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Japanese Childhood Socialisation

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Notes:

MoE = Ministry of Education (Monbushō)

MEXT = Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology
(Monbukagakushō)

Course of Study (*gakkō shidō yōryō*):

Roman letters in citation indicate the Chapter, e.g. MoE 1947:II.

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Prologue: A Sports Day at Handa Junior High



Picture 1: Handa Junior High

The second Sunday of August 2009 was no ordinary Sunday for the Handa district of the southwest Japanese town Kokonoe. It was the day of the local Junior High *undōkai* (Sports Day). At that time I was staying at a friend's house in Kokonoe and his family asked me if I would like to act as a surrogate for him, since he was out of town on a business trip during the event. I gladly agreed, as I felt it was a great opportunity to act upon the "participant" part in participant observation ethnographic research procedure. As a result I had to get up at six o'clock that morning, just like the other parents, to assist with the preparations at the school. On my way outside I passed through the kitchen, where the mother of my host-family was already busy preparing the *bentō* boxes for lunch later in the day. Outside, Satoru, a neighbour and friend, was already waiting for me in his little white truck. Together we drove to the school grounds of the Handa Junior High School. Even though it was only about a quarter past six when we arrived, the field was already full of people. Like Satoru, they were mostly parents of Handa Junior High students. They had all come together this early in the morning in order to put up the tents for the audience of this year's Sports Day. It was not hard work, and there were way too many people needed for the task. The tents, like the school grounds in general, had seen better times. They had clearly been in use for several decades as they were rusty and the covers had several holes in

them. Within fifteen minutes the setup of the tents was completed and Satoru used the opportunity to chat with some of his friends. Then, it was time to go back to the house. As we were leaving the school grounds, the first students began to arrive already wearing their PE outfits. It was about half past seven when I returned to my temporary home, and the mother was still busily preparing our lunch boxes.

One hour later I was on my way back to Handa Junior High once again. This time I was accompanied by my host family - at least by most of them: the mother and the two smaller children. Shō, the oldest son who was attending the third class in the Handa Junior High, had to be among the first students to arrive at the school because he was head of the planning committee (*jikkō iinkai*) for the Sports Day. This meant that he had been a rare guest at home during the last two weeks, always leaving early in the morning and returning late at night.

I was quite amazed at how much had changed on my return to the school grounds: Not only were the tents and seats for the teachers and the teams of the pupils set up, but elaborately decorated entrance and exit gates were adorning the sports ground. Giant speakers had been erected and there was a constant flow of pupils in and out of the school building getting various props and materials which they were preparing for later use. Furthermore, outside the school grounds a toy merchant was opening up his booth. Children were running around, the families of the students were arriving looking for a good spot to witness the event, which all resulted in a general atmosphere of chaos. However as the time approached nine o'clock, the chaotic scene gradually became more coordinated, the families – or at least the parents and grandparents – took their places (I also got a nice place with my host-family under the tent I helped to construct) and the pupils assembled behind their team's setups next to the entrance gate. Everyone of them was now in his or her gym outfit and wearing a bandana (*hachimaki*) in his or her team's colour. The whole school had been divided into two teams, red and white, before the summer holidays. A lot of effort was put into the foundation of the two teams, making sure both were equally strong. Since then, and especially during the two weeks after the summer holidays, the teachers, pupils and their parents undertook an enormous amount of planning and training to make the Sports Day a success.

Before the event started, pupils handed out the program for the Sports Day. Before three o'clock in the afternoon, twenty-two competitions and performances were to be held. At exactly nine o'clock a member of the broadcasting club, who acted as announcer for the Sports Day, informed us that the opening ceremony was about to start. Accompanied by Japanese rock music, the two teams entered the field. They were led by their team leaders and marched in unison around the field, finally coming to a halt in the middle of the school grounds. This was followed by a number of speeches by the principal and the team leaders. The leader of the red team also carried the winner's trophy from the last year, even though the teams change every year and the student giving back the trophy might have been among last year's losing team. The opening ceremony concluded with a stretching exercise (*sutoretschi taisō* - similar to *rajio taisō*). Not only did the students participate, many of the parents and grandparents also got up and joined in with the exercises.

Over the course of the next three hours, a number of sports competitions, performances and games were participated in. For each of the competitions the winner's team got a specific amount of points, adding up to a total number displayed on a large scoreboard. Running seemed the predominant activity at the Sports Day, and nearly everyone had to run at least once during the day, including me as well. The running competitions were not just sprints or relays, the planning committee of the Sports Day had been quite creative in thinking up obstacles they could put in the way of the runners. I personally had the joy of replacing Shō's father in the parent-child three legged relay race. There were over six competitions that involved the parents in one way or another. So, Shō's mother was quite happy that I had agreed to make her life a little bit easier by taking on some of the family duties. Finally, at about 11 o'clock I got my own red *hachimaki* and for the first time I entered the sports field as a participant in the Sports Day. Shō and I led the red team through the entrance gate to the starting position. While Shō was tying our legs together I got a bit nervous. I began to think to myself that it might have been a good idea to have practiced a bit beforehand. Shō on the other hand seemed quite confident. "As fast as possible" was his only instruction and after the starting signal it seemed to work, at least for a little while. However, as we approached the handover point it turned out my

concerns were not ungrounded. We lost our rhythm and fell. One of my shoes had come off, both my knees were bleeding and I was in a considerable amount of pain, but there was no time to feel sorry for myself, we had to get up and complete our section of the relay. The lost shoe was left behind and my knees were burning, but we managed to get to the finish line and were able to hand over the rope to our comrades who now had to make up for the time lost due to our clumsiness. For the rest of the race we sat in the middle of the field watching and cheering. After the race ended and the white team won, we left the field together with the other participants. Shō thanked me politely and quickly went off to prepare for his next event. I too went off to clean my wounds.

At twelve o'clock it was time for the lunch break (and it was precisely twelve o'clock – I was very impressed at how they were able to keep time so perfectly and so far everything had gone according to plan). Lunch break was the time the families came together and had their self made *bentō*. Shō kept his lunch break rather short, after only ten minutes he was gone again, running about all over the place, talking to teachers and other students.

The afternoon included, like the morning, a mix of running competitions and group games and performances (competitive and non-competitive). The one event that many people considered the main attraction of the Sports Day was *bōtaoshi* (pole climbing competition). Witnessing it myself for the first time, I remember feeling a little bit uneasy considering how dangerous it appeared to be. It's a capture-the-flag game where each team has a five meter high pole with a flag on top of it. Essentially a member of each team tries to climb the enemy's pole in order to get the flag while the other team tries to shake him down. One of the players of the white team fell off the pole and landed awkwardly on his wrist, which he broke. That was the worst accident to happen during the whole Sports Day, but not much fuss was made about it. I didn't even notice it had happened at first.

The last event before the closing ceremony was not another exciting sporting competition or a tightly choreographed dance performance; it was a simple western folk dance, and this was the official end of the traditional sports day much akin to the *rajio taisō* which followed the opening ceremony. It seemed a bit out of place, and most of the children did not even try to pretend a little bit of joy

or fun while performing it. The closing ceremony itself again contained a number of speeches. First, the principal thanked everyone for the effort they had put into the preparation of the Sports Day. Then the team leaders gave a small speech and following that each member of the Student Planning Committee said a few words. Shō, who was the head of the committee, went last. He was really anxious, constantly repeating the sentence he was going to say. I had not seen him that anxious during the whole event. Finally, after Shō's speech, the team that earned the most points received the victory trophy while the other team received the price for best cheering.

