

# COMPLETION OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION AND POPULAR LITERACY IN JAPAN

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# Modernization of Japan

- In 1868, a political revolution known as the Meiji Restoration took place in Japan, marked by the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate, and the birth of a new system of political authority with the Emperor at its head.
- The new government attempted to overcome the political crisis by abolishing the feudal regime and turning Japan into a unified, modern nation-state. Adopting as its main slogans, “Civilization and Enlightenment” (文明開化), “Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Military” (富国強兵), the new government introduced modern social and economic systems to Japan. Educational reforms were also included within this modernization package.

## Fundamental Code of Education (Gakusei) in 1872

- In 1871, the Department of Education was established and in 1872, the first systematic education regulation, the Fundamental Code of Education (*Gakusei*) was promulgated. In its preface the government declared;

“The Department of Education will soon establish an educational system and will revise the regulations relating education thereto from time to time; wherefore there shall, in the future, be no community with an illiterate family, nor a family with an illiterate person. Every parents shall bring up his children with tender care, never failing to have them attend school. A guardian who fails to send a young child, whether a boy or girl, to elementary schools shall be deemed negligent of his duty.”

「自今以後一般の人民、華士族農工商及婦女子、必ず邑(むら)に不学の戸なく、家に不学の人なからしめん事を期す」

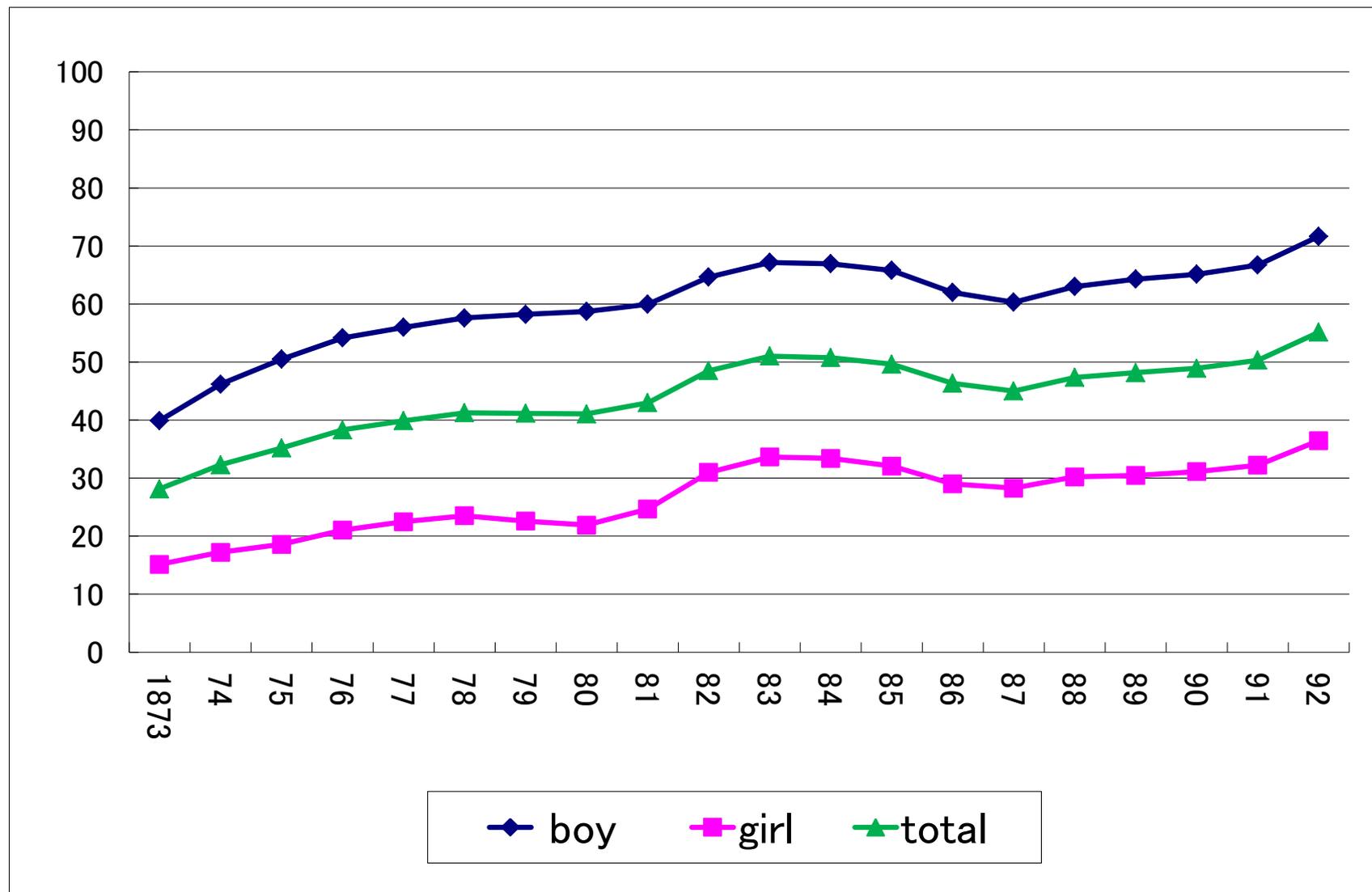
# “Proclamation of Education for All”

