

**Editor's Note:** This manuscript is based upon a considerably lengthier earlier book chapter by the author, Terumichi Morikawa, titled "Mori Arinori," published in *Ten Great Educators of Modern Japan: A Japanese Perspective*, ed. Benjamin C. Duke (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1989), 39–65.

## Mori Arinori and Japanese Education (1847-1889) By Terumichi Morikawa

On the morning of February 11, 1889, Minister of Education Mori Arinori was scheduled to attend the promulgation ceremony of the new Imperial Constitution. Dressed in formal attire, he waited for the official carriage to take him to the great event heralded by the government as a monumental stride forward in the modernization of Japan. Unannounced, Nishino Buntaro, a former samurai from Yamaguchi Prefecture, called at the Mori home in Tokyo, purportedly on a matter of great urgency. As the secretary received the guest at the entrance, Mori came downstairs. Suddenly the visitor rushed at the unsuspecting Mori, driving a knife into his chest. Mori died the following day at the age of forty-two.



Mori Arinori (photo taken when he became the first Minister of Education). Source: *Kagoshima Prefectural Library* at <http://tinyurl.com/npb29kf>.

considered by some critics a liberal individualist and a guardian of religious freedom during his earlier years who evolved into a nationalist in the latter period? Why did his life end in tragedy? The early life of one of Japan's greatest educators provides some answers to these questions.

Mori Arinori was born into a samurai family of the Satsuma clan in Kyūshū twenty-one years before the 1868 Meiji Restoration ended Tokugawa military rule. At the time of his 1847 birth, few in Japan could foresee the abrupt end of Tokugawa rule or the role the Satsuma clan would play in bringing down the regime. During Mori's early education, the Satsuma clan, long an opponent of the Tokugawa government because the Satsuma were far away from Edo, had some knowledge of Western technology despite Tokugawa suppression of many foreign ideas. The Satsuma clan had already experienced a painful introduction to modern Western military technology. In 1862, Charles Richardson, a British merchant residing in Japan, unwittingly rode his horse across the path of an advancing Satsuma procession returning home from an official Edo visit. A fanatical, incensed young samurai ruthlessly hacked Richardson to death. Determined

Mori's attacker, who received considerable public sympathy, revealed his motives in a document later made public. Nishino claimed that Mori deserved to die as just punishment for his disrespectful contempt for the emperor on the occasion of a recent visit to the Great Shrine at Ise, the hallowed grounds of the supreme shrine of State Shinto. On a school inspection trip around Mie Prefecture, the Minister of Education used the opportunity to visit the shrine. As he stepped into the inner sanctuary, he used his cane to raise the screen intended to shield the most sacred objects from public view, violating one of the oldest customs of the ancient faith.

Shinto authorities were already obsessed with fear that Mori, considered a liberal Minister of Education, would oppress Shintoism. Their concern was further aggravated by the general belief that Mori was also a Christian. Such widespread fear among the faithful instigated Nishino to carry out his daring act of assassination of a leading public figure and be subsequently executed. Miyake Setsurei, prominent Meiji Era critic, described Mori after his death as an enlightened individualist during his earlier years who later became a reactionary conservative. This seeming incompatibility of the "two Moris" was perhaps a natural consequence of the period when Japan was evolving from a feudal state into a Westernized nation.

Why were Mori's conservative beliefs virtually ignored shortly after his death with publicity accentuating his act of defiance of Imperial tradition and his progressive school reform plan? Also, why was he con-

to avenge the murder, British Naval warships later bombarded Kagoshima, Satsuma's capital, and because of superior military technology, reduced much of the defenseless city to ashes. The experience was a painful reminder to the Satsuma leadership of how the Tokugawa seclusion policy retarded Japan's technology.

