

THE COMPETITIVE EDUCATION IN JAPAN (Part 2)

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<Part 1>

- I Introduction
 - 1 My son is a pupil of a public junior high school
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 - 3 Competition has the power of involvement
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Part 2

III. *The History of the Gradual Intensification of Competitive Education in Japan*

1 The trend in the ratio of students who go on to a higher level

Competition exists in any field of life, especially in the economic field. But the level of intensity is not the same between some societies and also differs historically within each society.

In Japan the intensity of competition in education has changed in the latter part of this century. As mentioned previously, nowadays Japanese children must face keen competition, such that their parents did not experience. If we follow the history of Japanese education after the Second World War from the point of view of competition, it can be divided into three phases.

Figure 3 shows the ratio of students who went on to senior high school and college between 1950 and 1993. The two curves on the figure show "the capital S curve," a well-known type of trend that is composed of three phases, the period of stagnation, expansion and saturation. This 'S-type' curve has two turning points, the conversion from the old phase to the new phase. The first turning point, from stagnation to expansion, is near

FIGURE 3. THE RATIO OF STUDENTS WHO GO ON TO A HIGHER LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN JAPAN: 1950-1993

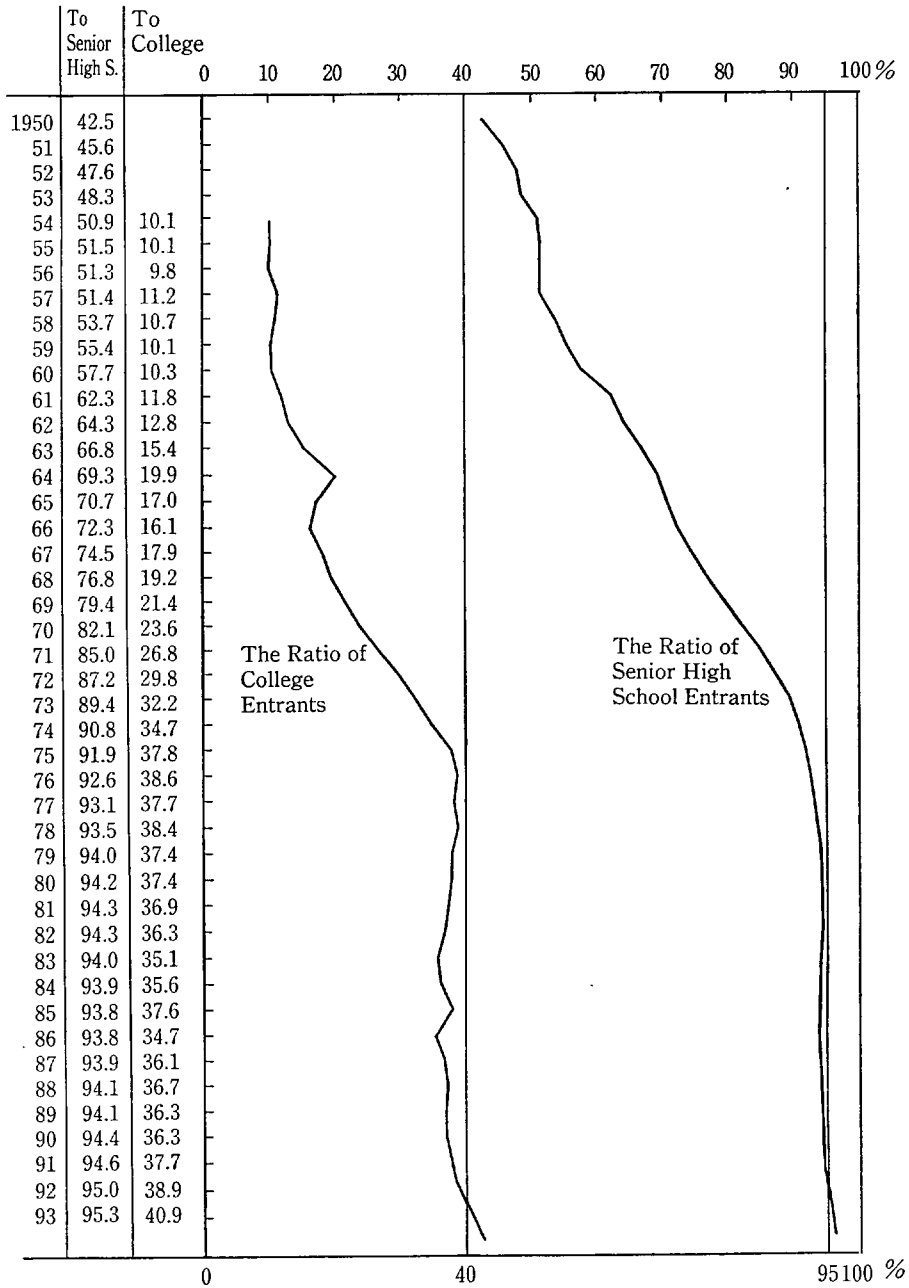


TABLE 3. THE THREE PHASES OF THE HISTORY OF GRADUAL INTENSIFICATION OF COMPETITIVE EDUCATION IN JAPAN

Phase	I	II	III
Period	~1959	1960~'74	1975~'90
The ratio of entrants	Senior High School 40~55% College 10%	58%→90% 10%→38%	90~94% 35~39%
The situation of the Educational System	Reorganized Structure after W.W. II	Rapid Expansion of Educational Opportunities	High Frequency of School Problems
The Nature of Competition in Schools	Restricted competition	Open competition	Closed competition
Age and Social Situation	Revival after the War Gap of 'Dual Structure' Separated Type of Occupational Life	High Economic Growth Correction of Gap Rising Type of Occupational Life	Post High Growth Magnification of Gap Competitive Order Type of Occupational Life

the year 1960 in both ratio curves. The second, from expansion to saturation, is near 1975.

If we take these two turning points as pauses in the history of intensification of competition in education, we can make Table 3 with three phases.