- It was planned to set up more than 50,000 schools for primary education throughout the country, in the proportion of one in each school district with a population of 600. All children were in principle required to attend primary school regardless of the sex of the child or the parents' occupation and social status.
- The aim was to catch up with the western advanced countries as quickly as possible by raising the level of knowledge among the general populace.
- The government officials urged people attending to schools. But schoolings were not smoothly extended.

## Struggle and stagnation in the early stages

- From 1872 to 1885, Japanese education was in the stage of “borrowing” and “trial and error” and faced many difficulties and twists and turns.
- The content of elementary school was modeled on that of American schools, and the textbooks used were also either translations or copies of Western textbooks. This kind of education made parents feel uncomfortable and aroused feelings of resistance.
- By financial reasons, for the establishment and running of elementary schools, the government had to be largely dependent on local community funds, taxes on the residents of school districts, and tuition fees for students.
- There were many small-scale farmers at this time who depended on family labor, and the loss of child labor through schooling was a considerable burden for them.

# Enrollment Rate in Elementary School : 1873-92



## Low attendance rate of the girls

- Especially, the enrollment rate of girls was extremely low and was as barely half as of boys. In 1890, enrollment ratio of school age girls was around 30 percent.
- Reflecting conventional attitude of discrimination against women, some parents did not feel necessity for their daughters to be educated.
- Many parents were also discontented with the school that lacked the teaching of sewing (*saihou*) to girls.
- Many girls managed domestic works such as cooking, washing, cleaning, and taking care of younger siblings.

## Reorganization of education by Mori Arinori

- In 1886, Mori Arinori, the first Minister of Education under the new cabinet system reorganized the education system.
- From his experience as the first generation of overseas student and his career as a diplomat, he was strongly concerned with upgrading international standing of Japan.
- He thought that to strengthen the country, first of all, it is vital to change the national mentality of Japanese people and strived to convert the people's mentality from a conventional passive and indecisive nature to a positive and resolute disposition filled with firm spirit and higher morale. 「士気の培養発達」「気力の鍛練」
- He emphasized that the primary purpose of elementary education was to cultivate such mentality in students. And he also introduced the military-style exercise to schools aiming at both physical and mental training of students. Normal schools were identified as key institutions to inculcate all future teachers with a nationalist ideology.
- Attendance for the 3 or 4 years' of ordinary elementary course was imposed as a duty.

