

# Individual and Group Life in Japanese Preschool

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## 1. Introduction

There are several comprehensive studies about Japanese preschools done by Western researchers (mainly American) (Hendry, J., 1986; Lewis, C., 1989; Peak, L., 1991; Tobin, J. J., Wu, D. H. Y., & Davidson, D. H., 1989). Most of their works emphasize the extent which Japanese preschools are group-oriented and tend to focus on how group-oriented behaviors are fostered in group life (*syudan seikatsu*). Although these analyses are not wrong, I think American researchers tend to dichotomize group versus individual, and determine that Japanese priority is on the group rather than individual. These analyses seem to imply that Japanese children have to learn how to restrain themselves or sacrifice their own desires for the group.

However, Japanese preschools also try to develop individuality, although it should be harmonized within a group norm. As a Japanese, I want to focus on how Japanese preschools try to balance individuality and group harmony, and integrate them. I also want to explore the diversity of Japanese preschools in terms of how they place emphasis on the group and on the individual.

In this paper, I will examine how Western researchers see the systems and characteristics of Japanese preschools from a critical point of view. Next, I will introduce my own interpretation of the function of Japanese preschools and then, compare them to an American preschool. Finally, I will discuss how Japanese educational philosophers, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare try to combine individualism and collectivism without conflict. I will also present the differences of relative emphasis placed on individuals and on groups.

## 2. The characteristics of Japanese preschool described by Western researchers

According to Shigaki (1983), most of the Japanese preschool teachers she interviewed told her that they want to foster a *ningen-rashii kodomo* (a human-like child). She categorized the characteristics that are valued in Japanese preschool education into the following four groups:

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harmonious relationships; perseverance and concentration; creativity; and thinking processes. The former two are especially valued cultural traits. Shigaki (1983) included *omoiyari* (empathy), *yasashii* (gentleness), *shakaisei* (social consciousness), *shinsetsu* (kindness), and *kyochosei* (cooperativeness) in the first category and *nintai* (perseverance) and *syucyuryoku* (concentration) into the second category.

Hendry (1986) showed that these characteristics are also considered to be the qualities of a desirable child in a preschool. According to her, a good child should be bright, cheerful, *sunao* (obedience), *yasashii* (gentle, kind, tender, affectionate), and *omoiyari* (empathetic). She argued that mothers' aspirations for children entering preschool are to let them get used to group life, and become a 'social person'. The ideals of cooperation and harmony are frequently mentioned by mothers, too.

Hendry pointed out that it is difficult to translate *sunao* into English, and introduced various dictionary definitions, such as gentle, meek, submissive, honest, and while researchers translated this term as guileless, straightforward, amenable (Doi), and compliant and upright (Hara and Wagatsuma). White (1987) also discussed the difficulty of translating *sunao* into English. She explained, "A child who is *sunao* has not sacrificed his personal autonomy on the altar of cooperation. Cooperating with others does not imply giving up the self, as it may in the West, but in fact implies that working with others is the appropriate means by which one expresses and enhances oneself." (p.28).

Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989) showed the results of the questionnaires that asked preschool teachers, administrators, parents, and child-development specialists, "what are the most important things for children to learn in preschool?". Eighty percent of the Japanese subjects ranked sympathy, empathy, and concern for others as the top three. "Cooperation and how to be a member of a group" is ranked at the second highest valued trait. However, gentleness was not placed in the top three. Nor was perseverance given a high rank. Tobin et al. (1989) also pointed out that teachers and administrators value Western traits such as *dokuritsu* (independence), *kosei* (individuality), and *sozo* (creativity). They found that most Japanese administrators try to balance Western and the traditional Japanese values. Their interpretation was, "Japanese preschools thus strive to produce children who are obedient, energetic, persevering, gentle, and group-oriented with a dash of self-confidence and individuality." (p.32).

