

To Nurture A Noble Spirit

The Power of the Imperial Rescript on Education

The Imperial Rescript on Education as an Ethical Model—Post-War History

In 1945, defeat in the war left Japan's educational system no choice but to go through a transformation. The General Headquarters (GHQ) of the occupying Allied powers defined Japan's education policy in order to "sweep away all measures of militaristic ultranationalism", but they did not criticise the Rescript at all in this process. Even the report from the US Educational Mission did not go beyond saying that "The ceremonial use of Imperial Rescripts ... we consider undesirable in the development of personality and incompatible with public instruction in a democratic Japan".

The Japanese authorities accepted these recommendations, and on October 8th 1946 the Ministry of Education issued a directive on "The Treatment of Imperial Rescripts", which said "The Imperial Rescript on Education must not be taken as the sole fount of education in our country, but rather the foundations of education must be sought in the Imperial Rescript alongside a wide range of ethical, philosophical, and religious principles from across the world and throughout history". In other words, there was no criticism of the content of the Rescript, but rather it was taken as one example of the wisdom of the past.

Nevertheless, in May 1948 GHQ suddenly asked the Diet to take appropriate steps to make it clear that the Imperial Rescript on Education was no longer in force. Given that the Education Ministry had already issued the directive described above and settled the status of the Rescript, there was no need for the Diet to make a declaration at this point, but under pressure from GHQ both houses passed resolutions stating that the Rescript had no force.

Through these two resolutions, it was reaffirmed that the Rescript was not the sole guiding principle for education in Japan, but this left it as a pure ethical model, as one historical document among others. In other words, this constitutes a recognition by the Diet of the Education Ministry's position that there was no obstacle to using the Rescript as an ethical model in schools, as the "Seventeen Article Constitution" of Shōtoku Taishi and the Analects of Confucius are used today.

When people hear that the Rescript was repealed or set aside, they are prone to thinking that this extended to its content, but in fact there is nothing in the content that deserves to be criticised. On the contrary, we can say that the correct attitude to the Rescript is to be guided by the truths that it contains.

Summarised from "On the repeal process of the Imperial Rescript on Education" in *The Heart of the Imperial Rescript on Education for Today* (in Japanese)

Now is the right time to revisit the Imperial Rescript on Education

It is not too much to say that it has become difficult to pass on traditional values in post-war Japan, in the face of a wide variety of changes such as the transformation of the economic structure, massive population movements, a shift to nuclear families, and a falling birth rate.

Thanks to many technological revolutions, we are blessed with free time and material prosperity. However, can we not say that, in the midst of the apparent wealth of these days, as we compare the quality and quantity of our visible material possessions with those of others, we are neglecting the things that we cannot see: the ease of the spirit, or the quality of our happiness and the values we bring to the world — things that we cannot compare with other people.

The Imperial Rescript on Education is little more than 300 Japanese characters, but it distils the virtues that we are in danger of forgetting. Revisiting the ideals given in the Rescript and nurturing noble spirits will also help to pass the beautiful traditions and character of Japan on from our ancestors to our descendants.

