

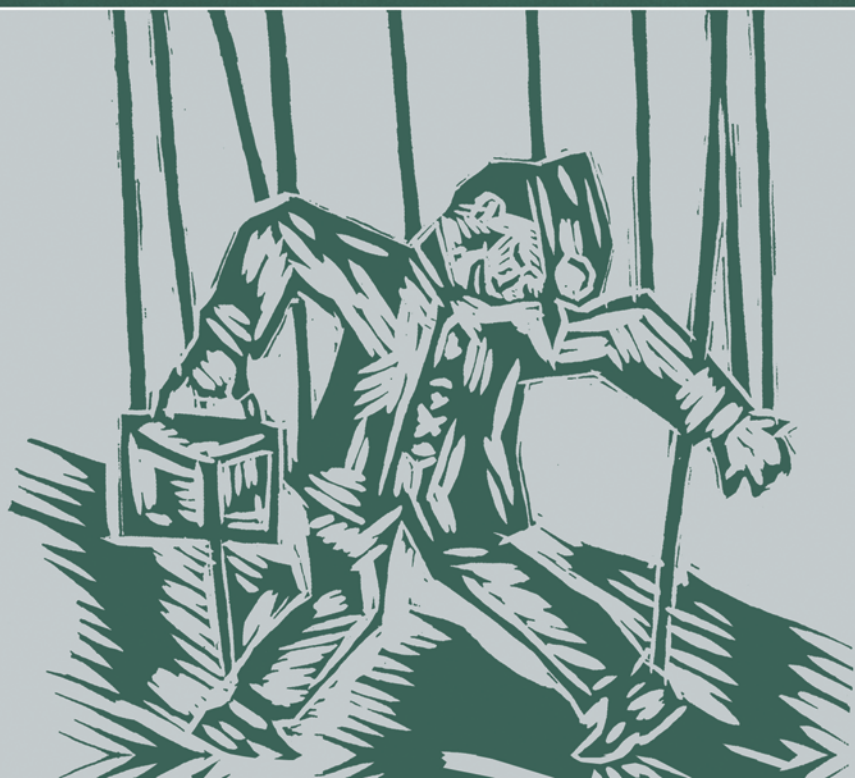


THE JAPANESE HIGH SCHOOL

silence and resistance

SHOKO YONEYAMA

NISSAN INSTITUTE/ROUTLEDGE JAPANESE STUDIES SERIES



The Japanese High School

Japan's education system, like its economy, was long seen in Japan and elsewhere as the model of efficiency, discipline and high standards. In recent years, however, the model has collapsed. Classroom pressures mount, and incidents of bullying, suicide, 'dropout' and violence of one kind or another proliferate. The growing sense of educational crisis came to a head with the 1997 incident in which a child was murdered and decapitated, apparently by a fourteen-year-old student. When the child killer of Kobe claimed that he had been avenging himself against school which 'threatened his existence', many students were reported to have expressed understanding and support for his views. For large numbers of students in Japan, school has become a battlefield.

What is going on in the Japanese education system, and among its students? What does the crisis in the education system signify for the country's troubled economic and political systems? This book describes the Japanese high school as experienced by the students themselves: a perspective which has been largely ignored until now. Using comparative data from Japan and Australia, Shoko Yoneyama focuses on four main aspects of school life: student-teacher relationships, discipline and punishment, school rules and study. She discusses the relationship between these and the phenomena of *ijime* (group bullying) and *tokokyohi* (school phobia/refusal). *The Japanese High School* is an incisive and disturbing study which will be of great interest to those working in the fields of comparative education, Asian studies and sociology.

Shoko Yoneyama is Lecturer in Asian Studies at the University of Adelaide, Australia.