### 3. Differences between American and Japanese preschool

As described in the previous chapter, Japanese preschools are characterized as group-oriented, harmonious, and vigorous by American researchers. They pointed out that these

characteristics are not only fostered by the Japanese preschool system, but some specific activities and teachers' class management styles. I thought comparing Japanese preschools to American ones would make it easier for me to understand what American researchers found different in Japanese preschools. To analyze an American preschool firsthand, I went to the R Child Care Center (RCCC) in Cambridge to observe its classes and talk with its director. I spent two to two and one half hours each time observing toddlers (2: 06~3: 04), preschoolers (3: 05~4: 05), and lymans (4: 00~5). I found that, basically, what I saw in an American preschool and what American researchers say about Japanese preschool are two sides of the same coin.

#### *Class size and Student/teacher ratios*

American researchers and educators seem to be impressed by the large student/teacher ratios in Japanese preschools. In Japan, there is usually one teacher for 30 to 40 students per class. Tobin et al. (1989) said an American administrator wrote on her response form after watching a video of the Komatusdani Preschool, "The worst thing by far is the ratios 30/1! That's too high." The other said, "No wonder there is so much wildness and fighting." Although American educators evaluated the large student/ratios negatively, researchers were more careful to discover that it is the key to fostering group identity among Japanese preschoolers. It is often pointed out that teachers treat children as a group and called them *minasan* (everyone) or by the class name such as *momogumi-san* (peach class) (Hendry, 1983; Tobin et al., 1989).

The student/teacher ratios at R Child Care Center is 3/10 for toddlers who are 30-40 months old, and 2/10-16 for preschoolers and lymans. I was impressed how these small ratios enable children to have easy access to their teachers. Teachers treat children individually especially in the toddler's class. Since teachers can give individual attention to a child, they even take a child to the toilet individually. The teachers frequently hug and soothe the children when they seem to be frustrated. The children can sit on the teacher's lap while listening to stories. It is possible for children to dominate one of the teachers when they want. For me, American preschool teachers seem to play a mother's role for toddlers.

However, the teachers' attitude toward children were different in the preschool class. Most of the children seemed to be much more independent than the toddlers. And the teachers didn't act like mothers any more, although they still have more than enough time to make individual contact with the children. Although no hugging was observed, children were allowed to sit on the teacher's lap when they wanted. When a child wanted to sit by a teacher during a free play period, the teacher did not encourage a child to play instead with other

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children as Japanese teachers would do. American children can even ask for their teachers to read a book to them individually. But teachers also treat the class as a whole. One of the teachers frequently called the class, "Preschoolers!".

Tobin, et al. (1989) pointed out that American teachers tend to focus on student/teacher ratios as the more important factor, whereas Japanese teachers tend to stress the positive importance of class size. As for the toddler's class, I thought 10 is the ideal size to create a homelike atmosphere in which children can feel secure. However, as for the Lyman's group, 10 seemed to be too small to create a dynamic group play during free play period. In fact, children were making flower books and playing with miniature cars individually, rather than interacting with each other. The length of time which a child devoted to one activity seemed to be rather short. It may be because the activity did not develop through interaction between children. They appeared to be very quiet when compared to the vigorousness of children in Japanese preschools.

#### *Uniformity and freedom in activities*

It is often pointed out that Japanese preschools have several rituals which are considered to foster group identity (Hendry, 1983; Peak, 1991; Tobin et al., 1989). Morning ritual may be one of the most popular ones in Japanese preschools. Usually children sing a morning song in unison followed by the recitation of morning greetings, "Good morning teacher, good morning everyone.". Then, a teacher calls the roll and each child answers *hai* (yes). Two monitors (*toban*) are designated and lead the class in reciting the date and the weather of the day. This kind of ritual can be seen at snack time, lunch time, and before leaving. Hendry (1983) added that class co-operative efforts are expressed in the drawings pinned up on the wall, showing seas full of individually fashioned fishes, woods full of trees, or a train full of people. Moreover, wearing uniforms and having identical sets of equipment contribute to fostering a harmonious atmosphere and group membership. Although there are many preschools which do not have uniforms and identical school bags, cooperative art works are very popular in Japanese preschools.

In RCCC, I have observed none of these kinds of ritual activities. Since, in Japan it is usual for children to start to eat snacks and lunch at the same time after they sing and recite in unison, I was surprised to observe that RCCC children starting to eat individually without resort to any sort of group activity. They need not wait for other children to be ready for eating. Moreover, the RCCC children were allowed to decide how many sections of orange or pieces of crackers they would eat. Children had a great deal of autonomy: they decided when to start eating, how much to eat, or when to leave the table after lunch or snack without being

concerned about the other children.