## Mr. Mori Arinori, the first Minister of Education



# Changing of Japanese Society

- In 1890, the Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyôiku chokugo*) was issued. As it formed the basis of a national morality, the Rescript exerted a great influence on society and schools.
- Between the final part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, there was a shift in Japanese society. In this period, Japan had experienced an international war, the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). In the atmosphere of nationalistic fervor that followed the war, Japanese people willingly began to accept the nationalistic education that the government had promoted.
- The war against Russia (1904-1905) raised Japan's international standing and accelerated the development of her industry. These wars helped the Japanese people to realize once again the importance of education in the development of a nation.
- There were rising popular demands for education.

## Policy for accomplishing universal primary education at around the turn of the century

- By the Third Elementary School Order in 1900, the elementary school system was almost completed.
- Attendance at the 4 years' ordinary elementary course was formally imposed as a duty on all citizens.
- Tuition fees at the elementary school were abolished .
- Delay or exemption from schooling by reason of poverty or child labor was examined more strictly.
- Prohibition on employing children who did not finish the compulsory education.
- The system of automatic promotion through grades was adopted and repetition and dropout in elementary school were steadily decreased.
- In the curriculum, unification of school subjects and careful selection of education contents were promoted. In 1903, the national textbook system was introduced.
- In 1907, compulsory education was extended from 4 to 6 years