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The Japanese High School: Silence and Resistance

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To my parents

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Series editor's preface

Japan, as the new century approaches, is going through a turbulent period in which some of her most entrenched institutions and practices are being increasingly questioned. The financial crisis which began in the latter half of 1997 – but whose origins go back several years earlier – gravely affected Japan, as well as other Asian countries. Quite apart from the economic and political implications of recession, widespread bankruptcies, increasing unemployment and a falling yen, the crisis is having a considerable impact on the psychology of ordinary Japanese people. They had been accustomed to steadily increasing prosperity and the international respect generated by the successes of their politico-economic model. Now, however, they were coming to wonder whether attitudes and ways of doing things that had been central to their lives and outlook over several decades were still appropriate to the disturbingly unstable world in which they now found themselves. One straw in the wind was a hugely popular soap opera aired on Fuji Television in the spring of 1998, entitled *Shomu 2* (General Affairs Section 2), in which a group of women office workers egotistically assert their rights as individuals and challenge time-honoured working practices. By challenging the prevailing atmosphere of inefficiency, refusal to face up to responsibilities, conformism, sexual harassment of women and mindless deference to hierarchy, this feisty group of ‘office ladies’ succeeds in saving the company from bankruptcy.

However much of a caricature the Fuji TV soap opera may be, it is symptomatic of a spreading sense that all is not right in what used to be seen as an unbeatable set of methods for running society. Grave though the crisis being faced by Japan was as the century approached its close, the impressive human and material resources that the country was still able to command were advantageous in the struggle to overcome the crisis. Whatever might be the outcome at the economic level, however, a troubling

intellectual problem remained. Few could doubt that radical reform was needed, but if this reform was simply to be a case of conformity with the norms of an America-centred global economy (following the principles of the free market and egotistical individualism), where did that leave the status of Japanese values? History suggested that simple acceptance of foreign models was an unlikely outcome, and that ultimately a creative solution might emerge, mixing external with indigenous elements. To follow this process over the coming years should be an intriguing task.

The Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series seeks to foster an informed and balanced, but not uncritical, understanding of Japan. One aim of the series is to show the depth and variety of Japanese institutions, practices and ideas. Another is, by using comparisons, to see what lessons, positive or negative, may be drawn for other countries. The tendency in commentary on Japan to resort to outdated, ill-informed or sensational stereotypes still remains, and needs to be combated.

This book is a sobering account of the Japanese school system, concentrating on high schools. Dr Yoneyama makes a bleak assessment of the way the democratic ideas of education put forward in the 1940s and 1950s have been subverted through the imposition of authoritarian hierarchies and a plethora of stultifying rules and regulations. She takes issue with functionalist analyses of Japanese education that concentrate on the role the education system has played in the 'economic miracle', and advances a critique that focuses on the alienating effects of the way schools actually operate, upon the morale, intellectual development and mental health of many pupils. Given that all school systems suffer from dysfunctional characteristics to a greater or lesser degree, she introduces comparative data on educational practice in Australia, seen as typical of Western-style liberal education systems. From this she is able to highlight the apparent atypicality of much Japanese educational practice in its degree of regimentation of school-children.

In the latter part of the book she enters into a detailed analysis – citing many intriguing accounts by children themselves – of two disturbing phenomena that have occasioned great controversy in Japan in recent years: bullying and truancy. Disagreeing with some Japanese observers who are inclined to attribute these problems to bad family relationships or to the fault of the children themselves, she argues eloquently that they stem rather from the authoritarian atmosphere of many schools, where corporal punishment is routine, the workload overwhelming and petty regulations ubiquitous. She also controversially suspects that the system has now become so dysfunctional that it is facing collapse, and that the educational ideas of the immediate post-war period are ripe for revival. However this may be, Dr Yoneyama

has written a book that challenges in the most forthright manner those who see in Japanese education a panacea for educational under-performance and indiscipline in other parts of the world.

J. A. A. Stockwin

Director, Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies

University of Oxford

My sincere thanks to my colleagues at the University of Adelaide for their continuing support. Dr Hélène Bowen Raddeker patiently responded to my queries about English expressions on numerous occasions over the years. Ms Naomi Aoki

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I would also like to express my appreciation to the editors of *Kodomotachi ga kataru tokokyohi* [*Tokokyohi* discussed by children], Dr Ishikawa Norihiko, Ms Uchida Ryoko, and Mr Yamashita Eizaburo as well as the Director of Seori shobo, Mr Ito Masanori, for giving me permission to reproduce substantial parts of the book. Naturally, to the children themselves I express by heartfelt gratitude. I also thank Ms Victoria Smith, Senior Editor of Routledge, and her anonymous specialist reader, who were so encouraging from the very early stage of this book project.