Even during group time, children were allowed to separate themselves from the group. During group activities such as listening to a story or singing, one child left its group and went to the corner of the classroom. He/she started wearing a costume or read a book by himself/herself. But teachers did not seem to consider these actions in any way as misbehavior. Rather, children's rights generally seem to be respected.

However, this does not mean that children are allowed to do whatever they want at any time. At clean-up time, a teachers told children who did not help to do their jobs. When a child started singing at snack time, a teacher told him, "Let's sing a song in the group time.", and encouraged the children to talk gently with other people on the table. At group time, when children talked about special events they experienced, one child who was not assigned to talk started speaking. The teacher told her to stop talking and to listen to the others until it was her turn. In this way, the teachers made the purpose of the activities very clear to the children. And, as far as children participate these activities, they have to follow the teachers' rules.

However, once children leave the group (and they are permitted to leave), teachers do not force them to join the group or follow any other rules. This principle is very different from Japanese preschools, where children are strongly expected to participate in group activities, but are not strictly warned when they talk noisily or bother other children. A good example may be the teacher's attitude of non-interference toward a boy named Hiroki in the Komatsudani Preschool, who participated in all the activities, but always bothered his classmates (Tobin, et al., 1989).

American researchers noticed that nonparticipation in group activities is considered to be a serious problem in Japanese preschools (Hendry, 1983; Peak, 1991). Peak (1991) illustrated how a teacher tries to make an unwilling child participate:

Following a number of direct requests, the teacher often tries to lead the child by the hand toward the activity. If this fails, she may warn the child that the group will proceed without him. ... If these tactics fail, the teacher may have to force the issue, provoking a tantrum, which she faces cheerfully, patiently, and sympathetically. Smiling, she psychologically outflanks the child, who ultimately finds himself the loser in this battle of perseverance (Peak, 1991, p.174).

Hendry (1983) also showed that Japanese teachers use peer pressures to make an unwilling child participate in group activity. But in RCCC, neither teachers nor class members pressed a child who left a group. This may be because individual desire is more respected than group participation. And in the United States, non-participation does not necessarily mean breaking

the harmony of the group. Thus, children seem to have "a right to leave the group".

### *Teachers' management of children's misbehavior*

Lewis (1984) suggested that Japanese preschool teachers' strategies for controlling children's behavior is to elicit children's compliance by using minimal pressure. This strategy is thought to foster internalization of norms. She proposed four aspects of teachers' strategies, which are: (1) minimizing the impression of teacher control; (2) delegating control to children; (3) providing plentiful opportunities for children to acquire a "good girl" or "good boy" identity; and (4) avoiding the attribution that children intentionally misbehave.

Lewis gave some examples to support her analysis. She suggested that the high level of noise and chaos in a Japanese preschool may be partly due to the teachers' tolerance toward a wide latitude given to children's behaviors. She also explained that teachers believe if children understand what is proper behavior, compliance will naturally follow. So, understanding becomes the teachers' primary goal. This idea is supported by Wagatsuma and Hara (1974) and White (1987) that both *wakaraseru* (to get the child to understand) and *rikaisaseru* (to get the child to understand logically) are the strategies to be used in mother-child relationships and teacher-student relationships. Lewis also suggested that the system of rotating *toban* (monitors) fosters children's ability to lead and to be responsible for other members of the group. And the way teachers manage children's misbehavior is to give the child a simple explanation of appropriate behavior or a series of questions which assumes that the child would not knowingly commit wrongdoing. In addition to giving an explanation or question, I think when a child becomes about 5-year old, Japanese teachers can warn the child against misbehavior just by calling his/her name. He/she is expected to guess what he/she has done is wrong.

This type of communication style has never been observed in RCCC. Teachers always clearly stated what a child should do when he misbehaves. And the teachers always gave him/her a reason why his/her behavior was inappropriate, and explained what would happen if he/she continued to misbehave. When a boy in preschool class started hitting a table with a wooden block, a teacher told him to stop it. She continued, "It's very noisy when you hit the table. The other children who are reading books are bothered by the noise."