2 Three phases and the change in the nature of competition in schools

See Table 3. Phase I [—1959] shows a 40–55% for entrants to senior high school and a 10% to college. At that point the Japanese educational structure was reorganized from the old autocratic system to the democratic 6-3-3 school system. The poverty of the Japanese people at that time restricted their ability to go on to a higher level of education. Further more, the habitus of the old middle class, farmers and independent businessmen, also restricted their children from going on to a higher level of schooling. Thus the nature of competition in education was 'restricted.'

Phase II [1960–1974] has an extreme expansion of educational opportunities—a 58% to 90% increase in entrants to senior high school, a 10% to 38% increase to college. At that time there was higher economic growth in Japan, and thus growth in individual income. The restrictions from going on to a higher level of education were decreasing. The habitus of restricting educational opportunities was also weakened by economic growth. Thus the competition to go on to a higher level of schooling was opened up to most social classes. The scale of the competition in education increased, but at the same time the framework of opportunity was increasing during that period. Thus, from these two points of view, the nature of the competition was 'open,' that is, opened to social classes and the frame was relatively opened.

Phase III [1975–1990] has a saturation of the ratio of entrants, 35–39% of colleges and 90–94% to senior high schools. This saturation came about not by the lack of increase in the willingness of Japanese parents and students to seek a higher level of education, but by the political control which was executed by the Japanese government at the time of the

end of higher economic growth.

The frame is closed in terms of the increase in the number of those accepted. The competition which is built in under the condition of a non-expanding frame was keen indeed. Under these conditions the relationships between the challengers caused the hostile competition; a zero-sum game. Thus the intensity of competition in education reached a higher level in this period.

Further more, as most of the students were involved in the competition, the choice of not to go on to senior high school became difficult. Such behavior was looked upon as a failure and not as a way to avoid being involved in the competition. In these two senses, the nature of competition became 'closed,' that is, the frame was closed and it was difficult to escape from.