I should not forget to thank Professor Trevor Matthews of Sydney University and Professor Emeritus Kachi Keiko of Tsuda College who enabled me to begin my academic life in Australia under the Australian Government Postgraduate Scholarship for Australian Studies Program. I am most grateful for the incredible opportunity they provided me.

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Last but not least, my sincere thanks to my family and close friends for their unfailing and loving support over the years.

Adelaide
December 1998

Notes on style

Japanese names are given in Japanese style, i.e. family name first, except for the cases where to refer to the person in English style is well established in the English-speaking world. Uncertainty may be resolved by reference to the index where all persons named in the text are listed in alphabetical order according to their family names.

School students who are referred to in the text are cited first by their name in full, and subsequently by their given name. Students who answered my survey have been referred to by fictitious names. In the case of Australian students, care has been taken to use names reflecting the diversity of ethnic background, but no necessary connection should be assumed between the name and the view quoted. In other words, the fact that a particular statement is attributed to a student whose name suggests a certain ethnic background should not be taken as implying that it represents the opinion of that particular group.

Quotations of the words of Japanese students were translated by myself. Words of Australian students were quoted directly, without changing grammatical and other errors. Only when there might be a problem of clarity due to a spelling error, the correct spelling is shown in square brackets.

On a number of occasions, the book refers to cases in which students were injured or sometimes lost their lives. With much hesitation, I decided to use the real names of such victims. This is partly because their names have already been widely reported in the Japanese media, but also because, although it might be painful to see the actual names of the victims, they should not stay anonymous. It seemed important that by referring to the name of each victim, readers see her or him as a real person, not just as 'a student'.

The book contains perhaps slightly more Japanese words than usually expected.

The word '*ijime*' has been preserved in the text because it has some specific features which distinguish it from the English word 'bullying' (see [Chapter 7](#)).

Where the context requires use of the word as a verb, however, ‘bully’ has been used, rather than the Japanese ‘*ijimeru*’, in order to avoid unnecessary confusion caused by Japanese grammar. The word ‘a bully/bullies’ has also been used to refer to those engaged in the act of either ‘bullying’ or ‘*ijime*’. The word ‘*tokokyohi*’ has also been preserved in the text because it too has some specific features which distinguish it from the English words ‘school refusal’ or ‘school phobia’ (see [Chapters 2 and 8](#)).

Apart from these, Japanese words are either used or referred to when I regard them as key words in the Japanese discourse of education or when the Japanese expression carries a special nuance which is difficult to translate in full into English. In order to avoid flooding the text with too many Japanese words, in principle, only the English translation of the names of Japanese organisations and the titles of Japanese publications are mentioned in the text. Some are official translations but others are my own translation, in which case researchers are encouraged to check the original Japanese names and titles by referring to the Bibliography, Glossary and Index before embarking on, for instance, an Internet search. In order to allow readers to find the original Japanese words, the Glossary and Index contain some Japanese words even when only the translation appears in the text.

‘High School’, used as part of the name of a particular school in Japan, means Senior High School (*koko* or *kotogakko*) unless it is written ‘Junior High School’ in which case the Japanese *chugakko* is indicated. In Australia, ‘government school’ means ‘state school’ or ‘non-private school’.

Unless otherwise specified, all quotations of works published in Japanese are translated by myself.

Abbreviations

ABS	The Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
<i>ANEN</i>	Asahi Newspaper E(lectronic)-News
<i>AS</i>	<i>Asahi Shinbun</i>
CAE	College of Advanced Education
<i>DY</i>	<i>Daily Yomiuri</i>
ME	Ministry of Education (Science, Sports and Culture)
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
PE	Physical education
QLD	Queensland
SA	South Australia
TA	Tasmania
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

1 Japanese students in crisis

Are you not trying to erase my existence?