### *Fighting and hitting*

Teachers' attitudes toward fighting and hitting are very different in these two cultures. Tobin et al. (1991) related how a teacher did nothing when a boy named Hiroki purposely stepped on another boy's hand to make him cry. Instead, the teacher encouraged the other

members of the class to take responsibility for helping Hiroki correct his behavior rather than using her authority to punish him. Tobin et al. also reported that some Japanese administrators criticized this management style, and that there is an ideological debate between traditional Japanese and Westernized internationalism.

I think that it is dangerous to overgeneralize Hiroki's case and believe that Japanese teachers do nothing to intervene in a fight. At the same time, I think it is also true that Japanese tend to think that fighting is a good opportunity to foster *shakaisei* (social attitudes and skills) in the children. Asou, Saito, and Ogino (1991) and Asou, Kinoshita, and Saito (1986) showed that teachers' as well as children's attitudes toward fighting dramatically change when the children are 2-3 years old and when they become 4-years old. They observed and analyzed children's fighting at preschools, and found that when children are 2-3 years old, 20% of the children asked for help from the teachers, and teachers intervened in 70% of the fights regardless of children's request for help. In contrast, when Asou et al. (1986) observed a class of 4-years old, they discovered that teachers intervened in only 7% of the fights and other children intervened in 22% of them.

Peak (1991) interpreted that "Japanese teachers do not consider hitting as a severe 'crime' or a demonstration of antisocial tendencies. Rather, it indicates social immaturity and frustration at an inability to verbalize one's feelings." (p.161). In addition, "There is not a strong feeling that 'victims' have a 'right' to be protected from 'aggression.'" (p.162). So, she assumed that "There is an unspoken assumption that learning to live in society involves learning to live with friends who express themselves by hitting as well as with words. This theme is reflected in the management of children who hit others frequently." (p.162).

American teachers do not seem to consider hitting as "just a lack of maturity of expression", and they believe it is their responsibility to intervene when children fight with and hit each other. During my observation at RCCC, I observed 1 hitting and 1 biting, and 2 fights over a single toy among the toddlers. And I observed 3 fights over a single toy and 1 hits and 1 monopolize of a playing space in the preschoolers' class. In all the cases, teachers immediately came to stop the fighting, and told the children not to hit or not to monopolize the toys. The teachers didn't judge which child was bad nor scold or punish the "criminal" children. Rather, they told children to share or to take turns. And the teachers soothed the frustrated children especially when they were crying.

#### **4. The roles of Japanese preschool**

As I have described in the previous chapters, Western views of Japanese preschools are more or less similar. But, I think that there are two different perspectives to interpret the

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overall role of Japanese preschools. Although both of them consider group life (*syudan seikatsu*) as an essential part of the child's preschool experience, one emphasizes the discontinuity of home and preschool, while the other emphasizes the complementary role of preschool.

Peak (1991) considered home and preschool as completely different worlds. She described home as a place where a child's feelings of *amae*-based dependency are accepted, and a child is indulged by the intimate mother-child relationship. And school is described as a place where a child has to learn to keep one's wings pulled in and display proper *enryo* (restraint), and develop self-reliance, conformity and control of egoistic tendencies to be a member of a group. She explained the discrepancy between these two worlds by citing the Japanese words *uchi* (private, home) and *soto* (public, outside). She wrote:

The home, or *uchi*, is the private, intimate arena in which one can relax, let all of one's feelings show, and expect indulgence and sympathy from other members of the family. Within the *uchi* a healthy amount of self-indulgence, regressive behavior, and mild aggression are not only cheerfully tolerated but also encourages as an indication of intimacy and trust. However, in the *soto*, or outside world, one must learn to assume a genial and cooperative public persona, in which individual feelings and desires must be subjugated to the harmony and activities of the group. (Peak, 1991, p.7).