This period also witnessed a higher frequency of school problems, which meant a high rate of 'falling behind,' a high rate of delinquency, students' violence in school, expansion of some types of school absence, an increase of bullying among school students, etc. For example, Figure 4 shows the trend in the rate of junior high school absence (over 50 days per year) in Japan for reasons other than sickness or economics, but for psychological problems, such as phobia, truancy, etc. We can note in this figure that Phase III [1975–1990] is a period of a continual rate of increase. During the last 18 years the rate per 1,000 students has increased 6.3 times.

Figure 5 shows the trend in survival at birth and 'Total Fertility Rate' in Japan between 1947–1993. The curve of TFR decreased from over 4.0 to near 2.0 in the period of Phase I of Table 3. Babies who were born in this period (Phase I) became the partic-

FIGURE 4. TRENDS IN THE RATE OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ABSENCE (OVER 50 DAYS PER YEAR) IN JAPAN, FOR REASONS OTHER THAN SICKNESS OR ECONOMICS BUT FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS, SUCH AS PHOBIA, TRUANCY ETC., —Period 1966–1992—

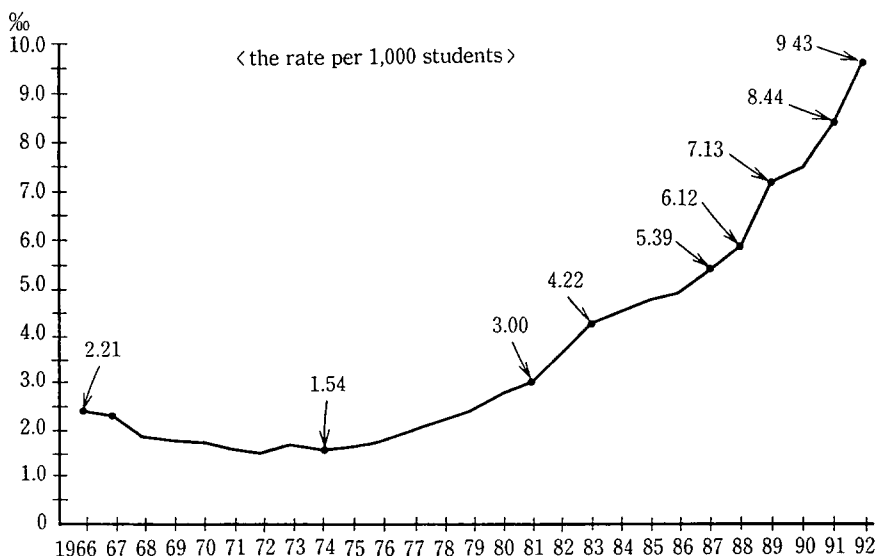
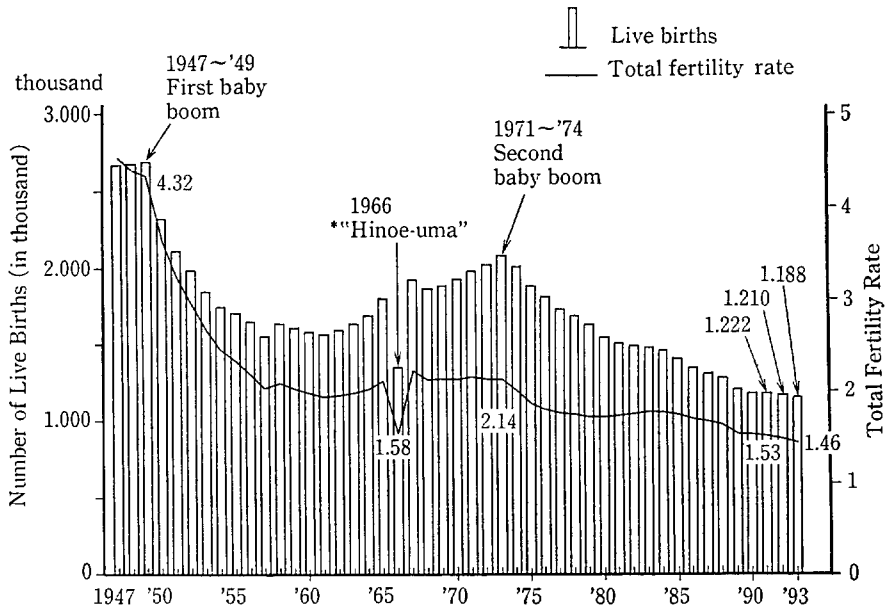