As the people in the audience started to pack away their stuff, the two teams met for the last time, thanking and congratulating their respective supporting teacher and team leaders, while discussing what had went well and what had not. Then suddenly a huge burden was lifted from the children's shoulders. They had done it, the *undōkai* was over. Some girls burst into tears, friends congratulated each other, and others simply sat down for a while, resting for a bit in silence. And so the Sports Day at Handa Junior High came to an end. Once more everybody helped taking down the tents, and the Handa students took down the decorations. Slowly the school ground returned to its original form.



Picture 2: Impressions from the Handa Junior High Sports Day

1 Introduction

*„The Sports Day was much fun.
My favourite memory of my school days.”*

*“It was like a public execution.
Every year!”*

Everybody who's grown up in Japan knows about the Sports Day (*undōkai*). It has become part of everyday Japanese life like the *Obon* Festival or the New Year's Day (*shōgatsu*). A large Japanese electronics manufacturers, for example, changes its video cameras advertising on a seasonal basis: In spring they show people enjoying (and of course filming) the blooming of the cherry blossoms, in autumn they show the red leaves, while in late summer they show children in school sports wear doing running competitions, making human pyramids and playing tug-of-wars. So the Sports Day represents a “seasonal event”, practiced primarily, but not only in schools. Sometimes bigger companies hold this kind of event in order to foster solidarity between the employees. As an integral part of Japanese school life one can easily find many books about the Sports Day discussing how to organise an interesting Sports Day or how to become number one at the various competitions. There are also *undōkai* themed videogames and the event is prominently featured in Japanese television dramas and animations which take place in schools. There are even internet shops specialised in selling *undōkai* related items and materials (e.g., <http://www.i-undokai.com/>).



Picture 3: The Sports Day depicted in the popular anime series *Azumanga Daioh*

The first time I experienced a Sports Day, I was highly impressed with the amount of planning and preparation involved, and with the energy and spirit the children (and also the adults) engaged in it. During my entire school life growing up in Austria, I had never experienced anything like this. As well as the school *undōkai*, I also experienced a village's Sports Day in a rural community in the Aso area in Kyūshū. It used the same structure, style and activities as the Sport Days in schools. However, the general tone was far more light-hearted and the participants of the activities were by no means as sincere as those at the school's *undōkai*. Several games revolved around the consumption of alcohol and a lot of people started drinking way before noon. The organisation was far less efficient and required quite a lot of improvisation. During the village *undōkai*, several people referred to the Sports Day as a *matsuri* (a social festival). The sporting activities were not that important or taken seriously. For example at the end of the festival, during the closing ceremony, several team members didn't even bother to stay around to receive their trophy.

In schools, the Sports Day is perhaps one of the most important annual events (*gyōji*) (Iemoto 1981:1-2, Makiyama 2006:145), but it is not the only big event during the school year. Other important annual events like Cultural Festivals, the Field Trip, and the Entrance and Graduation Ceremony can be seen as part of significant ceremonies and rituals which intersect with the Japanese life cycle. At schools, each of these events requires a considerable amount of preparation and instigation. So, all in all, these non-academic activities claim quite a significant amount of time and effort from the students and their families and therefore, in my opinion, should not be ignored – or taken lightly - when discussing Japanese schooling.

1.1 Sports Day? Undōkai? Taiikusai?

The Sports Day, as I described it in the prologue, is practiced throughout Japan. However the different names given to this event can be a bit confusing. In elementary schools they are usually called *undōkai* and in junior high and high schools the term *taiikusai* is more commonly used. In everyday life, *undōkai* is a

generic term and in my own experience, parents and older people tend to just use *undōkai*. A differentiation between *undōkai* and *taikūsai* is usually made only by students and teachers.

Talking to parents, students, and teachers about the terms for the Sports Day, it seems that nearly everybody has his or her own ideas and explanations about the subject. For example, the principal of the Handa Elementary School explained the different terms for the Sports Day as seen in Table 1:

	Post-War Period	Today
Elementary school	<i>undōkai (taiiku taikai)</i>	<i>undōkai (taikūsai)</i>
Junior high school	<i>taiiku taikai</i>	<i>taikūsai</i>
High school	<i>taiiku taikai</i>	<i>taikūsai</i>

Table 1: Japanese terms for the Sports Day
(according to the Handa Elementary School principal)

Even though he was not able to tell me when the term for the Sports Day changed from *taiiku taikai* to *taikūsai*, he had a theory about the reason behind. He thinks that the Sports Day had lost its character as a school event (*gyōji*) and become more and more of a (social) festival (*matsuri*). While this is true for the schools in Handa, it is not true for every school in Japan. As the principal explains, it depends on the number of students. In schools with a small number of students it is possible to organize the *undōkai* as a festival and include the whole family of the students. On the other hand, if there are hundreds of students that might not be possible. In such schools the Sports Day takes on more of the character of a school event, which focuses more on sports events and performances and less on communal activities.

In my thesis I will use both *undōkai* and Sports Days to reference the social practice of *undōkai* and *taikūsai* in Japanese elementary and junior high schools. It refers to the general practice and does not differentiate between the school types. If I refer to a specific type of Sports Day, I will state it clearly.

1.2 Research Questions and Methodology

Even though scholars acknowledge the importance of such events like the Sports Day (see Lewis 1995, Cave 2007) no thorough research has yet been done. Works on Japanese education usually mention them as a passing note, giving only partial descriptions without much depth behind it. Therefore, the aim of this study is to give a comprehensive and deeper description of the Sports Day. It will focus on the question of what significance the Sports Day holds in the context of Japanese education, and what social functions it offers to its participants. I believe the Sports Day displays a wide array of discourses, which often seem to contradict themselves like individuality and groupism, safety and risk, competition and harmony, nationalism and localism. I will try to find out the reasons for this ambiguity, how these contingent experiences of the *undōkai* are constructed and how they can exist side by side. This includes the question of the role of the Sports Day in Japanese school socialisation on the one hand, and the question of cultural meaning of the Sports Day on the other hand.

In order to answer these questions, my thesis will be divided into three major parts. Firstly, I will create a theoretical framework with which I place my analysis of the Sports Day in the broader discourse of ritual theory. I will show how we can use concepts and ideas of ritual theory to gain a better understanding about ritualised school events like the *undōkai*. Secondly, based on my theoretical framework laid out in the first section, I will approach the Sports Day from a historical perspective tracing its origins and continuities as well as discontinuities since its conception throughout the last 130 years. Thirdly, I will discuss a Sports Day in today's educational context using the case study of the Handa Junior High *undōkai*.

For the historical discussion, I have used a varied amount of available reading about the modern Japanese education system. The most important source discussing the early history of the Sports Day is *Undōkai to Nihon kindai* by Yoshimi Shun'ya et.al. (1999). It provides a detailed account of the social-political context of the creation of the Sports Day during the early Meiji period and discusses its developments until the Second World War. In contrast to this, no research has been done on the role of the Sports Day in education during the

post war period. I will base my discussion of this period on the official discourse of the Ministry of Education, as provided in the Ministry's Course of Study (*gakushū shidō yōryō*) and other official publications. Furthermore, I will contemplate the official discourse with accounts of actual *undōkai* of the time, provided by teachers in the book *Undōkai taikūsai* edited by Iemoto Yoshirō (1981). This book was published by Ayumi Shuppan, a publisher who was specialised in books on democratic education. It was part of the publisher's series on Elementary School educational practices and intended to show how to create a "successful" and "democratic" *undōkai* by providing examples of different schools, which created such events. The publishing company was founded by leftist *nikkyōso* teachers, who got fired because of the "red purge" in the 1950s (see Iemoto 2000).