Peak's ideas about *uchi* and *soto* seem to be strongly influenced by Doi's work (Doi, 1981). However, she described *uchi* and *soto* as if they were absolutely distinct and overlooked Doi's description of them as a relative relationship. According to Doi, "The Japanese behave 'reasonably' when *enryo* is present, but the circle in which *enryo* must be exerted is itself experienced as an 'inner' circle in relation to the outside world where no *enryo* is necessary, . . ." (Doi, 1981, p.43).

I think Peak overemphasized the difference between home and school and ignored the continuity between them. I don't think Japanese children always restrain (*enryo*) themselves at school. When we take Peak's perspective that Japanese children have to "pull their wings in", we can not explain why they are so vigorous and energetic at preschool. In addition, the fact that both teachers and mothers expect children to be *nobinobi* (carefree, a feeling of ease) (Hendry, 1986) and *kodomorashii kodomo* (a child-like child) (Tobin, et al. 1989) seem to be incompatible with a need to be restrained. I think Peak should distinguish *enryo* (restrain) and *omoiyari* (empathy). *Enryo* is to repress one's feelings and desires for the sake of others, while *omoiyari* is psychologically to take the other person's position and think or feel as if one were

the other. *Omoiyari* is mainly fostered in group life, but *enryo* is not necessarily fostered or displayed in group life. Also, *omoiyari* is not expected to be shown in the *soto*.

I agree that a certain degree of *enryo* is necessary at preschool, but it is also required at home when the children reach the age of 3 or 4. There are two Japanese proverbs which saying, "*Shitashiki nakanimo reigi ari*" (Etiquette and courtesy should not be forgotten even in the closest relationship) and "*Kyodai wa tanin no hajimari*" (Brothers/sisters are the beginning of outsiders). Both mean that a certain amount of *enryo* is preferable even at home.

I also think that Peak treated *amae* as if it were a static behavior. Although a feeling of *amae* can be observed at all age levels in close relationships in Japan, there are age-appropriate *amae* behaviors. So, even if a child at the age of 3 does not go to preschool, it is inappropriate for him/her to ask for his/her mother to button a shirt. It is one of the common child rearing strategies to say, "You can't go to preschool if you can't do it by yourself." in order to encourage self-reliance. But, this is not to prepare a child for going to preschool as Peak (1991) thought.

Peak also seems to ignore the continuity of communication styles between mothers and teachers with children. Clancy (1986) analyzed Japanese mother-child communication styles, and found that mothers use indirection both in giving and refusing directives. She also noted that a child's ability to empathize and conform is facilitated by his/her mother's communication styles. She wrote, "By telling their children what other people were thinking and feeling, the mothers encouraged their children to empathize with others; by warning them that certain behaviors were strange, frightening, or shameful in the eyes of others, they indicated the importance of conformity." (Clancy, 1987, p.245). These communication strategies look exactly the same as that pointed out by Peak when illustrating how the director of the Mountain City Preschool communicated with a boy who refused to join in the morning greetings. The director did not oppose the child explicitly; rather, she spoke sympathetically and showed understanding of his feelings, and led him to face a "no-win situation".

In addition, Peak described how Japanese identification with authority makes it possible to follow group norms. She explained:

Japanese children soon learn, however, that to resist the system is to battle an army of friendly shadows. Authority resides with no one, and to change the collective habits of the group requires an impossible effort. To escape or rebel is to sever social contact with those who provide daily companionship and the warmth of social life. Perhaps because this identification occurs early in the child's life, Japanese exhibit higher levels of social order and less ambivalence toward authority than do Americans. (Peak, 1991, p.190).

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I felt she implied that Japanese merge into a group and lose their individual identity. Also, she seemed to implicitly assume that Western values, including independence from authority is superior to one that identifies with the authority.

As described above, although it is an interesting observation, Peak's interpretation which dichotomize home and school seems to be extreme and ignores the continuity between them. On the other hand, Hendry (1986) emphasized the similarities between mothers' discipline at home and teachers' discipline at school showing that these are included in the Japanese concept *shitsuke* (breeding, upbringing, training, discipline). She explained that the word includes the idea of inculcation of good manners in a child, the passing on of daily customs, and the teaching of correct behavior.

