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# SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION: GLOBAL GROWTH, JAPAN'S EXPERIENCE, CANADA'S FUTURE

My emerging understanding of supplementary education in Japan has led me to ask what role such education plays in Canada.



Supplementary education is on the rise globally,<sup>1</sup> taking many different forms, from private tutors to small schools and large corporations. These providers exist outside conventional public and private school systems, offering remedial education and tutoring, parallel instruction to conventional schools, and accelerated or more advanced instruction.

Despite their global growth, we know very little about what is being taught in supplementary education institutions, how students and parents select them, or what role they play in education systems. When I have discussed my previous research on Japanese history textbooks with Japanese academics and educators, they have often pointed out that the role of textbooks is severely limited by the fact that most students gain most of their historical knowledge in supplementary education institutions. Yet my search for information about supplementary education led nowhere in terms of the teaching of history – or, for that matter, any other subject. I was surprised by this lack of research, especially because such education plays a crucial – perhaps even dominant – role in the development of Japanese students.

So, with support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Council, I set out to examine Japanese supplementary education. I have visited 25 supplementary education institutions (*juku*) in Japan, where I held long discussions with the schools' operators and observed classes. My emerging understanding of supplementary education in Japan has led me to ask what role such education plays in Canada and – perhaps more importantly – whether it might gain prevalence in the future, following the Japanese path.

## SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION AROUND THE WORLD

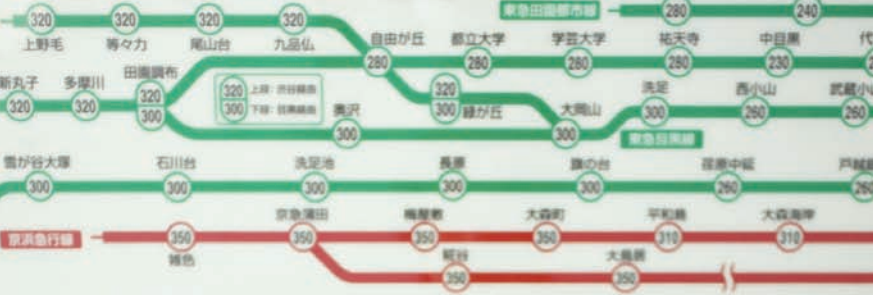
Globally, supplementary education is on the rise in advanced industrial economies, as well as in developing countries, and across political, linguistic and cultural contexts. Although so far there are no statistics by which to measure this global increase, growth is clearly occurring both in the number of individuals and organizations offering services and in the number of students subscribing to them.

A number of interrelated dynamics may be leading to this trend. In developing countries, supplementary education is often driven by the weakness of conventional schools, the poverty of teachers, and small increases in disposable incomes. Where conventional schools lack the geographical or socio-economic reach to serve populations, supplementary education institutions of varying levels of formality fill such gaps. For teachers in developing countries, the opportunity to offer additional instruction after school is often an avenue to improve meagre salaries. In some cases, these opportunities blend into extortion by teachers who might refuse to offer instruction unless students also subscribe to additional services for a private fee.

At the same time, supplementary education is growing in advanced industrialized countries. Some countries have had highly institutionalized systems of



**EN BREF** La formation supplémentaire prend de l'ampleur dans les économies industrielles avancées comme dans les pays en développement, dans différents contextes politiques, linguistiques et culturels. Dans les pays en développement, la formation supplémentaire résulte souvent des lacunes des écoles conventionnelles, de la pauvreté des enseignants et d'une hausse modeste du revenu disponible. Dans certains pays industrialisés, comme le Japon, la formation supplémentaire est une tradition bien établie. Dans d'autres, elle répond maintenant à un environnement concurrentiel et aux lacunes réelles ou perçues des systèmes conventionnels d'éducation. Bien que la formation supplémentaire n'ait pas pris racine au Canada, une comparaison entre son rôle au Japon et à Vancouver laisse entendre qu'elle prend de l'importance ici.



supplementary education for some time, most notably Japan. Elsewhere, supplementary education has existed in the form of private tutors, often university students. Tutoring has usually focused on remedial education, but recently more accelerated education offerings are springing up, promising a leg up to students in competitive education systems.

Again, a number of different factors may be leading to this increase. At the broadest level, the rise in supplementary services may be a delayed reaction to the rapid expansion of secondary and higher education in the 1960s – a response to real or perceived deficiencies in conventional education systems. Recent underinvestment in public education may be so severe that quality is deteriorating, and that perception could be driving parents and students toward supplementary services. The greater scrutiny placed on primary and secondary education following such near-global academic events as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) or Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) may be contributing to the perception that educational quality is on the decline.

Another explanation focuses on class reproduction. As cultural capital has been playing an important role in ensuring heirs' class status, parents have invested more in possible avenues of distinction. This search for distinction may be fuelling the rise in supplementary education services and should apply to achievement within a specific strata of education (secondary education, for example) as well as to increased opportunities for advancement to higher levels of education.