In order to be able to describe the Sports Day in today's educational context, I decided to use the following ethnographic methods: participant observation and ethnographic interviews. This is in line with the "Berliner Ritualschule," a grand scale research project on ritual and children in Germany (see Wulf 2008). Its members believe that ethnography and qualitative methods are a good way to do research on rituals and the performative aspect of pedagogical practices. As a result, I spent two months in a Japanese town, following the preparation and execution of an *undōkai* in a local elementary school as well as a junior high-school.

1.2.1 Fieldwork

My fieldwork took place from August to October 2009 in the town of Kokonoe, located in the centre of Kyūshū. The decision to use this location was a pragmatic one: From a previous stay in Japan I still was in contact with a good friend there, so I decided to ask him for advice. His prompt answer was that I should just come and he would provide me with access to schools and would help me in every way possible. He also provided me with a place to stay. Therefore, it was possible to do fieldwork with just a basic grant for short time research abroad (KWA) by the University of Vienna. Besides observation protocols and interviews with the

participants, I was also able to obtain materials and documents (like the internal preparation-plan of the *undōkai*) from the schools.

There is of course the question of how representative this research is; since there is no doubt that the educational situation is quite different in other parts of Japan. In this regard I will follow Cave's argument in his book *Primary School in Japan* (2007) where he states that the centralised nature of Japan's school system led to a national standardisation of education during the post-war years. Japanese schools nowadays are characterised by "a national curriculum, centrally ratified textbooks, and relatively egalitarian educational facilities and resource distribution." This aspects are further strengthened by

the nationwide reach of the media of pedagogical discourse, notably the large number of action research journals written and read by teachers. Moreover, the broad commonalities in outlook and practice reported from schools in different parts of Japan by previous researchers support such views. (8-9)

Ethnographic Method and Participating Observation

The ethnographic method is taking more and more spotlight from participant observation, even though it is hardly possible to separate them, as the participant observation can be an effective tool of the ethnographic method (Flick 2005:215-216). But the particular composition of the methodological principles of the ethnographic method is always specified by the research object and the field. Atkinson and Hammersley provide us with some general characteristics of the ethnographic method:

- a strong emphasize on exploration into the characteristics of a specific social phenomenon;
- the tendency to work with unstructured data;
- research on a small amount of cases or just one case;
- analysis of data as an explicit interpretation of the meaning and function of human activities – quantitative and statistical research only play a minor role (Flick 2005:218).

I decided to use a combination of participant observation and ethnographic interviews as tools for my ethnographic study and used a more descriptive approach for my observations in order not be blindsided by my own intentions.

Flick (2005) further describes several key problems for participant observation. First there is the question of selecting the right time and the right beginning for the observation (212). Luckily that was not really an issue since the *undōkai* are usually held in September. The only uncertainty for organising and planning my fieldwork was that the exact dates for the Sports Days were decided just before the end of the summer vacation. But this was not a real problem, as I planned for the beginning of my fieldwork to be at the end of the summer vacation, since I wanted to be present for the preparations of the *undōkai* as well. Another key issue that Flick (2005) mentions is the subject of getting access to the site. He argues that it is usually a “key person” who allows a researcher to get access to his chosen field (210). I was also lucky in this regard. My “key person” also turned out to be my contact in Kokonoe. He was head of the Parents-Teacher-Association (PTA) of one of the elementary schools, and his son was head of *the undōkai jikkō iinkai* (Sports Day planning committee) in one of the local junior high schools. Therefore it was fairly straight forward to gain access to these schools and get into contact with teachers, parents and students. This was especially significant in the case of the elementary school as it turned out to be quite handy to know the head of the PTA. He was able to introduce me to both the principles of the elementary school and the junior high school, which were also highly supportive. For example, the elementary school principle invited me to the meeting at the beginning of the semester and introduced me to the attending pupils, parents and teachers (even though this caused a bit of confusion, since some children and parents mistook me for a new teacher), and as a result I was included in school activities like the communal cleaning of the building. These communal activities turned out to be an excellent activity to have informal chats with parents and teachers.

Ethnographic Interviews

Even though participant observation is the main tool of fieldwork, interviews play an important role. The question is how conversations in the field can be arranged as an interview in which the interview partner is able to present his or her experiences of the research object. During fieldwork, opportunities for interviews often appear spontaneously and sometimes even surprisingly. Spradley

describes ethnographic interviews as a series of “friendly conversations”, during which the researcher slowly introduces new elements in order to allow the conversation partners to answer as informants for the research subject (Flick 2005:141). The difference between “friendly conversations” and ethnographic interviews according to Spradley are: ethnographic interviews have an explicit intention that results from the research questions; ethnographic interviews provide ethnographic explanations of the project and why it will be recorded (furthermore it contains everyday language, explanations of the interview and explanations of specific questions); ethnographic interviews contain ethnographic questions (descriptive questions), structural questions and contrastive questions, in order to provide insight into the different meanings the interviewees use to describe and understand their world (Flick 2005:142). During my stay in Kokonoe, I had many informal conversations with teachers, parents and children, which took on the characteristics described above. It seemed that everybody was quite eager to share their memories of *undōkai* as well as state their opinions about it, but since it was a busy time for everybody involved in the Sports Day, possibilities for interviews often turned up unexpectedly.

2 Theoretical Discussion: A Ritual Theory of School Events

To describe non-academic school activities like the Sports Day, the term ritual is used quite frequently, but it is also a term often used in everyday language in order to describe a large range of repeated, traditional or recurring activities. In this chapter, I will describe in what specific context I will use the term ritual, which existing theories of ritual I will base my argumentation on and how an interpretation of the Sports Day as a ritual can help us to get a deeper understanding.

Ritual theory is an enormously vast and diverse field. As an introduction, Jan Snoek (2006) lists a set of characteristics of ritual: they are culturally constructed; traditionally sanctioned; include behaviour, praxis, performance; marked off from the routine of everyday life; framed; liminal; collective; public; creating/organising society/social groups; creating change/transition; repeated; standardized; sacred; transcendent, rigid; stereotyped; stable, repetitive, symbolic; meaningful; formal(ised); conventional; rule-governed; etc. (11). This list goes on and on and is as redundant as it is contradictive and shows the difficulty of working with the term ritual. It is not possible, as Stanley Tambiah (1998) argues, to make a clear-cut distinction between rituals and non-rituals (227) and Dietrich Harth (2006) even argues that ritual is indistinguishable from social action (16). It seems that ritual has become an all-embracing term:

“Ritual has by now established a virtual monopoly – terminological, conceptual, and theoretical – for itself in the semantic field of terms denoting not only actions by means of which believers presume that they communicate with meta empirical realms and beings, but also in clusters designating secular modes of expressive behaviour [...]” (Platvoet 2006:161).

In the end, Snoek (2006) gives the advice that researchers of rituals should create their own definitions, according to their research projects (14).