According to Hendry (1986), the aim of preschools is to supplement home education, 'to develop the minds and health of the children' and to introduce them to a group life. She wrote, "At these establishments *shitsuke* is continued, with the particular new aspect of training in peer interaction and co-operation within the larger group, without which parents feel that their children would become selfish and over-indulged." (Hendry, 1986, p.119). So, Hendry thinks that the most important part of experiencing group life is to learn that the fun and friendship of preschools are for those who cooperate, who become active and enthusiastic members of the inside group. She pointed out that teachers make use of peer pressure that the other children laugh at or ignore the 'strange' (*okashii*) child who does not cooperate, which means that this child has not achieved self-control. She also introduced the teachers' technique to manage a misbehaved child, which is to isolate him from the rest of the class and then call on the class to express disapproval.

Hendry emphasized that becoming a member of a group does not mean that a child's individuality disappears into a collective entity. Rather, she interpreted Japanese group cooperative attitudes as mutual respect for autonomous will rather than an unilateral respect for authority. She wrote:

Co-operation, then far from denying the development of personhood, actually implies autonomy, or, in Piaget's view, 'personalities that are both conscious of themselves and able to submit their point of view to the laws of reciprocity and universality.' (Hendry, 1986, p.172).

I basically agree with Hendry's analysis of the continuity of the disciplines between home and school. But I wonder how we can explain teachers' using peer pressure to make children cooperative and group-oriented if the developmental goal is to develop the mutual respect of autonomy in the children.

I think that for Japanese going to preschool is to make *soto* (outside) into *uchi* (home), which both can be illustrated as concentric circles. Specifically, a child expands *uchi*, which originally was an unfamiliar *soto* (outside). So, in the beginning, when a child comes to preschool, it is an unfamiliar *soto*, which requires one to restrain (*enryo*). Children have to acquire new behaviors, such as cooperation and social consciousness (*shakaisei*) through peer interactions. However, since children have already been trained by their mothers to have empathy (*omoiyari*) and obedience (*sunao*), it is not very difficult to develop cooperative and social conscious attitudes in them. Moreover, as Lewis (1984) pointed out, an emotional attachment to the teachers and friendships with children are considered to be critical, teachers try to avoid direct confrontation when they correct children's misbehaviors. Once a child gets to know how to cooperate with other children, he/she will "feel at home" in the preschool and be able to act *nobinobi* (care free), *genki* (energetic), *akarui* (cheerful). By this time a child will call his preschool, "*uchi no yoochien*" (my home preschool). The reason Peak failed to find that preschools can be *uchi* for children is because she mainly observed the first two weeks of the school year when children are still unfamiliar with the new place.

I do not think Japanese are group-oriented because they identify with authority or because they have a "collective-self". Often, when Westerners talk about "self", they seem to be presenting a self that can be viewed as static and have a clear boundaries. However, I think a Japanese "self" is more situational with unclear boundaries compared to Western view of self. Thus, when a child is at home, he is in an unseparated intimate relationship with his mother. And when he comes to preschool, a class will become a part of his "self", which might difficult to distinguish from oneself. The feeling of *amae* (dependency) may mediate to form this cultural-specific self.

Consequently, the most difficult task in group life (*syudan seikatsu*) is not to learn how to cooperate with others but to learn how to balance a sense of individualism and groupism in oneself. In the following chapters, I will explore how the Japanese educational system and its philosophy handle these aspects.

## 5. Official educational goals for preschools

According to the new Course of Study for Kindergarten Education (*Yoochien Kyoiku Yooryo*) issued by the Ministry of Education in 1989, the objectives (*mokuhyo*) of kindergarten education (age 3-6) are as follows (Tobu & Aoki, 1990):

- (1) To nurture basic habits and attitudes necessary for a healthy, secure and happy lifestyle, and to lay the foundation for the development of a healthy mind and body.

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- (2) To nurture feelings of affection and trust towards people, and to cultivate an attitude of independence and co-operation as well as a spirit of morality.
- (3) To nurture an interest in nature and everyday, familiar phenomena, and to cultivate the ability to respond to these with a rich and understanding heart and discernment.
- (4) To cultivate within the framework of everyday life an interest in words and language and to enable the children to converse pleasantly.
- (5) To cultivate a richness of emotion and feelings through a variety of experiences, and enable the children to develop a spirit of creativity.