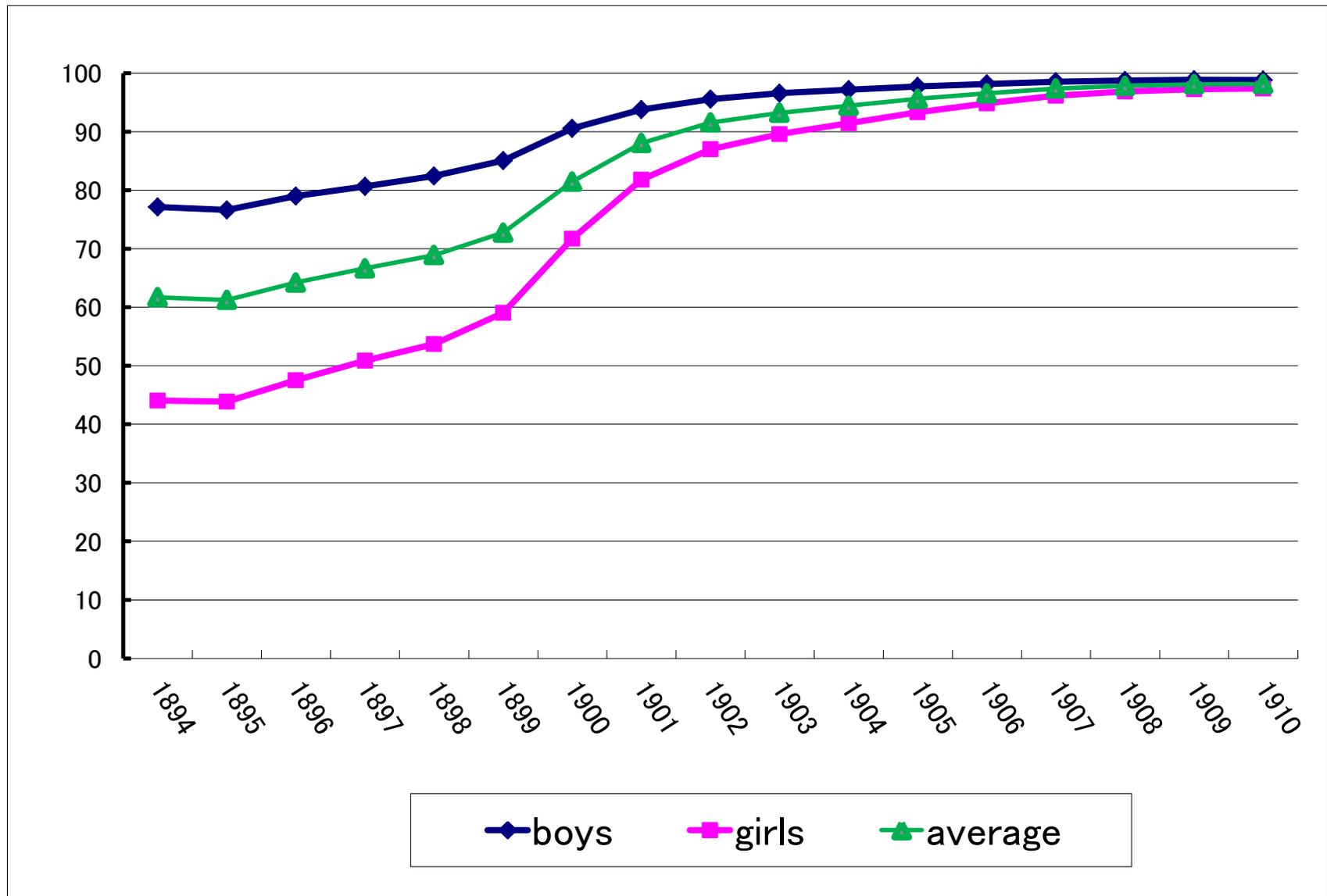
## Promotion for the girls' education

- And the arguments for girls' education from the viewpoint of a nation-building were also heard from those in charge of government policy. The government adopted active initiatives such as the heavy promotion of school attendance for girls, the improvement of sewing and needlework education, and the extensive training of woman teachers.
- In several prefectures, an unique form of schooling was attempted. Some charitable persons and school teachers organized “*Komori gakkô* or baby-sitters' school” for disadvantaged girls who engaged in baby-sitting works. These girls learned some basic subjects in the form of part time schooling. They attended to schools in the afternoon free-time bringing a baby in their back.
- Later on, the local governments tested the learning result of the girls and approved it as formal schooling record. These efforts and their learning results in the *Komori gakkô* seemed to have great advertising effects for promoting girls' education as a whole .