Chastened by the humiliating event, Satsuma leaders promptly tried to reduce the technology gap by establishing a clan school in 1864 called *Yogakkō Kaiseisho*. The curriculum included Western languages and culture, which defied the Tokugawa ban on foreign studies, but the central government was too weak to stop Satsuma leaders. Teenager Mori Arinori entered the school to study English. The impatient Satsuma government proceeded one step further in learning from its attackers and disobeying the Tokugawa government by formulating a secret plan to send promising young samurai boys to England to study Western culture and technology. In March 1865, fifteen young men, including Mori, clandestinely boarded an English ship offshore from a Satsuma port for a long and arduous journey halfway around the globe.

Assigned to study marine surveying, eighteen-year-old Mori Arinori arrived in London and was promptly immersed in the study of history, physics, chemistry, and mathematics under the tutelage of Professor Alexander Williamson at the University of London. Mori developed an interest in political economy and intensely studied the relationship between the UK's private and public sectors, best illustrated by the Industrial Revolution and the ensuing growth of private industry. Mori confessed in an 1867 letter to his brother that he had decided to redirect his course of study from technology to the modern concepts of the "foundation of the state"—that is, government.

Gradually, Mori's interest in analyses critical of parliamentary institutions in England and the United States heightened. According to one biographer, Kimura Rikio, the individual who played the most prominent role in nurturing these budding interests of the youthful Japanese was Laurence Oliphant, Mori's official guarantor in England. As a rising British diplomat, he had previously been briefly assigned to Japan, where he was attacked and wounded by a *rōnin* (masterless samurai) in a well-known protest against foreign intrusion into Japan. In July 1867, Oliphant abruptly resigned from the British government to join the Order of the Brotherhood of New Life utopian commune, which Thomas Lake Harris led in the United States. The Order of the Brotherhood was an obscure Swedenborgian Christian sect that bitterly denounced contemporary American society. Sect leaders railed against the materialistic proclivities of mainstream American Christianity that betrayed the unselfish love of God as expressed in the Bible in their greed to satisfy personal desires. Swedenborgians believed that selfless service to others and unselfish love of man exemplified by Christ's love was the only source of regeneration of American society.

Mori was unquestionably influenced by Oliphant's criticism of prevailing Western society and government even though his clan sent him to the UK to learn to help lead Japan's modernization. Ironically, Oliphant and the Swedenborgians stimulated Mori's skepticism concerning Western nations' utilitarianism and political institutions. During the summer of 1867, Mori and several other Satsuma clan Japanese students traveled from the UK to the small, isolated Swedenborgian community in upstate New York. They viewed the rigid sect discipline, which denied private property and demanded absolute loyalty to Harris in daily communal work and prayer, as an essential preparatory stage in the rejuvenation of feudal Japan. Young Japanese from privileged samurai families washing clothes, cooking food, and doing other menial daily chores was a far cry from the objectives of Satsuma clan leaders in sending young boys to learn from the West.

In December 1867, Mori and his colleagues learned of the Tokugawa regime's collapse and the rapid restoration of Emperor Meiji in what was to mark the initial stages of Japan's modernization. Upon the advice of Swedenborgian leader Harris, Mori returned to Japan in June 1868 at the age of twenty-one to join the new government. Mori envisioned a great opportunity to realize his dream of establishing a society of equality based on the principles of unselfish love. The Satsuma clan quickly assumed a leading role in the Meiji government. Mori, with English-language fluency and a Satsuma samurai, was immediately appointed to a high position in the foreign department. He was subsequently appointed chairman of a legislative council organized to develop new governmental agencies, but the intense internal power struggles greatly restricted the twenty-two-year-old's opportunities to exert influence.

Mori impetuously launched a campaign to rectify political and social conditions in Japan and put forth a highly controversial proposal that the council abolish the samurai privilege of being the only class allowed to wear swords. To Mori, this restriction epitomized the inequality and injustices of Japanese feudal society; the young reformer had already given up the practice, much to the consternation of some other samurai. All council members immediately rejected the proposal as an outrageous attempt to emasculate the status of powerful samurai families. Mori's life was threatened, and he was forced to retire from his post in the new government in Tokyo and return to his Kagoshima home. Soon, however, Mori was recalled to Tokyo

by a government unable to find qualified Japanese for diplomatic posts and suddenly found himself the first appointed representative of the Japanese government in Washington as Japan and the US officially recognized each other. In effect, at the age of twenty-three, Mori became the first Japanese ambassador to the United States.