I will use the term ritual as a meta-concept for describing the Japanese Sports Day. I will give a detailed explanation of how I will use this concept, but first I also want to stress that I will not use the term ritual synonymously with Japanese terms like *matsuri* and *girei*, which are often translated as ritual, but do

not incorporate the whole range of meanings included in the English term ritual as described in the paragraph above. *Matsuri* (and its Sino-Japanese reading *sa*) is primarily used to “designate festival of sacrifice, supplication to the gods, thanksgiving and purification” and even if *girei* was used during the rapid modernisation of the second half of the 19th century in Japanese translation of Western works on social and human-sciences, the term was used without much thought given to it and has a long prehistory with Chinese and Buddhist texts (Prohl 2006: 77).

2.1 Ritual Theory

Jumping into ritual theory can be rough. It is such an overwhelming area that one can easily get lost and even finding a good starting point turns out to be quite difficult. Beginning with Christoph Wulf’s (2008) categorisation of ritual research provides a good outline of the major developments and “turns”: The first approach taken is the classical approach based on “the myth and ritual school” propagated by William Robertson Smith, Edward Tylor, Sir James Frazer and the “myth and ritual School,”¹ who focused their research on the relationship between mythology and ritual. Basically it was a discussion of the Chicken and Egg dilemma - was the myth derived from the ritual, or the other way around (Wulf and Zirkas 2004:10)? The second approach analyses the relationship of rituals with the social structure of a society. Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirkas (2004) characterise this approach through its structural or/and functional perspective (12-24). The third approach is initiated by a new type of structuralists, who Christine Bell (1997) calls “symbolists, culturalists or more awkwardly, symbolic-culturalists (62).” The most important scholar in this group is arguably Clifford Geertz, whose ideas I will discuss later in more detail. This new generation analyses rituals as texts and tries to use them to understand dynamic social and cultural processes as well as to decipher the meaning of ritual for both cultural symbolisation and social communication. The fourth approach builds heavily on

¹ The term myth and ritual school refers to two interdependent branches: (1) a group of Near Eastern specialists of biblical and ancient rituals assembled around Samuel Henry Hooke and (2) a group of Cambridge University classicists incl. Gilbert Murray, Francis M. Cornford and Arthur B. Coock (Bell 1997:5-6).

the semiotic notion of culture presented by Geertz and the other symbolists, but also puts heavy emphasis on performative and/or practical aspects. Rituals are no longer perceived as pre-scribed texts, but their meanings are rather created through ritual action (Wulf 2006:395). Of course, this is just a vague categorisation of ritual theory, merely helpful to give a basic outline of the ever expanding field and therefore should not be seen as exclusive or even complete. It neither gives a distinctive chronology, nor is it possible to make clear-cut distinctions between the categories.

Although it is a good idea to take a look at the over hundred years of ritual research, much of it might seem antiquated and irrelevant when looking at a school event like the Sports Day, which may provide some conceptional and analytical ideas. From the very beginning, one of the “big questions” of ritual theory was whether ritual is related to a specific mythology or cosmology, due to its theological origin. Rituals were either seen as manifestations of mythology or mythology was seen as a legitimisation of rituals that, in return, constituted the social world. Even though contemporary research is long past this narrow view of ritual and myth, the fundamental question about the relationship of context (myth) and text/practice/performance (ritual) is still paramount. This is not only true for the religious rituals, but even more so for the secular. As Tombiah (1998) argues, mythology may not only be seen literally, it may also refer to social and political discourses when discussing secular ritual. This discourse on the ideas and principles of a society is used as a norm and is exempt from rapid, major change.

2.2 The “Myth” – Symbolic Order and the Two Dimensions of Rituals

In order to describe the “myth” of the ritual, the aforementioned basic ideas and principles of a society, most recent ritual research follows Geertz and other symbolic-culturalists in their use of a basically Durkheimian model of symbolic action (or a modified version of it). Durkheim emphasised that rituals are dynamic processes which join together a system based on symbols, which consists of three layers: First of all, there is the sacred, the moral code of a community. This is a set of values which holds a special meaning to the community and is generally respected and might be based on religion, myth or ideology. Second,

there are the individual members of the community. Third, the symbol, a representation of the sacred, something that mediates between the moral code of the community and the individual. Through the symbol, the individual can affirm the abstract values for which it stands, and thus making the symbol an important part of the social world. Expanding on that, Susan Birrell further states that “the symbol is a ‘collective representation’ because it serves as a concrete reminder of the values of the community to which all individuals must subscribe and through which they maintain their community identity”. More so,

the content of the symbolic system, the symbols venerated, the values and beliefs represented, all of these are relatively insignificant in relation to the fact that the ritual process itself serves to join the individual to a community of moral order. The content is not significant sociologically, but the process and the ceremonial effect of profound significance” (Birrell 1981:357-358).

In other words, through ritual a direct link between the social world of everyday life and the cultural web of meanings is created. But how does this link work? In order to understand how the symbolic system of the cultural context and the social praxis of a ritual relate to each other, looking at Geertz’ (1981) essay “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example” might help. In this case study of a burial ritual of a small boy in an urban neighbourhood, he describes the importance of distinguishing between two dimensions of a ritual – the cultural-symbolic side, and the social-practical side – on an analytical level. Geertz especially criticises the prior focus on the functionalistic approach of classic ritual research, because from this point of view, researchers tend to emphasise the structural and constitutive elements of rituals as well as their harmonizing and integrative function. But they fail to acknowledge the history and dynamics that exist within the ritual and its social context. Thus, the disruptive and disintegrating and also psychologically confusing element is left out. For the functionalists it was more important to show how religion (through their ritual practices) create and maintain the social and psychological structure of a society. The main problem in their conception, according to Geertz, is that the cultural and the social side of ritual are often not considered equally important. Most of the time, one side gets ignored or is merely seen as a mirror of the other one. As a result the less important factor is usually ignored and thus the dynamic elements of social

change that occur when social organisations do not match with cultural patterns have not been taken into account (Geertz 1981:96-98). Change is a fundamental aspect of societies and Geertz argues that it creates more or less radical discontinuities between culture and social structure, and such discontinuities can be seen and experienced through rituals where the cultural and social world overlap.

Eyal Ben-Ari's (1986) study about the *undōkai* in a small urban community in the suburbs of Kyōto echoes this view of the relationship between ritual and cultural change. He stresses the harmonizing and structuring effects of the event, and further argues that the Sports Day carries "a special potential for the creation of group identity and solidarity, and for the exploration of the social ties that bind the group together. But furthermore, the *undōkai* seems to be related both to 'traditional' rituals and ceremonies and to drinking 'occasions'." Ben-Ari understands that there is a difference between the application of ritual in the 'traditional' villages and new urban communities and even states that a "traditional interpretation" of the Sports Day along the lines of a "traditional" ritual theory might not be useful in this case. But even though he acknowledges these points, he does not further elaborate the relationship between the *undōkai* in this urban setting and "traditional rituals" (whatever they may be) and builds his interpretation on the structuring and community building aspects of the Sports Day.

