I. Introduction

1. My son is a pupil of a public junior high school

   My son, my eldest child, became a junior high school student last April. He had his first experience with the 'intermediate test' and told me that during the first section of the test his hands were shaking uncontrollably and he couldn't grasp the meaning of the problems. The night before the test he claimed he could hardly sleep. I told him to try to relax, but he said, "Oh, Dad. The result of this test will be included as part of my school report for the entrance examination of senior high school. It's very important."

   I have been criticising the problems of the competition in the entrance examination for ten years now, and now find myself the father of a son who is involved directly in the competition. This fact stirred my deep emotions.

2. The efforts of parents pump up the competition

   Nowadays Japanese children must face keen competition, such that their parents did not have to contend with. There is enormous pressure felt by the parents. One pressure point lies in the following fact: The efforts of parents who desire their children to overcome the competition and the efforts of children themselves pump up the race and are changed into the energies that overheat the competition. A certain journal entitled, 'Guidance for Taking Junior High School Examinations,' advertises special training through the summer vacation. A typical example of the training at a 'juku' starts from July 21st and ends on August 30th, continuing for 33 days from 8:30 am to 7:20 pm for 10 hours per day, at a cost of ¥160,000. If parents wish these special training courses for their primary school children, then in my opinion, they appear to be invading the children's rights.

   Year by year this situation grows more violent, but I think this is not justifiable, and there will come a day of catastrophe in the not very distant future.

3. Competition has the power of involvement

   Another area of terrible pressure is the power of involvement.

* The author would like to express his gratitude to Mr. R. Siani for his editing the English.
The term 'competition' originally means that men or groups in plural compete to get or accomplish something. That 'something' is attractive for them to attain. Competition, however, often spreads to those who were not initially attracted so strongly. There is a secret component of competition, that is called 'a triangle of human desires.' When one person desires something, by that fact another's desire is awoken. To give an example, if there is an item beside a boy, anything—a toy or a book—and his elder brother tries to take it, the younger one will hang on to it, never letting go, and even though he didn't particularly want it. It does not show his ill-temper, but by the fact that his elder brother wants it, the younger brother's desire is awoken.

Parents can't be indifferent to the competition and its objects which many parents, having children who are close in age, desire and compete. Thus, people who at first don't desire are driven by their emotions—a “don't miss the bus.” Involving these new participants, the competition increases its scale and degree of violence.

4. Competition penetrates throughout adults' body

Yet a third great pressure is that the competition penetrates through parents' body. For example, I once had a bitter experience as a teacher at the Saitama Teachers' College. One particular course in that college held an intermediate presentation meeting of students' graduation thesis every year. One day, when one of the students in my seminar class gave a poor presentation, I felt personally ashamed in front of my colleague. I commented somewhat severely to the student, suggesting that he check the original text of the data.

I believe I was right, but my tone was rather severer than I would have used if I was alone with the student, and not in the presence of my colleague. Following the presentation, the student suffered from 'school-phobia.' He never again attended my seminar or my coaching time for the graduation thesis. Somehow, he graduated from the college. But I felt responsible for the fact that he wasted a valuable chance in his college life. I now clearly see through my feelings at that time. I was driven by my feeling of shame at the student's inferior performance in front of my colleague.

It is necessary for parents to have expectations for their child, but I think this must be based on 'trust' in the child's nature and character. If they state their 'expectations' based not on 'trust,' but on feelings driven by comparisons with other children, the 'expectations' become irritations. These expectations in effect are denials of the child as he or she actually is, that is to say, they make the child feel that he or she is not as good as he or she should be. Is there more painful experience for a child than to be denied his or her present existence compared with another child? A child, who is a 'good' boy or girl, promises his or her parents to make strong effort. But this promise is not easy to fulfill. Thus the child is punished when he is not able to make the effort required. At this point, the denials are double—a denial of the worth of the child and a claim that he has not kept his promise. Hence the 'expectation' itself becomes the punishment—a negative sanction.

When the pressure of competition penetrates the parents, trust in their child changes to irritation or denial, and expectation changes into punishment.
II. Students under the Influence of Competition

1. "Whether their school achievements are good or not" is decisive

Four years ago my students and I made a questionnaire to 892 students of the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades of primary schools and the 1st and 2nd grades of junior high schools.

Figure 1 [Happy Points in School Life] shows the results of the question, 'Are you happy in each point of school life as follows?' Among the 22 items, over 80% of the pupils selected item 11 (company with friends) and item 18 (excursions, school trips & field trips). Over 60% selected item 6 (physical education), item 14 (recreation time in homeroom) and item

**Figure 1. Happy Points in School Life**

*Question* Are you happy in each point of school life as follows? Please select from the followings.

