Use of Sources

In searching the circumstances of how learners spent everyday in school and the influence of school on their lives, the first sources of information to be consulted are what are commonly called "legally required records to be stored." Article 10 of the "Regulations Concerning Enrollment, Dismissal, and Records of Secondary School Students" (1899) and Article 34 of the "School Act Enforcement Regulations" (1901) defined the "records to be prepared in secondary schools" as "administrative decrees from governmental Ministries and Agencies relevant to secondary schools, correspondence with such governmental bodies, school regulations, school registers, and questions and grade records of entrance and school year examinations."

Among these sources, school registers, correspondences, grade records, etc. reveal the circumstances of individual students. However, most sources had a pre-defined format, and most of the descriptions in them were only formal. To complement these, another important task for us is to examine and analyze in-school records that were defined and prepared by individual secondary schools. These include school diaries, education diaries, "round-robin decision-making records," and "circulatory" decision-making records, etc. which can provide important clues as to the conditions present in everyday school life.

Also, records of students' enrollment, dismissal, and transfer, school registers of students who left before graduation, lists of students who left before graduation, etc. directly describe dropouts and their reasons. Furthermore, records of disciplinary actions to students are also essential in finding out the reasons for disciplinary actions that forced students out of school.

It would appear as though the records above are sources prepared by teaching staff, and not made personally by learners themeselves. We need to keep this fact in mind. These are written records of "facts" that were created by teachers of secondary schools. It would be a major error to try to understand students' behaviors, feelings, thoughts, etc. through a direct reading of such documents.

Then, what kind of sources should we collect and analyze if we hope to find out the thoughts and feelings of learners and their situations? In this respect, there are not many documents that clearly and accurately detail what secondary students actually experienced in school.

In this case, the few remaining sources include, among others, journals of graduates' associations and journals of alumni associations that were prepared and published by individual schools. These also include nationwide-circulated magazines, such as Chugaku Sekai (Secondary School Students' World), Chugaku Shinshi (Secondary Schoolers' New Magazine), Chugaku Bungei (Secondary School Students' Literature), Chugakusei (Secondary School Students), and others, which welcomed text contributed by secondary school students in those days. As these contributions were written by secondary students themselves, they reveal to us what students were thinking and doing in their everyday lives. Indeed, studies of the history of secondary school education should consider how to make more use of these magazines.

Other very important sources of historical information created by students who left school include "applications for withdrawal or leave of absence." These often contain honest, detailed reasons and situations for withdrawing and taking a leave of absence, as described by the students themselves.

Also important are diaries, autobiographies, biographies, etc. describing the secondary school years of authors or targeted persons. Needless to say, these require a critical reading before they can be used as sources of historical information. It is essential to be trained in reading in order to understand what various statements truly mean.

So far, we have outlined various types of potentially useful sources. However, not all secondary schools had prepared "in-school records." Also, even if such records had been prepared, they do not necessarily survive until the present day. One of our tasks is to discover and collect as many records as possible and find in them clues for further analyses. Furthermore, we need to cross-examine them with prefectural and national sources (annual reports of prefectural school affairs, annual reports of the Ministry of Education, and nationwide surveys concerning secondary schools) to reveal the daily school lives of those who were learning. Thus, we might return to Hearn's statement below, in his diary.

> "at present, under the new strain, young bodies and young minds too often give away. And those who break down are not the dullards, but the pride of schools, the captains of classes."

The same kind of tragedy that Hearn experienced and filled his heart took place at many Secondary Schools, as suggested above.

We have clarified part of the reasons why some learners had to drop out. Yet what we have discovered is only the beginning. We need to move further to discover the relationship between dropping out and insufficient academic achievement, or hardship to pay tuitions. In the future, researchers need to create even more diversified perspectives in conducting new historic studies, while discovering and examining new sources.

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Note

i Lafcadio Hearn "From the Diary of an English Teacher," Glimpses of unfamiliar Japan: in two volumes, Kyoto: Rinsen Book, 1973, Reprint. Originally published: Boston: H. Mifflin, 1922