Reminiscence of Komori class in Gifu Prefecture

# Last spurt toward UPE in late Meiji





## Teaching in Meiji era



# Historical records on Literacy in Japan

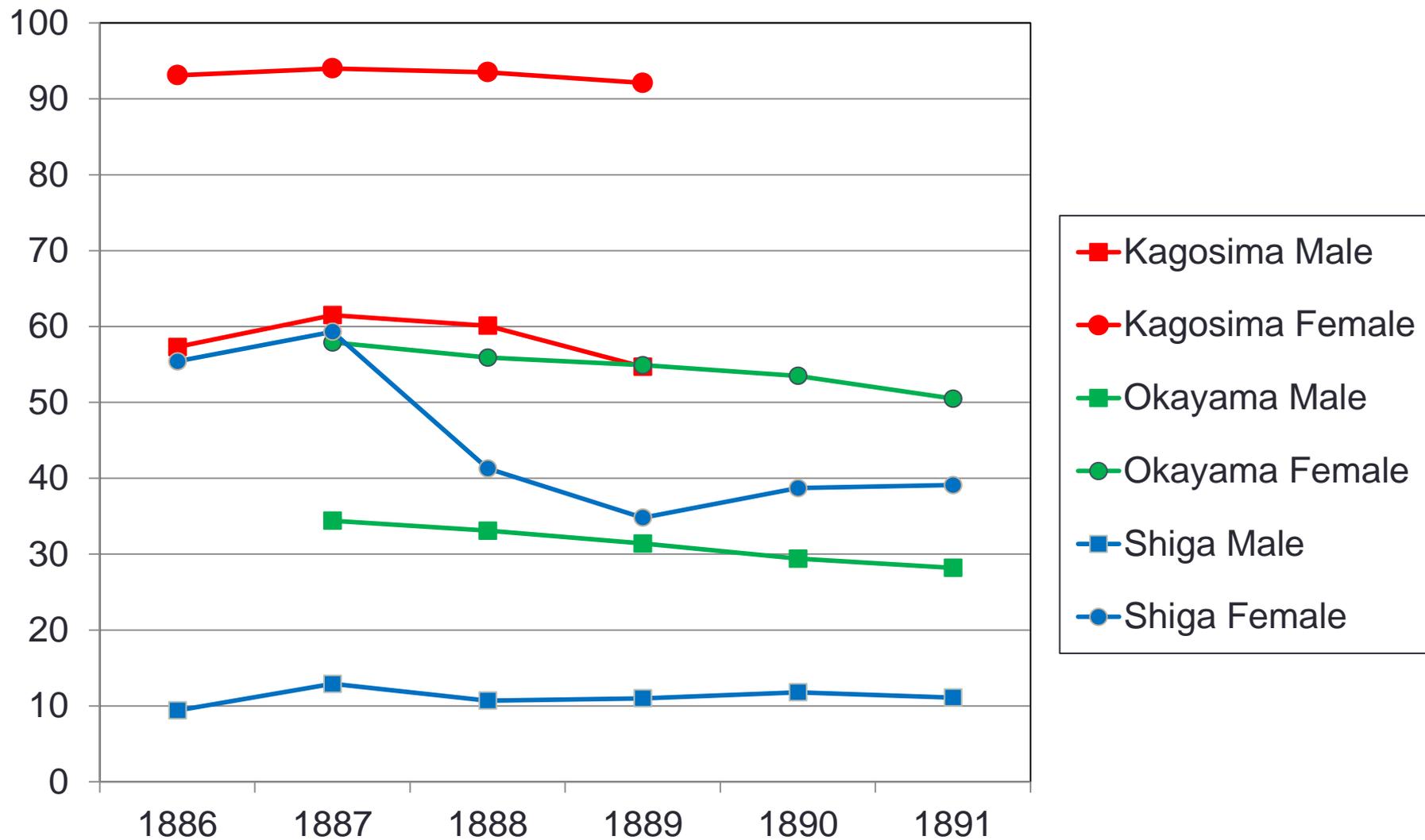
- There are almost no historical records on the literacy rate of Japanese people. Formal survey on the literacy was never conducted in modern Japan. So the literacy rate of Japanese people would be speculated based on the approximate data. Here I used some resources.
  - (1) Estimated popular literacy in Edo era
  - (2) One fragmentary information collected by the Ministry of Education
  - (3) A more useful and consecutive data are the result of conscription test conducted by the Ministry of Army. For the legal obligation of military service, all male youth of 20 years old received the conscription tests in both physical and scholastic ability.
  - (4) And the literacy survey that was conducted immediately after the Second World War.

## (1) Popular Literacy in Edo era

- Guessing from the wide diffusion of *Terakoya* and the prosperity of publishing business in Edo era, many people might enjoy reading a wide variety of books, for example, popular novels, useful handbooks for daily life, literary works such as *Haikai* and *Senryu*, traveling-sightseeing guides, and many special textbooks for *Terakoya*. A kind of casual newspapers called *Yomiuri* or *Kawaraban* came into being.
- “There can be no doubt that the literacy rate in Japan in 1870 was considerably higher than in most of the underdeveloped countries today. It probably compared favorably even then with some contemporary European countries”.

R.P. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* 1965 p.291

## (2) Rate of the person who cannot write the signature



### (3) Questions in the Test for Conscription in Kyoto in 1910

[尋常小学校卒業程度]