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<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26.0 &gt; 15.6</td>
<td>32.9 &gt; 21.0</td>
<td>50.4 &gt; 26.1</td>
<td>28.4 &gt; 29.7</td>
<td>19.5 &gt; 14.3</td>
<td>71.5 &gt; 41.7</td>
<td>37.0 &lt; 12.3</td>
<td>56.2 &gt; 57.5</td>
<td>28.5 &gt; 30.6</td>
<td>44.3 &gt; 7.5</td>
<td>83.3 &gt; 85.3</td>
<td>30.5 &gt; 10.8</td>
<td>26.2 &gt; 6.6</td>
<td>80.1 &gt; 46.5</td>
<td>12.7 &gt; 4.2</td>
<td>50.6 &gt; 18.6</td>
<td>50.1 &gt; 42.0</td>
<td>90.7 &gt; 71.2</td>
<td>69.8 &gt; 55.3</td>
<td>58.2 &gt; 36.6</td>
<td>17.2 &gt; 3.6</td>
<td>46.7 &gt; 9.0</td>
<td>19.9 &gt; 4.8</td>
<td>2.2 &gt; 0.0</td>
<td>0.2 &gt; 0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 1. ATTITUDES REGARDING TIME SPENT IN SCHOOL
[Question] How do you feel about each hour of school lessons?
Please select up to 3 items from among the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>The level of attainment*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Study time</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>83.3&gt;48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Time to increase knowledge</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>39.4&lt;47.6</td>
<td>50.0&gt;7.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Time to display one's knowledge</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>43.7&gt;27.2</td>
<td>44.4&gt;17.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Must spend time in school</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>8.8&lt;14.1</td>
<td>8.3&lt;30.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Must be quiet</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5.6&lt;17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Be silent without understanding the lesson</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.8&lt;3.0</td>
<td>0.0&lt;12.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Getting left behind in the lessons</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0.0&lt;17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Studying with friends</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>43.2&gt;24.6</td>
<td>30.6&gt;15.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Rivalry between friends</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>33.3&gt;5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Approval from teacher</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.5&gt;4.8</td>
<td>5.6&lt;5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Warnings from teacher</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.4&lt;1.5</td>
<td>0.0&lt;5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. A time of boredom</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>10.1&lt;17.7</td>
<td>11.1&lt;48.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. A waste of time</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.0&lt;4.8</td>
<td>2.8&lt;13.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.6&lt;0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The level of attainment [1. very good/5. very poor]

19 (club activities).

We show the results by dividing them into 5 groups in terms of academic attainment. Point 1 is categorised by the good achievement in school subjects and Point 5 is by poor achievement, and the evaluations were given by the pupils themselves to that questionnaire. The differences between the academically successful children in group 1 and non-academically successful children in group 5 are very great. For example, item 2 (mathematics) 73.0% as compared with 5.1%. Not only the items of school subjects, but also some other school activities, e.g. recreation time, sports, and so on show great differences between the two groups.

Table 1 shows the results of the question ‘How do you feel about each hour of school lessons?’ Students were asked to select up to 3 items. As we can see on the right side of Table 1, the non-academically successful group feels each hour of school lessons as a time of ‘dullness, uselessness, or being silent without understanding, etc.’ much more to the extreme than the academically successful children.

Table 2 shows the results of the question, ‘How often do you feel you would like to be absent from school?’ There are also great differences between the two groups. In the academically successful group 2.8% chose ‘frequently’ compared with 46.2% of the non-academically successful group. If we add the responses of items 1 and 2, 86.7% of the non-academically successful group answered that they would not go to school. There were some absent pupils from school at that time. This result was taken from pupils who were present on that day. We must not forget that there are a large number of pupils who would increase school truancy.

The two groups view the lives and time spent in the same school and in the same classroom very differently.
TABLE 2. THE FEELING OF SCHOOL REFUSAL

[Question] How often do you feel you would like to be absent from school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>The level of attainment*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Frequently</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2.8 3.8 4.8 8.4 46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sometimes</td>
<td>268.0</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>30.6 24.2 27.3 40.8 38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rarely</td>
<td>399.0</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>33.3 46.5 50.9 37.2 12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Not at all</td>
<td>158.0</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>33.3 25.5 17.1 13.6 2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The level of attainment by their own assessment
[1. very good 2. good 3. average 4. poor 5. very poor].

2. The level of self-esteem of Japanese children is very low

Several comparative researches show that the level of self-esteem of Japanese children is lower than that of children in other countries.

In 1985 Japanese Youth Research Center published a report of a comparative study of junior high school students and their mothers in Japan and the U.S. Some interesting results can be noted in the report. The time spent studying at home is greater in Japan than in the U.S., but the time spent reading books is greater in the U.S. And the largest difference is as follows.

As Figure 2 shows, to the question 'Do you think that your mother is proud of you?,' 'Yes' is 92.0% in the U.S. and 23.6% in Japan.

When mothers were asked 'Are you proud of your child (who brings this questionnaire from school)?,' 96.2% responded 'Yes' in the U.S. and 72.9% in Japan.

Some researchers said that the response tendencies in the U.S. and Japan are different. Americans tend to respond with much more confidence, while Japanese more hesitantly. If that is true, it can explain the difference between 96.2% and 72.9% of mothers but it cannot explain the great difference between 92.0% and 23.6% of junior high school students. It cannot be denied that the level of self-esteem of Japanese children is very low.

Thus there were numerous cases in which the mother indicated that she was proud of her child, but the child did not think his(her) mother is proud of him(her). It is apparent that the message of denying him(her) is more easily communicated than that of affirming him(her).

—To be continued—

Hitotsubashi University
Figure 2. Is Mother Proud of Her Child?

<Graph-A> To the Student of Junior High School
[Question] Do you think your mother is proud of you?

Japan
- YES: 23.6%
- No: 57.4%

U.S.A
- Yes: 92.0%
- No: 0.8%

<Graph-B> To the Mother of the Student of Junior High School
[Question] Are you proud of your child who brings this questionnaire from school?

Japan
- Yes: 72.9%
- No: 21.4%
- D.K., N.A.: 5.7%

U.S.A
- Yes: 96.2%
- No: 3.3%
- D.K., N.A.: 0.8%