Characteristically, the youthful diplomat set out to deepen his understanding of Western culture by cultivating a wide variety of leading thinkers in American education and government, and began to collect materials and develop relationships with individuals he thought could help advise Japan on education reform. In the campaign to modernize Japanese society, the government had tasked Mori with this specific assignment. During his short Washington diplomatic career, Mori invited a number of American intellectuals to express their opinions and extend advice on Japanese education reform, and thirteen responded to his invitation. Perhaps to facilitate those interactions and address the general lack of knowledge among Americans about Japan and its institutions, Mori wrote a book in English titled *Education in Japan*. The study, one of the first books ever written in English by a Japanese, offers insights into Mori's view of civilization and Japanese history.

In his book, Mori recognized the unbroken historical lineage of the Imperial system and leading role of the Imperial family. Nevertheless, he recognized moral law violations of the system such as the presence of Imperial concubines, as well as other social and political flaws such as unjust marital practices and the vague legal basis for Imperial succession. Mori also scrutinized the role of the Satsuma and Chōshū clans in the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate. He asserted that their opposition to central government, culminating in armed rebellion, represented an immoral *coup d'état*, and that Chōshū and Satsuma leaders in the new government should establish a climate of political morality and move forward with a firm moral and legal foundation.

Mori also asserted that in forming a new government, political leaders had too often responded to external pressure from other nations rather than doing what was best for Japanese. In a justification of his own activities, Mori contended that Japanese youth familiar with Western culture were better positioned to bring about genuine and effective domestic reforms. In another English-language book, *Religious Freedom in Japan*, which Mori wrote when posted in the US, Mori claimed that freedom of religion must be recognized as a natural right of man and the government was responsible for protecting that right. To counter critics who argued that Christianity provoked social unrest in Japan, Mori argued that historical progress develops through a continual succession of experiments and reforms. Later, as Minister of Education, still devoted to religious freedom, he called upon local teachers and education officials not to suppress the free development of religious thought and urged school administrators to encourage a school environment that also nourished academic freedom.

In 1872, Mori was suddenly recalled home after a government delegation from Tokyo submitted critical reports concerning his opposition to official governmental instructions. Back in Japan, he directed his boundless energies toward a host of activities, including the founding of the *Meiokusha* (Meiji Six Society), an organization of leading intellectuals. Named after the *roku* (sixth) year of the Meiji Era, it included such distinguished figures as Fukuzawa Yukichi, Nakamura Masanao, and Nishi Amane. Mori and others used the organization's journal, *Meioku Zasshi*, to challenge the existing social order, which they viewed as still too influenced by reactionary feudal practices, and to educate the public on appropriate progressive reforms. In one of his memorable legacies, Mori attacked gender inequality in Japanese society, especially the accepted practice of the husband maintaining a concubine along with a legal wife. As a bold act of defiance against tradition and to set an example to others, Mori was the groom in what is considered to be the first Western-style wedding ceremony in Japan that denoted mutual obligations between equals, with the governor of Tokyo, Ōkubo Tadahiro, and other distinguished guests as witnesses.