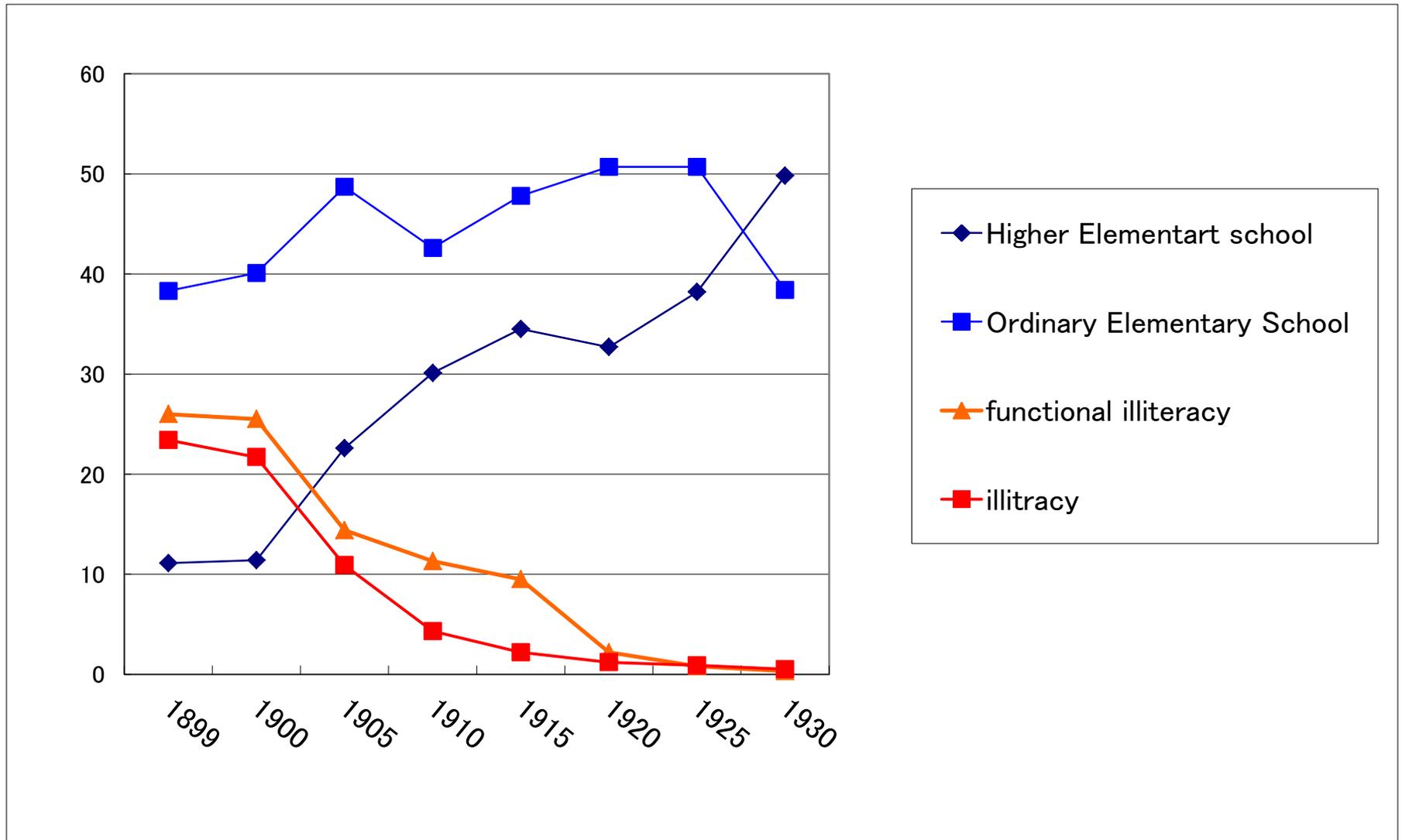
1. 活発ナル精神ヲ以テ事業ニ従事スヘシ (意味問う)
2. 満州に居る日本人中には戦勝を笠に着るものがあるようだ。  
(音読と「満州」の位置・方向を問う)
3. 樺太、共進会、種痘 (音読と「種痘」の意味を問う)
4. 百日ハ何週間ナルカ (暗算)
5. 一石の値拾貳圓五拾銭の米を三斗を買ひ五圓札で払えば過  
剩銭幾何受け取らねばならぬか。
6. 二十間毎ニ電信柱一本ヲ建ツルトスレハ一里ノ間ニハ何本ヲ  
要スルカ