Finally, some policy-makers have adopted policies to actually encourage the supplementary education sector, most prominently the 'No Child Left Behind' Act in the United States, which offers financial aid, specifically for supplementary education, to parents of students attending consistently underperforming schools.

**JAPAN'S EXPERIENCES WITH HIGHLY INSTITUTIONALIZED SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION**

Despite the general consensus that supplementary education is growing globally, we know little about its impact – or potential impact – on conventional schools and school systems. While the experiences in the developing world may be of little direct relevance to Canadians, Japan offers a very instructive example of how an education system with a significant supplementary sector operates.

The supplementary education industry in Japan includes many different sectors (study aides, adult education, etc.). Here, I will focus on supplementary education institutions that are offering fee-paying afternoon and weekend instruction to primary and secondary students in academic subjects. These schools are often referred to as 'cram schools' in English. American education scholars David Stevenson and David Baker have proposed that we think of this sector as 'shadow education'.<sup>2</sup> Both of these terms are somewhat derogatory, and so I prefer to use the Japanese term for these schools: *juku*.

While some contemporary Japanese *juku* incorporate elements of pre-modern forms of education, especially *terakoya*, or temple schools, they are primarily a phenomenon of the past 35 years. Operators of older *juku* have told me frequently that when they founded their schools, they often failed to obtain bank loans – and even, in one case, a bride – because of the newness of the business sector. The recent development of supplementary education as a large-scale industry has led me to conclude that it is not, as many think, rooted in long-standing cultural, religious and moral practices, but instead arises out of the contemporary institutional context of Japanese education. This observation leads me further to wonder about the potential for a supplementary education industry in Canada, despite the cultural differences between these two countries.

Although *juku* attendance has been widespread in Japan for over 35 years, there is very little concrete information on the programs or the students who attend them. Overall estimates of attendance offered in the Japanese press and by Japanese officials and scholars range from a low of 30 percent to a high of over two thirds. Since attendance varies significantly by grade and location, it is probably fair to say that it would be difficult to find any classroom above Grade 4 in a conventional (i.e., public or private) school anywhere in Japan where fewer than 25 percent of the students are attending *juku*, and it would not be difficult at all to find classrooms where virtually all of students are attending, especially in metropolitan areas and in higher grades. In private conversations, representatives of the Japan *Juku* Association have estimated the number of *juku* schools at approximately 50,000.

What does the presence of such a substantial supplementary education industry imply for the overall educational system? The number of *juku* increased massively in the course of the 'juku boom' of the 1970s, which was associated with high economic growth and increasing disposable incomes. Education had clearly established itself as the prime avenue to social advancement within a meritocratic education system in which merit was determined by standardized tests. Since then, *juku* have firmly established themselves as an important element in the Japanese education system, and few descriptions of Japanese education fail to mention 'examination hell' and *juku* as closely-linked aspects characteristic of primary and secondary education.

Over the past 15 years, Japan has been experiencing growing dissatisfaction with conventional schools. I sometimes wonder about this dissatisfaction in a country that continues to enjoy near-universal literacy in an ideogram-based language that requires continuous reading and writing education over virtually the entire period of compulsory education. Yet, the Japanese public has been gripped by

an education panic. This panic has led to widespread insecurity about conventional schools that has fuelled further *juku* attendance. While many of the *juku* that I have visited are led by charismatic educators who provide a social environment to students that is highly conducive to study, the growth of *juku* has been rooted in their status as an 'insecurity industry' (*fuan sangyō*) that caters to parents' fears about the economic prospects of their children and about their own lack of understanding of the contemporary education system

*Juku* are not under the purview of the Japanese Ministry of Education; instead, they are regulated as small businesses by the Ministry of Economics, Trade and Industry. However, dissatisfaction with conventional schooling has led to a number of policy changes recognizing the role provided by these services. Many local jurisdictions, especially in metropolitan areas, have introduced school choice programs at all levels of primary and secondary education. These programs have led to an increase in the counselling role of *juku*.<sup>3</sup> Other local initiatives have moved to integrate *juku* into schooling, circumventing the lack of a national policy. Even where this is happening, few policies address the most pressing systemic questions about the large supplementary sector. For example, how do conventional teachers teach classes that include a significant number of students who may be spending as much time in *juku* as they are in school? What does it mean that, when surveyed, a majority of parents suggest that their children are learning more in *juku* than in schools?

#### A CANADIAN COMPARISON: SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION IN VANCOUVER

Although supplementary education has not taken root in Canada, there is a prevalent sense of increasing demand. In an attempt to understand more about this emerging trend, last summer I compiled an inventory of *juku*-like institutions in Metro Vancouver with the help of Sabrina Lohner, an intern at the Institute of Asian Research.

Relying on the phone book and online sources, we found 74 tutoring centres or tutoring brokers operating in the Lower Mainland, linked to 55 companies. (Eight of the companies have two or more branches in Metro Vancouver. For example, Sylvan Learning Centre – probably the most visible supplementary education provider in Canada – has nine.) This is not an overwhelming number in a region of approximately 275,000 school-aged children. By comparison, about 600 *juku* are operating in Hiroshima, with an approximate school-age population of 150,000.