(School killer, Kobe, June 1997)

THE 'SCHOOL KILLER' IN KOBE

The ghastly murder by a 14-year-old 'school killer' of 11-year-old Hase Jun, whose severed head with mutilated eyelids and mouth was found at the school gate of Tomogaoka Junior High School in Kobe one morning in May 1997, shook Japanese society with a magnitude comparable, in the anxiety it caused, to the earthquake which hit the same city two years earlier. It had such an impact upon the people not only because the atrocity was perpetrated by such a young schoolboy, but also because a number of individuals, adults and children alike, found peculiar closeness between this extraordinary incident and their own lives, and thus it struck a responsive chord in their hearts. Unlike the catastrophe caused by the earthquake, there was something familiar, everyday-life like, and therefore directly threatening in this seemingly unusual murder case. It stirred general uneasiness regarding the way life is lived in school, family and society at large.

At the beginning, it was apparent that the crime was somehow connected to school. 'School killer' was the name the murderer called himself in the note stuck in the mouth of the victim, which read:

Now the game begins. Try and stop me, you thickheaded cops! I can't help but enjoy killing. I want nothing more than to see a person die. Exact the sanction of death on dirty vegetables. Shall my long-standing grudge be settled by the flow of blood [?]

(Shool [sic] killer, Sakakibara Seito: *DY* 29 June 1997)

In the letter he sent to the *Kobe Shinbun* one week later, the ‘school killer’ reaffirmed the connection between his crime and school. Writing that he had an ‘especially strong attachment to his existence’, he used the word ‘existence’ as many as eight times in his one-page letter (Kuroda *et al.* 1997: 19). He stated, however, that his existence had been reduced to that of an invisible being, and he held school and society responsible for his diminished state. The main purpose of the letter was to complain about the fact that his name ‘Sakakibara Seito’ – a fictitious compound written by combining Chinese characters meaning, ‘wine’, ‘devil’, ‘rose’, ‘sacred’, and ‘fight’, had been read incorrectly in the television news.¹ Part of his letter goes:

If I were what I had been when I was born, I would not have dared to leave a severed head at the front gate of a middle school. . . . But I have dared to draw public attention because I want you to see me as a real person in your imagination, although I have been, and will remain, invisible. At the same time, I will never forget that it was the compulsory education system and the society that created that system that rendered me invisible, and I will exact revenge.

(DY 29 June 1997)

In order to demonstrate the connection between school and his crime, he considered it essential to display the severed head at the school gate. After being arrested, he reportedly told the police that he left a mutilated body of a cat in front of the school gate several days prior to the murder of Hase Jun. The remains of the cat, however, were quickly taken away by the school authorities, causing no stir, which made him feel that ‘his revenge was ignored by the school’ (AS 2 July 1997). When he murdered the victim, therefore, the ‘killer’ reportedly took special care that the severed head would be discovered at the school gate *before* the rest of the body was found elsewhere. This was to ensure that the significance of the murder as revenge against school would be conveyed (AS 6 July 1997).²

At the beginning of the investigation, the ‘school killer’ expressed his resentment and grudge against his school and teachers (AS 30 June 1997), saying that he was ‘hit by the teacher repeatedly without reason’ (AS 2 July 1997) and ‘told by the teacher not to come to school’. When he did go to school, he said, he was hit by the teacher at the school gate (Takahashi 1997: 14). The principal categorically denied that corporal punishment was used in school, but subsequently it was revealed that this was not true (AS 5 July 1997).

As the investigation proceeded, however, the focus of the case quickly shifted away from school to the suspect himself. Mention of school by the boy apparently became infrequent (AS 13 July 1997). The team of psychiatrists conducted numerous

tests and concluded that he 'suffers from sexual sadism, a mental disorder in which an individual gains sexual arousal and gratification by hurting others' (*ANEN* 1 October 1997). The Kobe Family Court found the boy responsible not only for the murder of Hase Jun, but also for four assaults on children which had happened in the area in previous months, including the bludgeoning of a 10-year-old girl, Yamashita Ayaka, who died one week after the attack (*AS* 18 October 1997). The judge concluded that the boy 'is not mentally ill but should be treated because he still tries to justify his action' and that he 'suffers from deeply entrenched sadism related to aggressiveness and an immature sexual impulse' (*Japan Times* 20 October 1997). The 'school killer' Sakakibara was sent to a juvenile reformatory with medical facilities, where the length of the detention would be determined following on-going medical assessment (*AS* 18 October 1997).