2.3 Ritual Change

Neither the symbolic system, which constructs the context of the ritual, nor the ritual itself, nor the society in which it is practiced, is a static, unchanging entity. Some scholars like Christine Bell (1997) even see ritual as a "particularly effective means of mediating tradition and change (251)." Bell also provides us with two good examples regarding the changing nature of ritual in her book *Ritual – Perspectives and Dimensions* (1997) which I believe will be very helpful in my further discussion. The first one is the system of social rituals invented by Soviet bureaucrats as an attempt to socialise people with their ideology. Bell argues that the Soviet rites "demonstrate that large-scale ritualisation instigated and directed

by a core of very self-conscious specialists could be effectively promoted and well received by the populace.” After the Great October Socialist Revolution, the Soviet leaders installed a new set of lifecycle rituals like the registration of newborns, marriages, funerals as well as calendrical rituals like May Day. They believed that ritual could be the ideal tool for an effective socialisation and indoctrination of the people. But for them, it was not possible to use the new rituals as an “ideological weapon” in order to educate the masses according to their will. After the rites were created, it was hard to achieve the right balance between ideological representation and emotional fulfilment. People turned to these rituals to add “colour, beauty, heightened significance and dignity” to their lives, something that ideologically indoctrination alone could not do. After the Soviet ritual-officials noticed this fact, they started to put more emphasis on the emotional and affective dimension of the rituals. So, in the end, while a basic structure was promoted, local variations of the same rituals were allowed and the new rituals were no longer impersonal propaganda, but also incorporated elements of folk culture from different communities and traditions, like school songs or formalities that fitted local etiquettes (Bell 1997:225-231).

Another way of understanding ritual change is given by Bell by the example of the Olympic Games. Rituals “can act as a medium able to embody the contradictions, tensions, and ideals of a community trying to be born.” In case of the Olympic Games, this community is the global world, and the Olympics displayed the interest of this community for a medium “in which the goals and contradictions of an emerging global world were concerned.” What distinguishes the Olympics from other sports championships is its effective use of symbols and rites to give the world an idea of itself as a community. It contains a complex set of rituals that focuses on the individual athletes as well as on the national teams. It is this ambiguity towards national states, global unity and participating individuals that can be seen as the main dynamics by which the Olympics generate and maintain their affective power. Bell states that rituals like the Olympics can build communities, not by expressing harmony, but by “channelling conflict, focusing grievances, socialising participants into more embracing codes of symbolic behaviour, negotiating power relations and, ultimately, forging images by which the participants can think of themselves as an embracing unity.” The

example of the Olympics also shows us what can happen, if the ideal symbolic or cultural meaning of a ritual does not resemble the socio-political world order. During the 1988 games in Seoul the American team members refused to stay in formation during the closing ceremony, and wandered into the centre of the field, actively encouraging the members of other teams and the audience to mingle with them. Bell speculates that they may have felt “the desire to express a deeper *communitas* than the rigid structure of the games allowed.” Perhaps it was their confidence of their “place in the games and the world at large” that allowed them to display their own ideas about the meaning of world unity, in an attempt to modify the cultural meaning of the Olympic Games towards their own convictions. Other examples, when the political situation did not allow the idealistic expression of world unity through friendly competition, were the 1980 Moscow games in which the USA, West Germany, Japan, and several other nations boycotted the games, protesting against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In return, the Soviet Union did not participate in the 1984 Los Angeles games (231-235).

By these two examples, Bell showed in which ways rituals can change. Neither their practice nor their meaning is static and unchanging. Looking at the Soviet rites and the Olympic Games, we can make several assumptions about the changing nature of the symbolic system of meaning behind the ritual. First, the (conscious) creation of a new ritual is a dynamic process, and while the script might be created and provided by a central authority, the participating actors provide a new (legitimising) meaning by themselves, linking the ritual to their own needs. Based on Christel Lane, Bell summarizes this process of self-conscious creations of ritual as follows:

Designing a rite [...] involved activities analogous to the scripting and production of a new play on the one hand and the introduction of new political legislation on the other. A particular collective would rehearse the ‘script,’ invite critical comments from the creators and the performers, and revise it until it felt right. Then a commission would advertise and disseminate the rite on a regional scale [...]. After the rite was established, there was a monitoring process that could introduce further changes as necessary and periodic seminars disseminated advice to the local officials. Of course this process of development was not one of complete creation *ex nihilo*. Various familiar symbols and traditions were readily appropriated in bits and pieces to fashion something that was evocative while still espousing sentiments

in keeping with official directives. Likewise, one system was in place, specific parts of the new rites, such as the songs, could be put into the school curriculum to teach students a type of “ritual competence” and prepare them with associations that they could bring future participation in the ritual system. (Bell 1997:227)

Besides the creation of new rituals, the second mode of a change in meanings can be seen in apparently unchanging rituals like the Olympics, which is seen by the participating party from their own viewpoint of “global unity”. This is shaped by their socio-political context of their time. Bell summarizes the appeal of the Olympic Games as a ritual for the world community as the following:

As a combination of ritual and sports, the Olympics are an apt way of expressing the ideal of a world community and its real-life contradictions and constraints. Indeed, the competitive open-endedness of the sports contests and the political concerns that are apt to disrupt the games are certainly more reflective of the way that modern nations experience the tension between global ideals and realities than a fully ritualized ceremony could express. (Bell 1997: 232)

2.4 Ritual Practice and Socialisation through Ritual

Geertz shows at the end of his famous ethnography of Balinese cockfights how ritual can mediate between the cultural and the social dimension of a society. These cockfights are a Balinese interpretation of their social world. “Something they tell themselves about themselves”, as Geertz (1981:159) puts it. Pierre Bourdieu generally characterises rituals as “strategic practices for transgressing and reshuffling cultural categories in order to meet the needs of real situations” (Bell 1997:78). This is another important aspect about the mediation of meanings in rituals: Individuals can perform and portray themselves in specific roles, and demonstrate idealised roles or specific characteristics valued by society through their performance. According to Erwin Goffman, this is not an act of deceit; people do not claim values for themselves, which in fact they do not possess. It is a reaffirmation of the meanings people see in the ritual they perform. Therefore, a modification of Durkheim’s basic model of symbolic interaction is necessary. It should indicate “that the concrete symbol within which societal values are

encoded may very well take human form. In that special case, meanings are not encoded but embodied" (Birrell 1981: 360-361).

Birrell's argument consists of two interesting aspects: First, the meaning of ritual is mediated and negotiated through the performance by individuals and second, these meanings are embodied, emphasising the practical side of ritual. These aspects point to a "performative turn" in ritual theory. In this vein, Wulf (2006) argues that "in ritual studies praxis is a central concept that embraces many different dimensions. The concept is used to bridge the opposition between thought and action. [...] Praxis is conceived less a synthesis of consciousness and social being, but is instead used to mediate consciousness and social being" and that "rituals are among the most important manifestations of performativity because they organise transition processes and contribute to creating feelings of belonging. Even when participants' interpretation varies, the simple fact that the ritual takes place encourages the creation of a group identity" (Wulf 2006:399). This is an interesting viewpoint; it states that the performative aspect, the ritual action itself is the socialising, community building aspect of the ritual, and personal interpretations of the (sometimes ambiguous symbols) of the ritual are secondary.