FIGURE 5. TRENDS IN SURVIVAL AT BIRTH AND TOTAL FERTILITY RATE IN JAPAN: 1947-1993



* "Hinoe-uma" is a year described in the Chinese Calendar and comes every 60 years. In Japan there is a superstition that a female baby born in A "Hinoe-uma" YEAR would bring misfortune to her family.

ipants in the challenge to go on to a higher level of education in the next period (Phase II). The TFR stabilized a little in the period (Phase II) nearing 2.0, but it began to decrease half-way through the '70s. And during the last 20 years TFR has decreased from 2.14 to 1.46, which is also the period corresponding to Phase III of Table 3. The author feels that the intensification of competition in education may discourage people from having children.

Thus the intensification and the conversion of the nature of competition in education has been closely related to other social changes and also related to some educational problems.

IV. Japanese Children Experience 'Juku'

1 'Juku' as a part of students' daily life

The most explicit characteristic in the daily lives of school students who live in the period 'closed competition' is to go to both school and 'juku'. In Japan there are, of course, many private institutes where children learn arts and sports. 'Juku' are also private institutes, but they teach the same syllabus as that taught in school. Students study in 'juku'

and they hope to gain a better understanding of school lessons, to reach a greater attainment, to catch up on lessons, or to prepare for the difficult entrance examinations.

Table 4 shows the ratio of pupils who go to 'juku' in primary and junior high school in Japan. This data was released through official government research and covers the whole of Japan. The ratio of junior high school students attending 'juku' gradually increased and is now over 50%. The ratio of 4th, 5th and 6th graders in primary school—the percentage in brackets—has been gradually increasing and is now nearing 50%. This is national data in Japan.

Table 5 also shows the ratio of pupils who go to 'juku' in primary and junior high school, of which data was collected through research in the Tokyo area by our seminar—the Sociology of Education. "B"-Research was conducted in 1988, and "C"-Research in 1991, and the latter data covers that of junior high school only. In both surveys the total rate of junior high schools is seen to be high, in both cases over 60%. The 3rd grade of junior high school is also seen to be over 70%. The figures in the Tokyo area are higher than that for the nation as a whole.

Figure 6 shows the weekly frequency of 'juku' attendance for which data was also

TABLE 4. THE RATIO OF PUPILS WHO GO TO JUKU IN PRIMARY AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN JAPAN—DATA RELEASED THROUGH OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT RESEARCH—

Year	Primary School	Junior High School
1976	12.0% (19.7%)*	38.0%
1985**	16.5% (22.3%)	44.5%
1988	— (41.1%)	51.0%
1990***	— (—)	54.3%

* The percentage in brackets shows the rate of 4th, 5th and 6th graders only.