So far as the 'school killer' is concerned, therefore, all reference to school in accounts of his crime disappeared soon after his arrest, although it had been central to his pre-arrest statements. His 'discourse' was silenced as the nonsense of a boy deeply disturbed by his 'uncontrolled sadistic urge'. The principal of the Tomogaoka Junior High School commented on the outcome that 'it was an extraordinary case. We cannot really say that school is not responsible, but we do not perceive that we provided the trigger to the crimes' (*AS* 18 October 1997).³

EMPATHY EXPRESSED BY STUDENTS

The sociological significance of the Kobe murder lies not so much in the case itself, but rather in the fact that many students found these 'extraordinary' crimes not so surprising. More specifically, students, especially junior high school students, expressed strong empathy with the 'school killer' on two points of his statement: 'I am an invisible existence' and 'I want to exact revenge on school and society which made me invisible' (Miyadai and Terawaki 1998; Ogi 1998; Kamata 1997; Miyadai 1997; Chikushi 1997). The 'discourse' of the 'school killer' was thus 'taken up' by his contemporaries. Many were sympathetic to him even though they found his 'solution' unacceptable. Their empathy with the killer bridged the 'ordinary' to the 'extraordinary', the 'normal' to the 'abnormal', and made it impossible to dismiss or silence the agenda declared by the 'school killer', even after his case was officially settled.

Some 14-year-olds indicated that they sensed something familiar in the letter written by the 'school killer' and during the early stages of the case, when adults did not dream of such a possibility, suspected that it might have been written by somebody

of their age (Ebimura and Watanabe 1997). Miyadai Shinji, a sociologist at Tokyo Metropolitan University, remarks that 'at the very least some one-third of junior high school students showed rather strong empathy' (Miyadai and Terawaki 1998). Ogi Naoki, an educational critic, went through hundreds of faxes sent from junior high school students on a TV station and was 'astounded by the extent of the empathy and support expressed' (Ogi 1998).

Ujioka Mayumi, the education reporter of *Asahi Shinbun* who observed a discussion on the Kobe murder held in the second-year class of Higashita Junior High School in Tokyo, writes that the 'consensus among the children seems to be that, appalling though the crimes were, it was only a matter of time before somebody committed them'. She reports that 22 out of 35 students in the class indicated that they 'understand what was going on in the suspect's mind' and were sympathetic to him. Likewise, 28 out of 35 students felt that 'school forces everybody into a mould', suggesting that they also understand the claim by the 'school killer' that he had been rendered invisible by the school (1997d).

The comments made by 14-year-olds after the arrest of Sakakibara included:

- The feeling that 'I want to take revenge on school' seems widely shared among students in my school.
- I have not gone so far as to take revenge on school or teachers but I often feel stressed with school and *hensachi* (the deviation score which shows one's academic position relative to others). I too would be shocked if I were told 'not to come to school until graduation'. I understand the boy's feeling.
- Teachers should not say something like 'do not come to school'. My homeroom teacher said 'you are all stupid' when I was a fifth or sixth grader. Teachers can change the personality of primary and junior high school students. I feel sorry for the student who got caught.
- There is a teacher who calls us 'you stupid pig' and hits us only because we chat a little in the class. It has become a habit to bully the weak in school.
- The boy called himself 'invisible existence'. I too sometimes think 'what do I live for?'

(Ebimura and Watanabe 1997)

It was not only the 'revenge on school' and the perception of the self being 'invisible' to which contemporaries of the 'school killer' could relate. The fact that he targeted only small children was something familiar to students. His crimes were an extension of the *ijime* (bullying) prevalent in Japanese schools. Cruelty to and the killing of

small animals is also wide-spread among children (Miyadai and Terawaki 1998). His classmates remarked that Sakakibara 'often hit an intellectually handicapped child just for fun' (*Nihonkai shinbun* 30 June 1997), and that the victim, Hase Jun, was the target of his '*puroresu gokko*' (playing at professional wrestling) which was nothing but *ijime* (*Nihonkai shinbun* 2 July 1997). Sakakibara himself reportedly said to the police that 'anybody weak would have become the target' of his crimes (*AS* 13 July 1997). The judge said that the boy 'developed a fantasy of killing people while repeating the killing and dissecting of small animals' and that he 'created the self-righteous justification that if he is stronger than others he can control and kill them' (*AS* 18 October 1997).