As shown in (2), both independence and cooperation are valued and expected to be fostered with affectionate feeling within relationships. The *objectives* given above are set out as concrete 'aims' (*nerai*) which are categorized into 5 fields (*ryoiki*). These are 'health', 'human relations', 'environment', 'language', and 'expression'. The aims for 'human relations' are as follows:

- (1) To enjoy a kindergarten life and savour the feeling of being able to carry out an action using one's own ability.
- (2) To make contact with people around them and to have feelings of affection and trust.
- (3) To acquire habits and attitudes desirable in social life.

As for the special attention in the field of 'human relations', there is a remark that "Make children experience empathy by contact with other people and express these feelings and will in group life."

The field of 'human relations' basically pays attention to the empathy (*omoiyari*), while the field of 'health' includes self-reliance and selfcontrol of toileting and changing clothes. The 'language' field focuses on communication skills including both expression and listening. The 'expression' field mainly focuses on sensitivity and artistic creativity. However, the relationship among the fields is not clear. Moreover, it is impossible to figure out which field is considered to be more important than others. What I can say here is that, officially, empathy, independence, creativity and self-expression are equally valued by the Ministry of Education. In fact, concerning the field of 'human relations', kindergarten in Japan seems to follow the guidelines of the Ministry of Education very well.

The Ministry of Health and Welfare supervises day care centers (age 0-6). There is a revised Official Guideline for Day Care Centers (*hoikusho hoiku shishin*) issued by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 1990. Their five fields are identical to the Course of Study

for Kindergarten Education. The difference is that age-specific goals and aims are set in the Official Guideline for Day Care Centers.

According to this guideline, one of the goals of the for age 2 is "to be able to have contact with them." For age 3, it becomes "to interact with people around them and enjoy playing with friends." For age 4, the goal becomes, "to strengthen the relationship with friends and enjoy activities in a group." And for age 5, the goal is "to have close relationships with others, and to express oneself in a group as well as to behave with consideration for others." Also, there is a special remark for age 3 that, "In the case of a child who experiences group life (*syudan seikatsu*) for the first time, caretakers have to be careful not to make the child fatigued and should respond to him/her individually."

Consequently, the importance of developing empathy (*omoiyari*) is not mentioned until age 4. There are two special remarks for age 4 concerning the field of 'human relations'. One is that, "When a caretaker make a child participate in group activities, she has to be careful to fulfill the child's individual needs as well as to let him/her experience the joy of playing in a group." The other is that, "A child should be given a chance to learn understanding other people's feelings by interacting with others. A caretaker should let a child notice that, sometimes, it is necessary to control his/her desire to play with others joyfully."

The Guideline for Day Care Centers suggests that going to preschool does not automatically mean a child experiences "life as a group" or is expected to be a member of the group. The word "*syūdan*" (group) first appears in the goal for 4-year olds. Before age 4, relationships with caretakers or peers are not based on the group but on the individual's needs. Even after age 4, a caretaker is required to treat children not only as a group but also as individuals. At the same time, a child has to learn self-control in a group at age 4. So, I conclude that according to the official guideline, to become a member of a group is a developmental task for 4-year olds in Japan.

## **6. Individuality and groupism in a Christian preschool**

In the ideological debate of Japanese education, both traditionalists (rightists) and socialists are group-oriented. As Tobin, et al. (1989) described, Christian educators seem to have the most individual-oriented idea. So, I decided to examine how a Christian preschool manages individualism and groupism by looking at Kotloff's work (1988). Kotloff observed and analyzed Daiichi Preschool in Kanazawa, which is a middle size traditional city in the center part of Japan. Daiichi Preschool, which was founded by American missionaries is one of the oldest Christian preschools in Japan, and is now attached to Hokuriku Gakuin Junior College.