Also by comparison, most of the centres in Vancouver are relatively new, founded after 1990; only six have existed for more than 25 years.

Most supplementary learning centres offer math or English programs; eight offer all subjects from physics to history, plus help with homework. Depending on the centre, programs are available in class-sized groups, small groups of two to five, and one-on-one.

The monthly price varies from \$65 to \$399 and the price per hour from \$18 to \$80. The lowest of these fees are very similar to Japan's – where a basic package of twice-a-week instruction in two subjects would cost approximately ¥7,000 per month – but the Vancouver fees for additional instruction and specialized packages send the upper end of



the scale much higher, justified in part by greater experience and expertise of teachers.

The online profile of these institutions shows that barely more than half of the homepages are catering to their market in English only. Excluding tutoring brokerages we found that 52 percent of tutoring centres have a homepage in English only, 36 percent provide information in more than one language, and 12 percent appear only in an Asian language. Schools offering information in more than one language generally use English as a first language, and offer information in Korean, Japanese or Chinese as a second language. Since approximately one third of Metro Vancouver's population is of Asian ethnic background (although a significant portion of that is relatively old immigration and may not be attracted by offerings in an Asian language), this advertising strategy suggests a disproportionate interest among Asian-Canadian populations – or at least the perception of such interest by supplementary education providers. It is noticeable, as well, that many homepages appear to have a distinct Asian branding strategy, often displaying Asian-looking children, students and teachers – sometimes to the exclusion of others.

Since we could not obtain information on the number of students attending particular establishments, we are unable to reach any firm conclusions about the relative share of students speaking Asian languages among the supplementary education population.

#### THE FUTURE OF SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION

According to many of the juku operators I have interviewed

in Japan, the future of the industry in that country looks relatively rosy. It is increasingly dominated by large corporate players as opposed to the small, individually-operated juku that I have focused on in my research. While low birth rates have resulted in a decline in the number of school-aged children in Japan, Japanese observers say that the proportion of children attending juku is rising. Juku are also forcefully shifting away from group instructions to individual tutoring, a shift to more expensive offerings and greater per-student revenues. Based on local initiatives that are involving juku teachers in teachers' education or examples of public schools offering 'package deals' that include juku tuition, some even suggest that juku will become an element in the official education system over the long run.

In the Canadian context, a number of conditions point to the likely emergence of a more active supplementary education industry. Policy initiatives of the past 20 years or so have generally attempted to insert more private and quasi-profit-motivated incentives into the education system. Charter schools and school choice programs have had some successes in Alberta, for example.<sup>4</sup> Research has also pointed to the vibrancy of 'third sector' private schools in Toronto.<sup>5</sup> Some Canadian researchers have begun to document the rise of tutoring services generally.<sup>6</sup> These developments are occurring in the context of a global rise in supplementary education as I have described it above.

My census of Vancouver supplementary education institutions points to an additional potential dynamic. Given the apparent marketing of supplementary education to recent Asian immigrants, I would argue that supplemen-



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tary education is traveling across the Pacific as an institutional import. To most recent Asian immigrants, especially from China and Korea, supplementary education institutions will be a very familiar element of an education system. Many of these immigrants also carry with them very high expectations of education as a vehicle for social advancement for future generations. Even though Canada generally compares favourably to other industrialized democracies in international comparisons of educational achievement, some immigrant parents are turning to supplementary education when their specific expectations – including expectations of a particular style of education, especially one that is focused more on computational than on analytical ability, to take mathematics expectations as an example – are not met by public schools. In her study of Chinese-Canadian parents and students in Richmond, B.C., for example, Li summarized this difference in expectations as follows: "Chinese parents preferred traditional teacher-centered, code-emphasis education", whereas "Canadian teachers believed in progressive, student-centered, meaning emphasis education".<sup>7</sup> The gap between parents' expectations and schools' aims can easily be filled by supplementary education services.

It does not seem far-fetched to imagine that some of the entrepreneurs who are catering to immigrants could soon expand their offerings to attract a broader clientele. In the context of heightened concern about public education, it would take relatively few children in a particular class to be enrolled in tutoring before other parents felt driven to seek tutoring for their children. Tipping point effects in small social groups may emerge as a powerful driver for the local increase in supplementary education institutions.

Canadian education may be somewhat inoculated against such developments by the absence of individual high-stakes testing. Even though recent policies across the provinces have emphasized accountability, as a rule they have restricted themselves to collective testing. For example, the Fundamental Skills Assessment in British Columbia is primarily a test of schools and their success in educating children, not of the students themselves. And while entrance to some Canadian universities is highly competitive, less competitive alternatives are generally seen as very strong and therefore not necessarily a significant loss in educational and occupational opportunities. Except for the most ambitious students and parents, supplementary education expenses may not be perceived as a worthwhile investment except for remedial purposes.

Nevertheless, Canadian policy makers and teachers would be well advised to keep an eye on the developments in supplementary education, both worldwide and in Canada, not because there is anything inherently bad about it, but because its rise may have a significant impact on Canadian education in the future. |

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### Notes

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