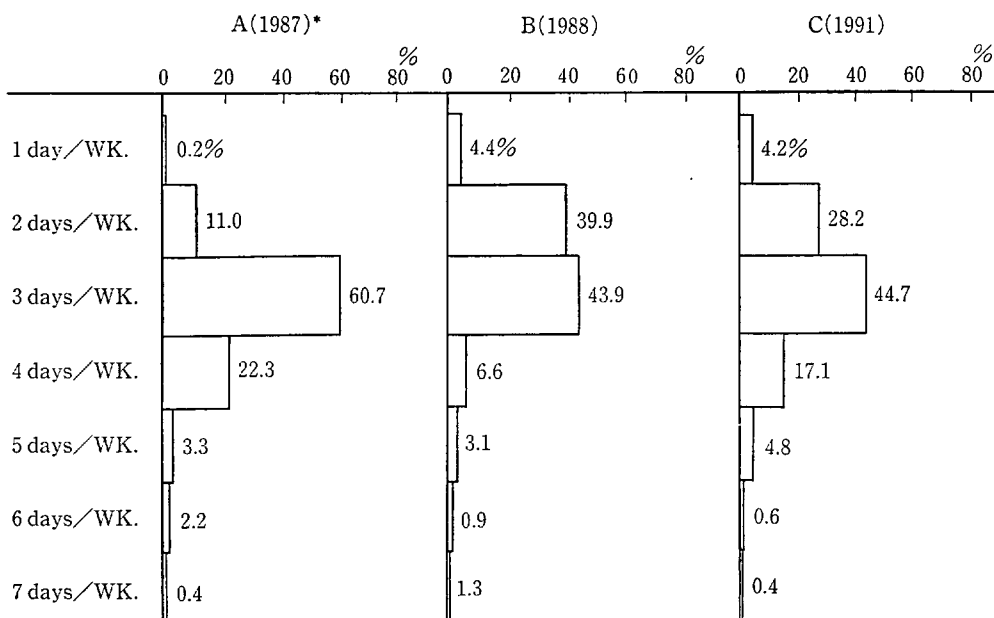
** Concerning 1976 and 1985, the data are provided by the Education Ministry.

*** Concerning 1988 and 1990, the data are provided by the Director-general of Administrative Affairs the Prime Minister's Office.

TABLE 5. THE RATIO OF PUPILS WHO GO TO 'JUKU' IN PRIMARY AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL—DATA COLLECTED THROUGH RESEARCH IN THE TOKYO AREA BY OUR SEMINAR

Grade		B (1988)		C (1991)	
		the number	%	the number	%
Primary School	4th Grade	18	24.7		
	5th Grade	22	32.4		
	6th Grade	34	44.7		
	Total	74	34.1		
Junior High School	1st Grade	47	54.7	369	53.3
	2nd Grade	48	63.2	480	67.1
	3rd Grade	63	73.4	484	74.2
	Total	158	63.5	1,333	65.1
Combined	Total	232	49.8		

FIGURE 6. WEEKLY FREQUENCY OF 'JUKU' ATTENDANCE
—DATA ALSO BY OUR SEMINAR IN THE TOKYO AREA—



* "A"-Research was taken from a random group of 12 JUKU in the Tokyo area, compared with "B"- & "C"-Research which were taken from Primary & Junior High Schools.

TABLE 6. WEEKLY FREQUENCY OF 'JUKU' ATTENDANCE
—THE SAME DATA IN FIGURE 6 ARE DIVIDED INTO THE GROUPS AS FOLLOWS—

	A (1987)		B (1988)		C (1991)		
	Small JUKU	Large JUKU	Primary School	Junior High School	Junior High School 1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade
1 day/WK.	0.7%	0.0%	9.7%	1.9%	5.2%	4.7%	3.1%
2 days/WK.	29.7	2.8	55.6	32.7	34.3	27.5	24.2
3 days/WK.	44.5	67.8	20.9	54.5	47.4	47.4	40.2
4 days/WK.	10.6	27.4	4.2	7.7	9.8	16.3	23.4
5 days/WK.	7.2	1.6	6.9	1.3	3.0	3.4	7.5
6 days/WK.	7.2	0.5	1.4	0.6	0.0	0.2	1.4
7 days/WK.	0.1	0.0	1.4	1.3	0.3	0.6	0.2

collected through research in the Tokyo area by our seminar. "A"-Research was conducted in 1987 and taken from a random group of 12 'juku'. The mode of distribution of weekly frequency is 3 days per week in all three cases.