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Compared to other Japanese preschools, Daiichi has small classes and student/teacher ratios. There are 33 children in the 3-year old class with 3 teachers. Four-year old and 5-year old classes have 16 to 22 children. One of the four-year old classes has 2 teachers (Kotloff, 1988). Unlike many other Japanese preschools, they have no uniforms. The first hour and a half of each day is for free play, in which children can choose various kinds of activities according to their own interests. Kotloff reported that in Daiichi, less time is spent in daily routines such as taking roll call, announcing the date, reporting the weather, doing morning calisthenics, playing movement games, singing in unison and preparing lunch. Instead, children are expected to be involved in the intellectual and creative activities such as writing and developing their own musical and dramatic pieces, and creating art projects.

According to the analysis of the book written by the director of Daiichi (Kotloff, 1988), education in Daiichi emphasizes the importance of unstructured play and an individualized curriculum, which is child-centered and open-ended. These ideas originally came from the philosophy of American open education. Although the director basically agreed with the philosophy, she also criticized it because it tends to ignore the importance of the group. She emphasized that children have to learn how to "*hito to tomo ni ikiru*" (live and share their lives with others). Kotloff (1988) in analyzing this idea believed that the primary task of human development is to learn to get along in a social world, and that individuals should be connected to each other with empathy and mutual concern. Although she thought "*hito to tomo ni ikiru*" is a basic Japanese value, the director herself believed that it is a Christian value of brotherly love.

Kotloff (1988) considered that Daiichi's Free Play/Art period represents individuality, while Morning Group Discussion represents cooperative group atmosphere. Through the individualized Free Play/Art period, autonomy and self-initiation are fostered in the children. The period encourages a great deal of diversity in activities and children are expected to be self-directed. The Morning Discussion Time, which follows the Free Play period, is a time for sharing and emphasizing the experiences of individual children. Each child presents his/her art project and explain it to the whole class rather than only to the teacher. The teacher asks the class what they think about the project. The children warmly praise the work and sometimes even give some suggestions. Kotloff described, "Through the Morning Group Discussion, the individuality of the Free Play period became integrated into the group-life of the classroom." (Kotloff, 1988, P.81).

Since Kotloff did not give the examples of how teachers at Daiichi deal with a difficult child, especially one who refuses to join a group activity, we can not know how much "individual freedom" is allowed in group time. Also, we do not know how much more

'independent' and 'self-reliant' the Daiichi children actually are, compared to their counterparts in other preschools. In spite of these weaknesses, she clearly showed how the creativity of children is fostered in the individualized Free Play and also encouraged in the group atmosphere. Thus, I think Daiichi's method is a good example of how individuality can be combined in group life.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper was written to challenge a Western tendency to understanding Japanese preschool as a place to transform children from home-indulged selfish ones into self-reliant, independent group members by letting them do exactly the same things as others do. This idea seems to be based on two assumptions; dichotomization between home and preschool, and oversimplification of relationship between individual and group in Japan. I attempted to present how Japanese educators, philosophers, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare balance between individual needs and group harmony, and to explore its complexity and diversity.

I found, as Western researchers have pointed out, that 'group life' is the center of preschool experience, but that cooperation (*kyoryoku*) and empathy (*omoiyari*), rather than restraint (*enryo*), are the key to developing membership among children. Thus, Japanese children need not to pull their wings in at preschool. Instead, they are expected to behave carefree (*nobinobi*) as if they were at home (*uchi*).

Western researchers often dichotomize home and school, and are misled to the conclusion that Japanese children are indulged and overdependent at home, and that once they get into preschool, they are trained to be self-reliant. However, as the Official Guideline for Day Care Centers shows, going to preschool does not automatically mean that children are always treated as a group. Children's individual needs are respected higher than group goals until age four. In addition, since empathy (*omoiyari*) and obedience (*sunao*) are emphasized at home, home and school are fundamentally continuous places for children psychologically. Children are affectionately tied with teachers even though they should not rely on them as they do on their mothers. So, the differences between these two places are situation-specific manners.

By presenting Daiichi's method, I discussed that the relationship between individual and group in Japanese preschool should not be treated mutually exclusive. An individual exists in a group, and these two are concentric circles, which interact each other without conflict. The individual contributes to the group as well as is supported by the group. Although these idea and method are not typical in Japan, I believe they are the good examples that show the balance between individual and group, which Western researchers tend to overlook.

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