While there was a general sympathy among students towards Sakakibara, he also caused anxiety among them that 'if I am not careful, I might be killed' (Ebimura and Watanabe 1997). This suggests that many students somehow perceived such a possibility as real. In the classroom discussion mentioned above, 30 out of 35 students indicated that they had at one time or another wanted to kill someone. Another 30 indicated that school is a 'tiring' place, and that the most tiring of all is relating to friends, i.e. making the necessary efforts to stay on the right side so as not to be considered weird and therefore ostracised and bullied (Ujioka 1997d). The crimes of the 'school killer' pushed the situation even closer to the edge, and made school even more tension-laden than before.

GOOD SCHOOL, GOOD FAMILY, GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD

The murder in Kobe had a completely different meaning for adults. One of the worst aspects of the case for them was the fact that there was nothing extraordinary or problematic in the background of the young criminal. If anything his background represented everything ordinary citizens of Japan aspired to: the boy was a 'good child' from a 'good family' going to a 'good school' in a 'good neighbourhood' (Chikushi 1997).

Tomogaoka Junior High School is the 'best' of three junior high schools in that area. Teachers are so 'enthusiastic' that there are few delinquents, few with pierced ears, dyed hair, loose socks or mini-skirts, although such were part of teenage fashion culture (Sakamoto and Takahashi 1997). Tomogaoka students photographed by the media were extremely neat and uniform in appearance – same clothes, same shoes, same socks folded at the same length, same hair styles, same bags carried in the same way – all walking in a group along the road 'protected' by rows of parents standing

at the side of the road. In other words, Tomogaoka is a school successful in maintaining order, where school rules are strictly observed and where instruction is carried out by 'enthusiastic' teachers.

The impression neighbours had of the 'school killer' was not bad. He was regarded as a diligent-looking boy who would greet neighbours properly (*AS* 30 June 1997). His family appeared to be an ideal, close-knit family, with father working for a big firm and mother a full-time wife and enthusiastic participant in school activities. One neighbour said that 'if that family has a problem, there would be no family which does not have a problem' (Sakamoto and Takahashi 1997).

They also live in a 'good' neighbourhood. The cohesion of the community is so emphasised that the representative of the neighbourhood self-governing body apologised to the public through the media for 'producing such a person from our neighbourhood'. In this community, a list of students with behavioural problems is made in order to caution their parents (Sakamoto and Takahashi 1997). The wall of the 'neighbourhood watch' office is covered with slogans such as 'Let's work hard with a smile' or 'Father is the support. The child who is led by a father's hand sparkles [*kagayaku*]' (*AS* 2 July 1997).

This is also the region where the stratification of middle schools is extremely advanced and academic competition especially stiff (*AS* 11 July 1997). Some of the local streets were informally known as 'Tokyo University Street' or 'Nada High Street' after the 'top' university and private high school in the country (Sakamoto and Takahashi 1997), indicating that these districts were regarded as good breeding-grounds for the educational elite of the nation. In the late afternoon, shining *juku*-buses go through the neat and clean streets of the town in which every corner is fully developed and utilised, collecting students from homes to deliver them to the after-school *juku* (cram school) (Yoshioka 1997).

In other words, the environment in which the unprecedented crimes were committed was one in which such crimes were least expected. The case happened in one of the most carefully guarded and cultured corners of Japanese society. The area represented an epitome of the control society, where school, family and neighbourhood functioned in a coordinated, orderly and watchful manner, just as they were supposed to function. It was the paradox of 'supreme order' and 'supreme normalcy' in the background that was most offensive and threatening to Japanese society as a whole about the horrific crimes committed by the young boy.