Therefore it is easy to see why ritual can be an effective tool of socialisation in schools, which is especially important because they are not only expected to teach children skills and knowledge, but they are further expected be institutions that "shape children into adults with the character qualities that society demands" (Cave 2007:1). This process is

a largely covert operation dealing with the inculcation of culturally defined ways of perceiving the world and acting within it. It is concerned with the ideas, often amorphous and conflicting and rarely critically examined, that make up the world view of a particular social group. As such, it is a process, unlike the straightforwardly instructional, that is little scrutinized or discussed by school practitioners and their clients, and much taken for granted. (Kapferer 1981: 258-259)

Kapferer (1981) further argues that socialisation includes two aspects: First, it is concerned with the behavioural practices within the milieu of the school and second,

the promulgation of a broader set of values and attitudes than those which have relevance only to the bounded everyday life of the school. These include ideas of truth, justice, liberty, the moral and philosophical ideals underpinning the secular state, and the proper mode of conduct for its citizens, an area of teaching and learning fraught with conflicts and contradictions, not only between teachers and pupils, but also and more significantly among teachers and among their clients .
(258-259)

Focusing on the latter aspect, school socialization can be seen as the process of teaching cultural values to children and rituals can be considered as an effective tool to achieve this aim as Wulf describes how ritual practice and the bodily knowledge that is incorporated within can be used:

Ritual praxis requires bodily movement, by which proximity and distance among the rituals participants can be theatrically realized. These bodily movements express cultural attitudes and social relationships. (...) In mastering ritual praxis through bodily movement, the body itself is mastered by ritual praxis: it is civilized and cultivated. (...) Due to their figurative nature, such movements are particularly memorable and lend themselves to repetition. (Wulf 2006: 400-401)

In other words, “rituals construct the social realm and generate communities in which children have their place” (Wulf 2008:72). Theodore Jennings (1998) also argues that rituals do not only create social order and structures but also transmit and generate knowledge. Knowledge from ritual does not result from detached observation but from the action itself. Actions play a more important role than reflexion about the actions (161).

Rituals practices need the knowledge of how to perform a ritual. This practical ritual knowledge is mainly learned in a mimetic process (Wulf 2006:395). In his writings about the performative aspects of rituals, Victor Turner (2002) asks how an actor can portrait a ritual originated from a different culture. Usually an actor tries to identify the “individual character” but takes the socio-cultural role of this character for granted (e.g. father, businessmen, friend, etc.). These roles are collective representations of people living in the same culture. To act in a different culture, an actor has to learn the cultural rules, on which these roles are based. According to Turner, the best way to learn these rules is by acting and performing: the actor learns by performing and performs the learned (199). Gwen

Neville (1984) is also sharing this view, when she describes that through rituals, a child

is like the fieldworker learning the new culture, absorbing bits and pieces, putting together sequences that make sense, figuring out what a scrap of behaviour means, [...]. Through trial and error, the child gradually assembles enough pieces of the puzzle to form a picture of what things mean and how to be a member of a family [...] (158).

The repetitive aspect of ritual plays an important role when it comes to transferring knowledge through a ritual. In mimetic processes children create practical knowledge. They generate “mental imprints” which they can access later on and adapt to new situations. In other words, rituals create the “social memory” of communities (Wulf 2008:72).

In a sense, school rituals can also be seen as cultural performances. Following Milton Singer, a community formulates its self-consciousness in cultural performances and performs it in front of members and also outsiders of the community and

for the outsider, these can conveniently be taken as the most concrete observable units of the cultural structure, for each performance has a definitely limited time span, a beginning and end, an organized programme of activity, a set of performers, an audience and a place and occasion of performance. (quoted in Fischer-Lichte 2002: 289)

Wolfram Manzenreiter (2004) further discusses the relationship between cultural performance and the sporting body. He argues that

“sport serves in at least two different ways as a stage for performing the nation. On the one hand, the practice of structured body movements according to intersubjective rules is always a kind of cultural work that is in this context grounded within the territorial boundary of a national culture. [...] Performative cultural events, such as rituals, festivals, or its more mundane variants, such as parades or sports contests, thus vividly express a society's ideas and conceptions of itself.

On the other hand, the performance of sports as a staged event has emerged in the service of dominant elites and representatives of the nation state. (781)

This close connection between such cultural performances and nationalism also led to the use of sport as a disciplining instrument in the ideological education of totalitarian regimes (see Manzenreiter 2007a).

Such an instrumentalisation of ritualistic performances in educational contexts led to criticism against the use of rituals in schools, which were considered as hidden forms of oppression (Groeben 2000:7). They feared that rituals were tools of powerful systems and can be used to lead to collective ecstasy and even delusion (as seen in the Nazi pedagogic). So it is no surprise that rituals in schools were deemed dangerous in German and Austrian schools and most of them were abolished. And while the recent discourse about school rituals puts emphasis on the positive effects of rituals, the danger that may come with it is still a topic of concern in recent German publications on this subject (see Groeben 2007, Wermke 1997). Wulf (2008) argues that “rituals include and exclude and this processes can also be violent and can lead to restriction and oppression” (72).

2.5 Summary: A School Ritual as “Cultural Palimpsest”

“The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”

Karl Marx

The aim of this chapter was to show how it is possible to analyse an event like the Sports Day as a ritual, taking both the cultural and the social dimension into consideration, by using features and concepts given in various fields of ritual theory. Axel Michaelis (2006) says it quite well, when he argues that there are two interesting elements to ritual: First, people learn to preserve and memorise cultural values without rationally choosing to do so. Second, rituals do not have an intrinsic meaning, but through history, a wide range of meanings can be attached to a ritual (260). He does not only express how rituals can act as a tool for socialisation, but also emphasises once more the historicity of rituals.

As Bell pointed out, rituals are not static, unchanging constructs; they are part of a dynamic, ever-changing world. But the cultural meaning and the social practices are not directly linked to each other. They are interdependent, but one

side is not a simple reflection of the other. Therefore a complex web of social functions and negotiated meanings is the result.

I suggest using the metaphoric idea of a palimpsest to describe this kind ambiguous, constantly changing ritual. I believe this metaphor works on both dimension of the Sports Day – the symbolic system of meanings as well as the social practice. A palimpsest in its explicit meaning refers to a parchment, of which the top layer was scraped off in order to be able to rewrite it. Fragments of the original texts are still visible “between” the new text. The term became popular in literature theory due Genette’s use of this term for his exploration of “hypertextuality” and the relationship between “hypotexts” (original texts) and “hypertexts” (texts that are based on “hypotexts”) (Winkgens 2008:554). But the metaphor of the palimpsest turned out to be also quite useful in other fields of research such as architecture, art history or film studies. The social scientists John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman also used the term “palimpsest of contradictions” to describe the ethnical and political realities in contemporary Africa (see Berman 2004). Winkgens (2008) believes that the image of a palimpsest also might turn out productive in cultural studies and cultural history as well, because it allows to trace and read moments of discontinuity and fragments of past discourses that are still present (even if they are overwritten or “deleted) in texts and discourses (554).

I think it is helpful to view school rituals like the Sports Day as a kind of “cultural palimpsest.” The modes of ritual change I discussed above, like the strategies and continuities regarding consciously created rituals, and changes of meaning through a changing socio-cultural context lead to a number of continuations and discontinuities in the practice of ritual. These (dis-)continuities can be traced historically, and by putting them in a larger socio-cultural discourse about schools and education throughout different times, we also can trace back changes of meanings on the symbolic-cultural level, and see how layered on top or aside of each other. But I believe that, much like a literary palimpsest, older meanings are not completely overwritten or forgotten. School events like the Sports Day have a strong communal aspect to it. They bring together different members of the communities (at the very least the teachers, parents and children), so different generations are participating in the same ritual. Each of the

actors has its own experiences and views about the ritual and together they renegotiate the rituals meanings every time through its performance. Therefore, I view the ritual not as text, pre-scribed with symbolic meaning, but more as a framework, in which (often ambiguous) meanings can co-exist, and lead to contingent experiences within the same framework.