In another controversial proposal, Mori unsuccessfully advocated replacing Japanese with English as the national language. He developed the idea of a dual-track school system with a mandatory disciplined moral education in the earlier grades. Higher levels of education would be devoted to scientific studies based on principles of academic freedom. In order for Japan to advance, Mori believed the Japanese language should be used in ordinary daily life and English utilized in schools because it was better suited for scientific studies. The nationalists who opposed both Mori and the diffusion of Western culture often used this education reform proposal as an example of Mori's extremism. In contrast to his progressive stance on certain issues, Mori opposed the direct election of the Diet, which he felt would make the legislative branch the captive of special interest groups. Influenced by Oliphant's skepticism of the abuses of Western-style parliamentary institutions and the utilitarianism characteristics of advanced societies, Mori believed that democratic institutions evolved

through creation of a moral citizenry. Rather than impose a Western-type parliament on a people incapable of supporting it, the foremost problem facing the new Meiji government was to build this solid foundation of social morality. This attitude made Mori different from several other leading figures of the day. Several years later, when serving in the prestigious post of ambassador to the Court of St. James's in London, Mori recognized the importance of a representative form of government and came to support electing legislators.

Among Mori's many contributions to Japan, his views on education are of the greatest importance since he is considered the father of the modern Japanese school system. One of the first opportunities we have of analyzing his personal views on education came in his 1879 lecture on education for physical development before the Japan Academy. It was the initial revelation of his attitudes toward a national philosophy of education. In the speech, Mori claimed that the role of education was to foster the intellectual, moral, and physical development of the individual. This broad approach to education indicated the influence Herbert Spencer, author of the classic *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical*, exerted on Mori. The two had met in London when Mori visited Spencer. Mori made the curious claim that because the Japanese people were lacking in physical stature, it was difficult to cultivate their intellectual and moral development. Since he felt that the progress of educational development was dependent on a strong physical foundation, Mori called for the introduction of a military-based physical exercise program in the nation's new school system. Although his strong views on physical education of a military nature attracted criticism, later, as Minister of Education, Mori implemented the military-supervised physical training program.

Underlying Mori's philosophy of education was his antagonism toward Confucianism, which had exerted a dominant influence over education throughout the 250-year Tokugawa Shogunate. The basic method of Confucianist learning was memorization and reproduction of intricate passages from classical texts indoctrinating a specific discipline of thought. Mori was adamantly opposed to instilling any specific religious, political, or philosophical doctrine in students; education must provide the opportunity for students to develop their own ways of thinking. Since his attitude negated that of the many conservative believers in Confucianism, Mori became a target of criticism.

When Mori arrived in England in 1880 with the coveted diplomatic assignment of minister to the most powerful empire, political events were transpiring at a rapid pace in Japan. During his four-year London assignment, an enormous amount of jockeying for power occurred in Tokyo as former clan leaders struggled for supremacy in determining the direction of the Meiji government. In 1881, the leadership changed hands when the progressive Okuma Shigenobu was forced to resign his cabinet post, although the new leaders agreed to the formation of an elected national parliament in 1890. A coalition of former leaders of Mori's Satsuma clan and the Chōshū clan led the succeeding government. A new constitution was required for the beginning of parliamentary government. Itō Hirobumi from the Chōshū clan became the central figure in drawing up its provisions. Concurrently, Mori, always interested in Western parliaments, addressed the issue of the relationship between representative government and education, along with the revision of the unequal treaties signed previously by the Japanese and foreign governments when Japan was in no position to avoid the agreements. According to biographer Sonoda Hidehiro, Mori promoted a form of nationalistic education that viewed education as an instrument to serve the state.

According to Mori, no group of people has ever been uniformly endowed with intelligence, morality, and physical development. In order to protect the weak from the strong, societies make laws, which evolve as human intelligence improves. Since human inequalities exist, some form of government must be designed to serve all the citizenry. Echoing Oliphant and Harris, Mori concluded that Western legislative bodies, although elected directly by the public, did not reflect the will of the entire electorate but only the interests of the minority from the better classes. Mori's still somewhat-critical stance toward representational government was related to his view of the Imperial system where the emperor stood at the very apex of the state.

At a press conference upon his departure as ambassador to England, Mori expressed his deep conviction that the progress of Japan depended on two historical pillars: broad support for the Imperial tradition and independence from foreign colonial control. These two factors would enable Japan to progress by absorbing foreign elements in the modernization process while maintaining the nation's cultural identity. Comparing Japan's history and culture with those of Western nations, he concluded that a parliament consisting of enlightened representatives indirectly chosen would best serve the interests of the nation and the emperor.