What was even more chilling about the Kobe murder, however, was the fact that the family of the 'school killer' had little idea what their child was up to, and worse still, that many students in his generation claimed that they understood his feelings. The

murder in Kobe made it painfully obvious that there is a huge gap between children and parents. Numerous parents expressed their concern that their children might also become Sakakibaras. In one TV programme, more than 70 per cent of the audience expressed this concern. Many parents evidently feel that they do not understand their children at all (Ogi 1998).

The 'school killer' therefore caused grave uneasiness throughout Japanese society. It confronted the society with the realisation that their young were in serious crisis and that the nature of that crisis had not been fully understood by adults. The crisis emerged somehow from the very core of the social system which had been taken for granted, and it threatened the foundations of that very system in an unprecedented and unpredictable manner.

THE PREMONITION OF 'SAKAKIBARAS'

It is not that the Kobe murder occurred completely out of the blue and out of context. For those who were highly sensitised to the perceptions and feelings of students, it was something that might even have been predicted.

Miyagawa Toshihiko manages the Kokugo sakubun kenkyujo (Institute for Essay Writing in Japanese) in Tokyo. He uses composition writing to analyse, educate and communicate with students. In 1987 he predicted that two types of students would emerge in the near future: the extremely docile, flexible, and sheep-like type who feels little and thinks little, on the one hand, and the extreme and aggressive type, whose profile matches almost exactly that of the 'school killer', Sakakibara Seito, on the other (Miyagawa 1995).⁴

The most outstanding characteristic of the crimes committed by Sakakibara is that they were constructed within a cosmic world which he had created in his mind. He was completely absorbed in the rituals and symbolisms of this world. He called himself, not only 'school killer' but Sakakibara Seito. His letters and notes were marked with a symbol which combined what appear to be a swastika, a teardrop and (possibly) the distinctive mark of a well-known American serial killer. He regarded his crimes as games or experiments; he mutilated the bodies of small animals and one human victim and carefully displayed them; he left crime notes to establish his imagined identity; and he called his victims 'dirty vegetables' which he was destined to 'crush'. In addition, he wrote notes spelling out plans and records of his crimes. Each entry begins with 'Dear God Bamoidooki', the godlike figure he had created in his mind.⁵ The note dated 8 May 1997, 16 days prior to the murder of Hase Jun, reads:

Dear God Bamoidooki, I am now 14 years old. I think it is about time I decided to perform the 'anguri'⁶ ritual to receive a holy name. I have thought about this for some time. I decided to stop attending school as the first step. But if I stopped going to school all of a sudden, people would be suspicious of me. So, I have already devised a plan to deal with such an event.

(DY 20 July 1997)

Miyagawa (1995) writes:

Children who have lost will power [*iyoku*] and feel emptiness within themselves will try to affirm their sense of selfhood by being absorbed in something. . . . Some of them will set out to behave in an extremely radical way and atrocious behaviour will be sure to come of this. Those who start losing their inner subjectivity rely upon their emotions even to tell right from wrong. . . . The kind of violence which will occur in future will differ in that one's selfhood will be clearly and purely defined through criminal activity. No concession will be made to the fact that the victim is also human. . . . Victims will be regarded just as objects. . . . The crimes will be highly premeditated and pure in execution. . . . There is no doubt that the age of such criminals will become younger and younger.

(Miyagawa 1995: 165–7).

He continues:

Furthermore, children will direct themselves towards something which is extraordinary so that they can lose themselves in it. . . . They will be gradually absorbed by occult and SF and will be devoted to irrational and mysterious things. . . . Furthermore, children will take up religion within themselves, not the established sorts, but those which . . . allow them to have mysterious experiences. . . . They will look for religions which will absorb their whole mind, something which will provide a place where they can feel absolutely secure and peaceful. . . . Children will be attracted to rituals. They will try to feel their own existence by becoming assimilated within some clearly defined value to the extent of losing their selfhood within it.

(Miyagawa 1995: 167–8)

The remarkable resemblance between the profile of Sakakibara Seito and the typology of Japanese children Miyagawa canvassed ten years earlier suggests that the 'school killer' was not a psychopathic minor but a child of the times, whose ferocious crimes

somehow reflected the society in which he was born. Contemporaries of Sakakibara 'understood' his feelings, and they were not 'so surprised' at what he did.⁷

Miyagawa's prediction was based on numerous compositions which he read daily, and on constant conversation with his students. He quotes a 13-year-old girl who wrote:

I do not have anything inside myself. In my heart [*kokoro*] self does not exist.
I wonder where it has gone and I look for it, but I cannot find it. It is not in the dictionary, nor in the newspaper.