In order to give a deep description of such a school ritual that fully explains the inherent ambiguity, which results from constant re-evaluation and re-negotiations of meaning, I will give an historic as well as ethnographic account of the Sports Day. Through ritual activities actors embody and represent the actors' ideals of the culture behind the ritual. I believe the difference in the experience (and therefore the ambiguity of the ritual) can be seen as specific selections (and maybe rearrangements) of the different meanings inscribed over time on the "cultural palimpsest" of the Sports Day.

3 Historical Discussion: The Sports Day in a Changing Educational Context

Japanese schooling underwent several radical changes over the past 150 years. The first happened with the introduction of modern (Western) schooling during the early Meiji period. Before, in pre-modern education, each *daimyō* had in his capital at least one domain school (*hankō*) for the education of the samurai class. Outside the capital samurai were also educated in local schools (*gōgaku*). These schools were based on Confucian ideals and thought, literature and martial arts (Stevenson 1991:105) but the main aim of the Samurai education was not the acquisition of practical skills or intellectual development, but moral principles and virtue. The samurai “would serve as an example for the other classes to follow in their respective position within the ‘natural’ social hierarchy” of Tokugawa Japan (Lincicome 1995:4).

Children of commoners could learn basic skills, like reading and writing, in temple schools (*terakoya*) or *tenarai*sho. These were also the only type of school in pre-modern Japan that accepted girls (about one quarter of the *terakoya* pupils were female). According to Okano and Tsuchiya, the main function of pre-modern schooling of Japan was to “equip them with the knowledge and skills that they would require in performing the tasks of their respective classes when they reached adulthood” (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:14). Some scholars argue that the traces of a standard curriculum and a uniform order of instruction can be found in pre-modern times and are decisive structural factors which laid the foundation for the rapid modernisation of Japan's education system in Meiji Japan (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:15-16, Lincicome 1995:8-9).

3.1 Modern Schooling and the Creation of National Rituals

School education in the Meiji era was a single-track education system, instead of the two-track system as described above. The foundation of this new system was

laid by the Education Law (*gakusei*) in 1872. It was seen as an important part of the Meiji state politics of “rich nation and strong army” (*fukoku kyōhei*) and “production-increase and founding of industries” (*shokusan kōgyō*). This new system was based on four principles: First, the elimination of feudal class barriers; second, making individual success and enlightenment the main goal; third, emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic (and other practical skills); fourth, costs of education were to be defrayed by the public (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:15).

Furthermore, local ceremonies that we know today as *matsuri* are inventions of the modern Japanese nation state as well. The Meiji nation state as a disciplining and regulating power often tried to remove and repress “traditional” customs and ceremonies of the Japanese people in order to regulate the people’s life, but even though the regulative power of the state could be experienced in nearly every corner of (daily as well as non-daily) life, the state was not able to repress the folkloric *matsuri*, rather their strategies led to new formations or re-creations of the folk habits. This was further intensified by the establishment of modern institutions like fairs and museums, which also led to a new awareness of history and further to the “invention of traditions”, as evident by the exploding numbers of newly set up historical monuments and memorials in the second half of the 19th century (Yoshimi 1999:8).

The modern school system was one of these strategies used by the nation state and it also played an important role in the modernisation of Japan by promoting a new time-frame and the establishment of a new set of nationalist rites to replace the older (folkloric) traditions. In order to regulate the time-frame of the people, a calendar reform was issued in 1873, in which the Meiji government officially adopted the Gregorian calendar, as part of the general modernisation efforts of the country (Takahashi 1999:115).

Modern schooling, or more precisely the compulsory school attendance, played a major role in socialising the population with the new calendar (and with it the new nationalistic rites and holidays). This did not happen overnight, it took a long time for the local communities to adapt to the new rites. During the first decades, traditional folkloric holidays were still practised in schools (or outside school, with the children absent), whilst on newly established national holidays,

like the Emperor's birthday, children still attended school, either to learn for the upcoming exams or because they just did not know what day it was (Takahashi 1999:115-122). In the beginning these new holidays were often considered as "something peculiar to schools", and nothing of importance for the general public life. But this relationship between the holiday ceremonies at schools and the traditional, folkloric life began to be more coordinated towards the end of the Meiji era (Yoshimi NN:13). Even so, in the Taishō era, with the new national rites firmly established in the new calendar-oriented system that now structured daily life, the people still lacked emotional affection. For example, Hayashi Fusao, a famous intellectual who grew up in a modernised Japan in the early 19th century, could not understand the "depth of their meaning", concerning the state rituals, and wrote in an essay about his childhood the following:

During primary school ceremonies, we always sang 'Kimi ga yo' and read the *Imperial Rescript*. On the three grand national holidays, we also worshipped the emperor's portrait. The teachers were very respectful at such times, and the children were on their best behaviour. These were always impressive ceremonies, replete in both solemnity and silence. After these ceremonies were over, no flame remained burning in our hearts. (Hayashi 2008: 93)

3.1.1 Ideology of Modern Japanese Education – The Rescript on Education, Mori Arimori and Taisō

According to Lincicome (1995) the intellectual elite of early Meiji Japan conceived its education policy as a combination of "praiseworthy motives." On the one hand was their patriotic concern for the future of Japan, on the other they had a "humanitarian desire to release the common man from the shackles of feudal economic exploitation and political subservience" (19). In this education policy, elementary school was the first compulsory stage of education and therefore its primary goal was to educate the children as functional citizens of a modern state in order to help modernising and further industrialising Japan. Because this public school system was created and regulated by a centralised government, the new education certainly involved in its core a political dimension (Lincicome 1995:23).

The foundation for the political dimension as well as the moral principles of the Japanese nation was completed with the *Imperial Rescript of Education* (*Kyōiku ni kansuru chokugo*) in 1890 and kept unchanged until the end of the Second World War. The *Rescript* confirmed the absolute moral status of the emperor and emphasised Confucian values on family relationships and morals of the modern nation. Because of this combination of the morals of the family and the nation, it stressed the sacrifice of individuals in service of the imperial state. Over time, the Ministry of Education increased its control over the schools even more by producing their own textbooks on focusing on moral education, language and history because “anything in the school curriculum that contradicted the Rescript on Education was challenged by the state” (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:18-19).

The most prominent figure in creating Japan’s pre-war education ideology was Mori Arinori, who became Japan’s first Minister of Education in 1885. Yoshimi Shun’ya (1999) argues that Mori’s educational policy followed two strategies: First, he thought that children need to be trained to obtain modern physical skills and second, their strength as a national subject has to be beneficial for the national community and the emperor (Yoshimi 1999:20-21). But Mori’s ideas cannot be perceived merely as tool for political control. In Mori’s vision of the nation state, obedience should not have been a result of oppressive power, but rather be a form of self-sacrifice that people would carry out as their duty for the state and emperor. Within his education system, he tried to create a framework, where this spirit of self-sacrifice could blossom. Therefore the Emperor’s presence had to be felt everywhere in the country (Yoshimi NN:5).