Mori felt Japanese culture also contained characteristics superior to those of Western societies, specifically fraternal love and paternalism. Western individualism debased the culture into a form of utilitarianism, whereas the ties that bound

Japanese society together were based on mutual affection and consideration for others. Mori's utopian view of Japanese society justified a form of government contrasting with that prevalent in the West, in which an elected parliament with powerful leaders in fact represented minority classes of landowners and business interests.

In 1882, Itō Hirobumi, the most prominent figure in Japanese politics, then studying German constitutional law in Vienna, met Mori in a Paris hotel during Mori's tenure as ambassador to the UK. In one of the most significant discussions in modern Japanese history, the two discussed the future of Japanese education, and Mori agreed to accept Itō's offer of appointment as the first Minister of Education in Itō's new cabinet. Mori outlined his view of the state and education, which impressed Itō. At that time Itō supported a new constitution based on Imperial authority. Education was intended to produce citizens who supported the constitution and maintained peace and social order. Education, rather than government organs such as the police or army, would be the major instrument to keep public order. Itō also opposed Confucian principles of education, advocated by Motoda Nagazane, entailing the mere memorization of passages from the classics as the goal of education. He also supported Mori's idea of introducing a military form of physical training in the schools. Motoda and other conservatives opposed Mori's appointment as Minister of Education. One of the factors behind the opposition was the suspicion that followed Mori to his death: that he was a Christian.

After returning to Japan from England in March 1884, and prior to his appointment as Minister of Education in late 1885, Mori was thrust into the deliberations on the bill for the new constitution then under consideration by the Privy Council. Mori's attempt to modernize Japan based on traditional Japanese customs with the Imperial system at the center was strongly influenced by his view of the inherent differences among people. He was convinced that those gifted with superior qualities (presumably such as himself) should serve the national government as "enlightened leaders." Those with less talent should serve as local government leaders, while at the bottom levels of government the least able could carry out routine work. An education system should be constructed to socialize and educate people for their different roles in the hierarchy.

As the new Minister of Education, Mori plunged into the position with a rapid succession of new regulations designed to transform Japanese education from top to bottom. From March through April 1886, new regulations for Imperial universities, teacher training colleges, secondary education, and elementary education were all issued from the Ministry of Education. For the first time in Japanese history, the aims and purposes of schooling were officially defined. One of the most significant elements of Mori's attitude toward education was his distinction between *gakumon* (learning) and *kyōiku* (education). In various lectures, he took the opportunity to spell out how they differed. Mori defined education as the intellectual, moral, and physical training received under the guidance of one's teacher. In contrast, learning involved the process of individual development. For example, education at the Imperial universities represented the process of learning with the individual essentially responsible for his own development. At the lower school levels, the student was educated under the specific instruction of teachers.

The ordinance governing the establishment of national universities clearly defined their purpose as offering curricula that served the needs of the nation. Upper secondary education was designed to prepare students for the university or for business. The aims of elementary education were not so clearly defined. Nevertheless, in a speech at a normal school in Wakayama in 1887, the minister called for an elementary education that would develop the child's personality and code of conduct as a loyal Imperial subject. According to Mori, the success of the new national elementary schools depended to a large extent on teacher quality, which in turn greatly determined the success of the nation in international economic and military competition. Because of the fundamental role of the teacher in the well-being of the nation, Mori devoted himself to reforming the normal school (teacher training) system. He revealed his intentions in a speech at Saitama Normal School in December 1885, prior to his appointment as Minister of Education.