In Table 6 the same data as in Figure 6 is divided into groups, small & large 'juku' in "A"-Research, primary and junior high school in "B"-Research, and 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades in junior high school in "C"-Research. As the students progress up through the school

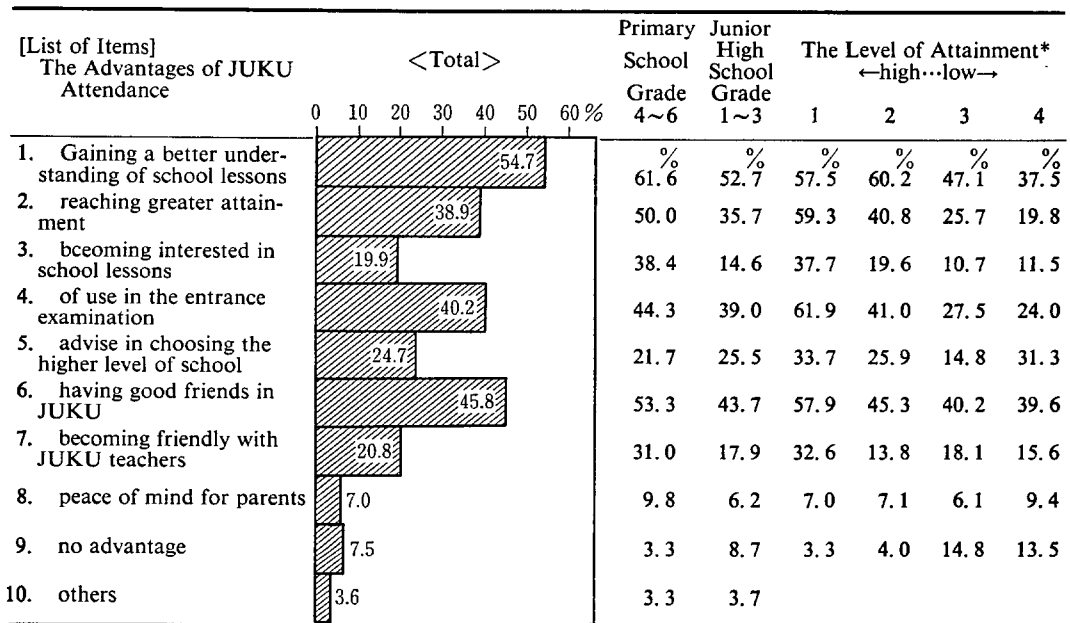
system, the weekly frequency becomes higher. If we combine the percentages of 4-7 days per week, over 30% of 3rd grade junior high school students attend 'juku' more than 4 days per week. 'Juku' attendance has become the normal way of life for Japanese junior high school students. They are now in a double school situation.

2 The advantages and disadvantages of 'juku' attendance for students

Many pupils attend 'Juku' frequently in Japan, but what are the advantages of 'juku' attendance for them? And likewise what are the disadvantages?

Figure 7 shows the results concerning the advantages, answered by the students themselves in "A"-Research. They chose any number of items from the list which they thought were the advantages of 'juku' attendance for themselves. Item-1, -2, -4 and -6 were chosen by near and over 40% of the respondents. Especially item-1 and -2 are 'better understanding' and 'greater attainment,' thus there is no doubt that 'juku' attendance is supplementing the intellectual training in school. It's also of use in preparing for the entrance examinations (Item-4). But the effect of 'better & greater' is lower in junior high school than in primary school. And more seriously, when we divide the data into 4 groups by the level of attainment [1, very good; 2, good; 3, poor; 4, very poor], concerning the percentages of item-1 and particularly item-2, the group of good attainment has a higher rate than that of poor attain-

FIGURE 7. THE ADVANTAGES OF 'JUKU' ATTENDANCE
 —REPLIED BY THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES IN "A"-RESEARCH (1987)—
 [Question] Please choose any number of items from the following list which you think are the advantages of 'juku' attendance for you.



* The level of attainment by their own assessment [1. very good 2. good 3. poor 4. very poor]

FIGURE 8. THE DISADVANTAGES OF 'JUKU' ATTENDANCE
 —REPLIES BY THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES IN "A"-RESEARCH (1987)—
 [Question] Please choose any number of items from the following list which you think are the disadvantages of 'juku' attendance for you.