(Miyagawa 1995: 85)

The emptiness the girl feels inside her *kokoro* is the same emptiness the 'school killer' refers to by his reference to his 'invisible existence'. Mimori Tsukuru (1997), a psychologist, maintains that a new type of human being, whom he calls '*kokoro-nai*' (not having a heart), had come into being. By this term he meant not simply cold, heartless, unfeeling, and inconsiderate, but a profound void, not even having the moral foundations from which such feelings might be generated. He believes that these new '*kokoro-nai*' type human beings will also be highly 'program-driven', the antithesis of the conventional 'mind-driven type' human beings who act on the basis of motives and intentions generated in their own mind. The 'program-driven type' personality acts on the basis of a 'program', i.e. a behavioural procedure which determines how to act at a given time in a given circumstance. Mimori remarks that it would be 'an act of ignorance' to use such methods as interviews to analyse this type of human being, because they simply choose the most 'appropriate' behavioural procedure for the specific time and place. According to Mimori, it will be impossible to penetrate to the mind of the 'program-driven' personality, since there is actually no mind accessible to others.

The 'program-driven' personality depicted by Mimori bears some resemblance to what teachers call '*shijimachi ningen*' (human beings waiting for their instructions) and might perhaps best be rendered in English as 'automaton'. The increase in numbers of these '*shijimachi ningen*' is, they say, the most notable change in the profile of students in recent years (Ashizawa 1997). '*Shijimachi ningen*' are '*botsu-shutai*' (void of subjectivity), apathetic, passive, bored, low in energy, unwilling to think or make decisions or initiate any action. But they are also capable of appropriate action when the recognised stimuli are applied. Many teachers feel that it is extremely difficult to communicate with children in this category. They feel that it is like 'talking to an alien' (AS 11 December 1994).

The student crisis, then, is also the crisis of teachers and adults who feel that they are no longer able to understand their children, who feel that they have no means to deal with children themselves or to comprehend the indefinable problems children seem to face. The ‘school killer’ Sakakibara Seito embodied the new syndrome as a changeling introduced into Japanese society by unknown alien forces and therefore immensely threatening to the paradigms recognised by adults. Adults do not know how to deal with these changelings, yet they can sense their presence everywhere. Those who on the surface seem so ordinary and problem free may be fundamentally incomprehensible and alien.

AN OVERVIEW

What are the characteristics of the Japanese education into which this generation of children were born, and what does the present moment represent in the over 50 years of postwar Japanese education? The chronicle of major events in terms of education since 1983, when the ‘school killer’ was born, is shown in [Table 1.1](#). While the list is selective, each entry constituted a major news item at the time it was reported.

One is immediately struck by the large number of deaths of students and killings by students which have occurred, even though only the most conspicuous cases among dozens of similar cases are listed here. Of course, deaths and serious injuries among the young, or killings and injuries inflicted by youths, are not limited to Japanese society. What is distinctive in Japan, however, is the fact that tragedies involving students occur primarily in the school context. Japan’s youth suicide rate, for instance, may not be especially high when compared with other societies, yet numerous examples suggest that suicide among Japanese youth are, by and large, closely related to problems with study and school. Likewise, an astonishing number of deaths and injuries of students occur in the context of their relationships with teachers and classmates. Even problems at home tend to happen in relation to school-related matters. The life of Japanese students is affected most not by drug problems, family breakdowns, or delinquency, but by school-related problems. The reason for this will be discussed in detail throughout the book.

The chronicle also indicates that there may be certain overall trends in Japanese education which influence the life of students. Most significant of all, we argue, is that the so-called ‘hidden curriculum’ has been augmented considerably in recent years, to the extent that the term ‘hidden curriculum’ is perhaps inappropriate. The New Course of Study (*Shin gakushu shido yoryo*), launched in 1989 and fully enforced in 1993, means that not only academic performance but also almost *every* aspect of student life – including