「壮丁教育程度調査報告 京都府」明治 44年

## Academic achievement of the male youth Results of Test for Conscription

year	Comp. of ordinary elementary school	Equivalent to ordinary elementary school	Scarcely can read and write (functional illiteracy)	Can not read and write (illiteracy)
1901(M34)	33.74%	8.83%	22.83%	19.66%
1905(M38)	39.99	8.69	14.59	10.88
1909(M42)	42.25	7.17	10.02	4.97
1913(T2)	41.81	7.08	8.88	2.53
1917(T6)	36.49	10.65	11.43	1.99
1920(T9)	42.86	12.66	2.22	1.16
1925(T14)	41.67	8.96	0.79	0.87

# Academic achivement of the male youth



## Eradication of the reproduction of illiterate youth

- According to the conscription data, it means that in 1925 almost all the Japanese male youth were literate and the reproduction of illiterate youths was virtually disappeared.
- We don't have any data on the female youth, however, if we consider the dramatic increase of girls' enrollment rate in the final years of Meiji era, the literacy among the female youth would also be improved with a time-lag of some five to ten years' behind of male.

## (4) Literacy survey under occupation

- The large-scale postwar reform of the Japanese education system was carried out on the basis of the recommendations of US Education Mission to Japan. They came to Japan in 1946.
- However, an objection from Japanese side rose to the one recommendation concerning the language reform in Japan. A controversy broke out among Japanese people and between Japan and Occupation authority.
- To settle the controversy, the Education Sector of GHQ asked to Japanese government to carry out a literacy survey on Japanese people.
- In 1948, the first and full-dress survey on the reading and writing ability of Japanese people was conducted by Japanese scholars.
- Around 17,000 adult person (male and female of 15-64 years old) were selected and tested by a carefully compiled written examination.
- The results of the survey were published in 1951.

## Recommendation of U.S. Education Mission

- “The Japanese language in its written form constitute a formidable obstacle to learning. Practically all informed persons agree that the memorization of the Kanji, in which the Japanese language is largely written, places an excessive burden on the pupils. .... On leaving the elementary school the pupils may lack the linguistic abilities essential to democratic citizenship”.
- “Broadly speaking, three proposals for the reform of the written language are under discussion: the first calls for a reduction in the number of Kanji; the second for the complete abandonment of Kanji and adoption of some form of Kana; the third for the complete abandonment of both Kanji and Kana and adoption of some form of Romaji”.
- “In the judgment of the Mission, there are more advantage to Romaji than Kana”

*Report of the United States Education Mission to Japan, 1946*  
pp.20-22

# Example of the questions in the survey

(五)

○  
 [ ] を見る。  
 [ ] お体を大切に  
 いただきました。  
 この子は  
 [ ] 生まれました。  
 みなさん  
 [ ] ですか。  
 のちほど  
 [ ] します。  
 [ ] をしまし  
 ます。  
 あつ  
 [ ] 申しあげます。

[ ] 私には  
 [ ] があります。  
 [ ] すると千円  
 になります。  
 お  
 [ ] 致します。  
 [ ] になって下  
 さい。  
 [ ] かぜをひいて  
 [ ] した。  
 役場へ  
 [ ] を出  
 した。  
 右のよう  
 [ ] 致します。  
 [ ] とせかく  
 [ ] 致します。

(四)