A teacher's worth should not be judged from the perspective of the subject matter being taught but valued according to his disposition reflected in three traits: obedience, friendship, and dignity. *Junryo* (obedience) involved faithfully following the regulations of the school and the instructions of the principal, *icyou* (dignity) concerned the ability to train students to follow teacher instructions, and *shin'ai* (friendship) was the process of cultivating good manners among human beings. To develop these essential ingredients of the good teacher, future teachers should undergo military-style training based on similar objectives to the army's demand for obedience to orders, the dignity of an officer in controlling his men, and camaraderie among soldiers. Accordingly, Mori made a military type of physical training and mandatory dormitory life part of the new normal school system.

Mori's attitude toward the sensitive issues of loyalty and patriotism deserves special consideration. As mentioned previously, he was highly critical of Confucian educational practices and moral discipline. Nor did Mori change his basic support for religious freedom. In many speeches, he recognized the right of teachers to hold personal religious and political beliefs, but warned that it was improper for them to impart those beliefs to their students. This caveat was specifically aimed at eliminating Confucian doctrine from its traditionally influential role in the schools.

Moral education in a modern society as Mori perceived it consisted of close horizontal relations between people with no concern for Buddha, Confucius, or any philosopher. Mutually beneficial relations between individuals meant domestic peace; otherwise, society would be in conflict. He introduced ethics into the course on morals in an attempt to replace the existing course, used to impart specific Confucian- and Shinto-based moral indoctrination. Friendship was one of the characteristics of Japanese society that Mori considered a positive element in comparison with Western societies. Therefore, he considered friendliness an essential ingredient of the teacher's disposition. It was the duty of the teacher to nurture mutual assistance based on friendship through the new ethics course. The arch-Confucianist Motoda criticized Mori's ethics course, claiming that it was too abstract to develop a loyal Japanese subject. Other figures of the day also expressed dissatisfaction with the course, since it did not include loyalty to the emperor. These outspoken critics reflected widespread opposition to the Minister of Education by most conservatives on the issues of loyalty and patriotism, which inextricably involved morality.

Mori struggled with the related problem of how to develop fidelity to the Imperial state rather than to the emperor himself. In a bill he drafted defining the purposes of educational reform, Mori called for loyalty to the state in order for Japan to compete successfully in the international arena. He felt that people in the West united in the defense of their nations when threatened, regardless of social or religious backgrounds. However, because the Meiji government was autocratically ruled by a few powerful figures, individual Japanese could not conceive of what the state actually represented. This was to him one of the major unsolved problems of education: how to develop a sense of nationalism through the schools without resorting to indoctrination. In order to nurture patriotism and love of country, Mori turned not to the emperor but to the historical symbol of the long reign of the Japanese Imperial system. For him, there was no alternative to building that critical sense of nationhood other than the Imperial family itself. The Imperial tradition consequently became a symbol of nationhood in Mori's new school system.

The distinction between the emperor, regarded by Confucianists and Shintoists as a *revered deity*, and the Imperial tradition as a symbol of Japanese nationhood was of great importance to the architect of Japan's national school system. It also defined for him the mission of the schools in producing loyal subjects, not to be confused with absolute obedience to the emperor. Regrettably, it was also a major factor in bringing this great educator's life to a tragic end. The assassin's dagger destroyed not only Japan's first Minister of Education, but kept him from opposing predetermined indoctrination in his quest to build a modern united nation based on Japanese cultural traditions. As one of the greatest educators Japan has ever produced, Mori Arinori was clearly ahead of his time. The very year following his death, the Japanese government issued the Imperial Rescript on Education, which eventually became the symbol of ultranationalism and emperor-worship indoctrination in the schools. It reflected the essence of Confucianism and Shintoism, the very concepts Mori sought to expel from the schools.

Despite this successful rejection of Mori's values by traditionalists, his structure for education remained essentially in place until the postwar era. The lower-level schools provided a solid basic education for all with a competent teaching corps graduating from normal schools. Higher education produced loyal graduates prepared to serve in national government ministries, including the new Ministry of Education designed by Mori to maintain Japan's first national school system. One can only conjecture about the course of Japan's history in the prewar era if the first Minister of Education, Mori Arinori, had lived to promulgate ideas contrary to national indoctrination.

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