Making Japan Great Again: The Imperial Rescript on Education

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Making Japan Great Again

The Imperial Rescript on Education

Imperial Rescript on Education

Know ye, Our subjects:

“Our Imperial Ancestors founded our empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly planted virtue; Our subjects, ever united in loyalty and filial piety, have, from generation to generation, illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Nation, and herein also lies the source of Our education.

Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and meekness; offer yourselves courageously to the state, and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of our imperial throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall ye not only be our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.

“The Way here set forth is indeed the teaching taught by our imperial ancestors, to be observed alike by their descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and in all places. It is our wish and prayer to transmit it in all reversion, in common with you, our subjects, that we all thus attain to the same virtue.” (Emphasis added)

The Imperial Rescript on Education was written after the promulgation of the Constitution by Emperor Meiji. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Nation, and herein also lies the source of Our education.

Authors

Nakahama Masani (1832-1891) was originally a Confucian scholar who later joined Tokugawa loyalists in 1866 to study in Europe. He promoted educational opportunities for women, founded charitable institutions, and condemned the new centralized Meiji regime with deep Confucian beliefs.

Motoda Nagazane (1818-1891) was an influential Privy Councilor to the Emperor with deep Confucian beliefs but had no experience studying abroad. He was also a Confucian instructor, and was especially responsible for the Confucian elements of the Rescript. He led a life devoted to the imperial family and worked for them from 1870 until his death.

Iwakura Tomomi (1844-1903) was originally a Confucian scholar who later studied abroad in Germany and France and translated the Prussian and Belgian constitutions. He was appointed as a Chief Cabinet Security and as a Minister of Education. Overall, the strong Confucian background coupled with some Western experience explain the great emphasis placed on Confucian ideas such as loyalty and filial piety as well as an importance of learning to the Imperial Rescript on Education.

Background

The Imperial Rescript on Education was written and signed by Emperor Meiji of Japan on October 30th, 1871 during the Meiji era. The Tokugawa regime had just been replaced by a new centralized government with the Emperor at its center. The Meiji reformers wished to put an end to “S trusting” (revere the Emperor, obey the Unders) as a national agenda to strengthen nation by accepting western education and technology, all ultimately to negotiate the unequal marital forces upon Japan by the Western powers. They sought to achieve this goal through education and military reforms.

After the Meiji government was formed, a debate concerning the direction of Meiji-era education emerged. While the advocates of Western thought such as Fukuzawa Yukichi took an anti-Confucian stance in favor of education centered on Western morality, other scholars argued that religion, ethical theories, Confucianism, and imperial commands should be used to establish moral ethics in education. A conference was finally held in February of 1870, where prominent government proposed that a policy statement from central education authorities was to be sent. The Cabinet debated the proposal and deliberated it to the Empress Meiji, who decided to an abdication of procedure to meet this todd. The Cabinet then decided to draft it into an Imperial Rescript. This job was given to Nakamura Masani (left) in 1870, reviewed and drafted by Inoue Kounosu (center) and Motoda Nagazane (right). The Rescript was then distributed to all schools in the country.

Analysis

The Imperial Rescript on Education effectively utilized the Confucian doctrine to mobilize the public toward universal education and militarization. For example, the Rescript invited Japanese to become “attuned in loyalty and filial piety” to the Emperor and the State and to “pursue learning... and thereby develop intellectual faculties and moral powers.” In further command, “subjects” to “safeguard and maintain the prosperity of the imperial throne coeval with heaven and earth” (emphasis added). By appealing to the Confucian value of loyalty to the state, the Rescript encouraged Japanese to pursue education for the service of the state.

The Rescript lead to a conservative shift in education. Over the next two decades, the government began running schools for teachers similar to military training camps, and within two decades textbook were being entirely controlled by the Ministry of Education. Right-leaning lawmakers understood the wording of the Rescript to justify militarization for Japan in the name of the Emperor, teaching the populace from a young age to cherish the country and the Emperor. This militarization education would prepare the populace for war in the 1930s and 40s.

The Hibiya Riots and the Japanese involvement in the future wars were strongly suggest that the government succeeded in mobilizing the Japanese public with hyper-nationalism through reformed education. For example, the Hibiya Riot occurred at the end of the Russo-Japanese War when the Japanese public were dissatisfied with the terms of the peace settlement. They launched a massive 3-day riot against the government, as well as on importance of learning in the development of the Japanese nationalism. The Imperial Rescript on Education therefore served as an effective tool to justify the hyper-nationalism by reinforcing Meiji education and preparing the people for militaristic efforts, which later influenced fascism and increased militarism that plagued Japan before World War II.