[List of Items] The Disadvantages of 'juku' Attendance	<Total>		Primary School Grade 4~6	Junior High School Grade 1~3	The level of Attainment ←High...low→			
	number	%			1	2	3	4
1. less free time for playing	31.3	31.3	42.9	28.3	36.5	29.1	31.2	40.6
2. less free time for watching TV	30.5	30.5	26.3	29.1	25.4	28.0	35.3	49.0
3. less free time for sleeping	33.4	33.4	39.6	31.9	45.3	33.7	25.6	36.5
4. 'juku' lessons are too difficult for me to understand	13.9	13.9	11.5	14.7	11.7	14.2	14.3	17.7
5. have become more sensitive to the results of tests	37.2	37.2	43.5	35.7	44.2	36.5	35.0	37.5
6. over tiredness through studying	18.6	18.6	16.5	19.5	20.1	17.5	17.6	29.2
7. economic burden on parents	25.7	25.7	14.2	29.2	24.5	25.7	24.6	33.3
8. unable to take part in club activities	11.0	11.0	15.7	9.7	17.9	10.8	7.4	9.4
9. no disadvantage	17.8	17.8	18.9	17.7	15.3	18.1	21.0	11.5
10. others	6.3	6.3	6.5	6.3	10.2	4.9	5.1	11.5

TABLE 7. SUBSTITUTES FOR GOING TO 'JUKU'
 —REPLIES TO BY THE STUDENTS WHO ARE NOW ATTENDING
 'JUKU' IN "B"-RESEARCH (1988)—
 [Question] If you stop going to 'juku', how would you use the time?
 Please select any number of items from the following list.

[List of Items]	<Total>		Primary School Grade 4~6 %	Junior High School Grade 1~3 %	Junio High Shool Grade ouly %
	number	%			
1. play with friends	103	45.6	68.1	35.1	32.3
2. do hobbies	120	53.1	52.8	53.2	54.8
3. take lessons in arts or sports	18	8.0	9.1	7.1	4.8
4. do home study	101	44.7	27.8	52.6	64.5
5. watch TV	98	43.4	36.1	46.8	45.2
6. sleep	78	34.5	30.6	36.4	30.6
7. others	10	4.4	5.2	5.2	8.1

ment. If it is true, the function of 'juku' does not shorten the gap of attainment, but rather widens it.

Figure 8 shows the disadvantages of 'juku' attendance, answered also by students themselves in the same research as Figure 7. Item-1, -2, -3, and -5 were chosen by over 30% of respondents. Item-1, -2 and -3 mean that students free time is suppressed by 'juku'

attendance. They lose free time for playing, watching TV and sleeping. Further more, Item-5 was selected by the highest rate of respondents. To become more sensitive to the results of tests is the most characteristic attitude in the intensity of competition in education.

Looking at the right side of Figure 8, we cannot find such a big gap of data by the level of attainment as we find in Figure 7, referring to advantages. Thus we could say that suppression of free time and becoming sensitive are the general effects of 'juku' attendance, not influenced by the level of attainment.

Table 7 shows the results when students were asked, "If you stop going to 'juku', how would you use the time? Please select any number of items from the following list." Item-1, -2, -4, -5, and -6 were selected by between 34 and 53% of the respondents. Especially Item-2 [do hobbies] was selected by over 50% of every grade of students. Item-1 [play with friends] was selected by 68.1% of primary school students compared with 35.1% of junior high school students. Item-6 [sleep] by 30.6% of primary school compared with 36.4% of junior high school. But more important, Item-4 [do home study] was selected by 27.8% of primary school students compared with 52.6% of junior high school students. Of particular note, 64.5% of 3rd grade of junior high school students selected this item [do home study]. Junior high school students who are evaluated daily, and the 3rd grade students who are nearing the entrance examination for senior high school, cannot get away from the hard study and keen competition.

—To be continued—