二	目	目	日	日	〇
本	本	本	米	木	

入	戸	出	出	山	□
口	口	日	口	口	

受	沖	受	宇	窓	□
取	月	付	付	口	

切	手	功	切	木	□
手	形	手	付	手	

湯	所	場	日	場	□
所	場	面	時	所	

汽	注	注	中	用	□
車	竟	意	位	意	

電	電	通	雷	電	△
信	話	話	和	活	

收	着	改	出	改	△
札	駅	札	札	札	

本	本	戸	本	末	△
籍	席	籍	箱	借	

申	申	深	言	告	△
込	告	刻	告	申	

持	系	役	係	縣	△

# Questions to test the understanding of sentences

2の1

**村民運動会**

6月5日  
10時-16時

青草村小学校校庭  
雨天順延  
青草村青年会

大阪では、朝鮮からの引揚者中村三郎さんに百万円当った。彼さんから買った小遣いで銀行から買った二枚の宝くじの中一枚が当たった。めでた。家の者にも知らせすし、買ってあげたが、出してみたらしらなくて、いたというので大サワフと奥さんと娘さんとむすさんの四人ぐらし。

十八日午後十時ころ品川区大崎一ノ三八四山田家まで「むね十一」坪を全焼。電熱器の不始末らしい。

東京都内十七の職業安定所に押しかけた求職者は四月中に三万余で、前月より一割の増加だが、求人はずっと減る一方で、男女を通してしまつたのはわずかの二〇%。五月は一日も深刻で、三日の某職業安定所の窓口には赤ちゃんを背にした婦人ひとまじえて約二千名の失業者群が早朝から長い列をつくらせていた。

(例) このころは何のしあせてすか。

村会  
運動会  
おまつり  
卒業式  
草刈り

(問) この運動会は、五日に雨が降つたら、どうなりますか。

今年はずつない雨が降つてもやる。どうなるかわからない。天候のよむにのぼす。ひと月のはず。

(問) 百万円当った中

一枚  
二枚  
三枚  
四枚  
五枚

(問) 宝くじは何を買いましたか。

タバコ屋  
大阪  
娘さん  
銀行  
中村さん

(問) 上の文章は何のことか。

火事  
土地  
料理  
停電

(問) 上の文章は何のことか。

結婚のまじまじ  
郵船の行先  
子供の習字が  
家族をあげると  
仕事が出来ない

(問) 三日とは何月の三日のことか。

四月  
五月  
六月  
七月

(問) 約二千名はど

東京都民  
職業安定所の役人  
男女  
仕事をあげたい人  
赤ちゃんとおむつの人

ういう人たちのなっている列ですか。

## Percent of the illiteracy in different age groups

age	total	15~ 19	20~ 24	25~ 29	30~ 34	35~ 39	40~ 44	45~ 49	50~ 54	55~ 59	60~ 64
illiteracy	1.7%	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.5	0.5	1.8	2.8	7.0	15.4
illiteracy + functional illiteracy	2.1%	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.7	0.8	1.1	2.7	4.0	9.9	18.3

## Main points of the survey result

- Although there were some difference in the reading and writing ability of Japanese people depending on their ages, gender, living areas, and their academic background, the average level of literacy was rather high, at least not so deficient as was pointed out in the Mission Report.
- There remained certain amount of illiterate persons in the old generation of over fifty-five years old, however, the total percentage of the person who lacked literacy was only 2.1% of the population.
- Japanese researchers asserted that the illiteracy rate of Japanese is very low compared with the situation of the world.
- After the announcement of these results, arguments for limiting Kanji or Romanizing Japanese language were declined.

## Achievement of universal literacy?

- According to the survey in 1948, after 25 years later, in the middle of 1970s when the old illiterate generation would die off, Japanese society might have achieved the universal literacy among the people.
- Until the 1982 edition of the Statistical Annual Report of UNESCO, the illiteracy rate of Japan was reported as 1.0% for male, 3.3% for female, and 2% in total. But from the 1983 edition on, the figure of Japan disappeared from the item of the report.

## National literacy campaign?

- At least, I can not find out the historical records of the (national) literacy campaign in Japan. We did not have a large-scale literacy campaign that have been seen in many developing countries.
- It seems that some literacy training for adults might have done in particular institutions, for example, in the army or in the prisons. However, we don't have a reliable information on these matter.
- Japan took preference eradicating the reproduction of illiterate youths by promoting the universal primary education over doing compensatory literacy training in adult education.

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