Mori stated in his Elementary School Curriculum that teachers had to select “the virtuous words and deeds of upright men – Japanese and foreign, past and present” and to “discuss simple, easily understood matters and teach them everyday conduct, with the teacher’s words and actions supplying the model.” But even though Mori was dedicated to educate the Japanese children as loyal citizens, who were capable of bearing the burdens of industrial and military growth, he was not entirely neglecting intellectual education. He defined primary schools as institutions for general education (*futsu kyōiku*), in contrast to the revised Primary School Law, which was issued two years after Mori’s

assassination in 1890. It stated that the most important tasks of primary school was to provide moral education (*dōtoku kyōiku*) and education for citizenship (*kokumin kyōiku*), along with common knowledge and practical skills (Lincicome 1995:90-91).

But in Mori's educational philosophy, there was also a distinction between "academic study" (*gakumon*) and "education" (*kyōiku*). In "academic study", the future leaders of Japan would study at imperial universities "the truth in science and technology and Western civilization." "Education", on the other hand, should provide reading, writing and arithmetic skills and also moral education in order to turn individuals into filial imperial subjects (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:17). In order to do so Mori also strongly emphasized physical training and bodily discipline as one of the main functions of schooling. Through the "Normal School Act" of 1886 military style training, together with a regimented lifestyle in dormitories, was made a required subject of the Normal School² curriculum (Shimizu 2007:56). Mori obviously was a supporter of physical training through military style drilling (*heishiki taisō*), a practice that dominated the discussion of physical education in the end of the 19th century. Under his administration, *heishiki taisō* became a regular part of Japanese middle and normal schools, and then further expanded to primary schools (Lincicome 1995:185).

The term *taisō* was first coined by the Meiji philosopher Nishi Amane, who was commissioned by the Meiji government to create a moral code for soldiers. *Taisō* was created as an equivalent to several foreign terms like gymnastics, and from the beginning, it was heavily associated with military drills. The concern for physical education was not only reflected in the government's concern for building a strong national army, but also in their goal to build physically strong and disciplined citizens. Thus "one of the country's highest priorities was to improve the physical strength of its youth" and so "*taisō* was to become closely linked with disciplinary education and physical training, particularly in schools" (Shimizu 2007:55).

Taisō continued to be an important aspect of modern schooling in Japan throughout the pre-war period. The 1891 Elementary School Curriculum states that the "objective of *taisō* is to provide balanced growth for school children,

² Normal Schools were institutions in which elementary school teachers were educated.

enabling them to maintain their health and have cheerful strong spirits. And it is also to cultivate the practice of obeying rules” (Shimizu 2007:56). In the Taishō era, Nagai Michiaki became an important person for the history of *taisō* education by writing the Teachers Curriculum for *Taisō* in 1913, and creating the Manual for Teaching School *Taisō*. According to Nagai, *taisō* as a school subject had four objectives: to achieve a well-balanced development of all parts of the body; to achieve full development of each bodily function; to develop the capacity for quick and lasting action and to cultivate a strong cheerful spirit; to acquire the values and habits of discipline and cooperation (Shimizu 2007:58-59).

As we can see, *taisō* (and especially *heishiki taisō*) was not only a way of physical training, but also a means for moral education. But also this idea of *taisō* as moral education had its share of critics among Meiji intellectuals. Some argued that *heishiki taisō* might help in fostering bravery and perseverance, but that its real objective was to train the pupils to obey rules and practice order, making students only passive receivers instead of active participants, and thus it did not help to develop their moral sentiment (Lincicome 1995:186). *Heishiki taisō* was also linked to student unrest in several normal schools in the 1890s; because, according to a commentator of the time,

within the schools, it did not inspire students to do battle with knowledge or hone their skills. Nor did it install a spirit of competition for advancement. Instead *heishiki taisō* trained students to cooperate with one another regardless on endeavour. Thus, if one or two students advocated disrupting the school, then the entire student body was likely to join in without thinking. (quoted in Lincicome 1995:190)

Nevertheless, during the time of increased nationalism and militarism in the early Shōwa era, *taisō* became an even more important practice in Japanese schools. The Ministry of Education's National Spiritual Mobilisation Policy (*kokumin seishin sōdōin*) emphasized the place of *heishiki taisō* within schools (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:24-25).

3.1.2 Modern Education and the Birth of the Sports Day

The 1872 Education Law (*gakusei*) contained rules and regulations for all types of schools, and so created a homogeneous school system for Japan (Murakami

1934:47-48). Based on the French education system, the whole country was divided into eight university districts, each with 32 middle school districts. Every middle school district contained 210 elementary schools (Takahashi 1999:102). In the 1870s the government encouraged teachers to use a collection of novel teaching methods and techniques, based on theories by Western educators like Johann Pestalozzi or Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Soon, in the 1880s, Japanese educators ceased to just imitate these teachings methods but began to evaluate these methods critically in an effort to identify the principles and philosophical ideas behind them (Lincicome 1995:10).

This early stage of modern schooling in Japan faced several problems, and thus the implementation of the *gakusei* wasn't as successful as hoped at first. Many textbooks were translations of American textbooks about enlightenment, something people in villages or working families considered irrelevant to their lives. Also the cost of living and the fact that schooling was compulsory for children increased the people's sentiment against the new school system. By 1876 only 25,000 (instead of 53,760) schools were operating and many of them were still single-class schools located in temples or private homes (just like *terakoya* used to be). As a result the government acknowledged the shortcomings of the *gakusei* and reacted by reducing the compulsory school time to four years and transferred the school management to local representatives. But soon after, critics within the government also criticized the Westernisation of the Japanese education system, and suggested that "traditional Japanese Confucian" values should be the foundation of the nations' education philosophy. In 1880, the government also tried to limit the influence of civil movements by prohibiting teachers and students from attending political meetings, and also prohibiting several textbooks which were considered inappropriate. In the end, the Ministry of Education gained more power over the schools again, and created official and binding guidelines for teachers' behaviour and thoughts. (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:15-16).

Within these turbulent times, the Sports Day began to appear at Japanese (elementary and middle) schools. This was preceded by two developments: First, *undōkai* were established at the Naval Academy, the Tokyo Imperial University and other elite schools as amateur sport championships in the 1870s. Second, in

1885 there was also performed a *taisōkai*, in which over 1,500 elementary school pupils participated. A similar event was held in Nara a year earlier. These can be seen as forerunners of the *undōkai*. Other similar events were held in various areas of Japan. They were basically exams in order to let the children work together, or also compete in various academic disciplines. It took about one decade until these kinds of events merged together and established the *undōkai* as a practice at elementary and middle schools. These early Sports Days at elementary schools showed the same militaristic tendencies as the elite schools by using activities like *heishiki taisō*, flag-taking games and tug-of-wars. But while individual competition was the main focus of the *undōkai* at elite schools, the elementary and middle school Sports Days focused a combination of individual and group competition, as well as the tendency of incorporating the local population. The Sports Day was spreading to elementary and middle schools all over Japan in the second half of the 1880s. The first examples of an elementary school *undōkai*, are according to Yoshimi, the Matsushiro Elementary School Sports Day in Hokkaidō as well as a jointly operated *undōkai* in Shizuoka in 1885. At the Matsushiro Elementary School, the older students were split in two teams and performed *taisō*, played flag taking games and tug of wars, while the lower classes played freely on the fields. Also the Shizuoka Prefecture Education Chronic shows that *undōkai* were done at several elementary schools in Shizuoka around the same time (Yoshimi 1999:11-12).

As early as 1886, the Sports Day was performed in various prefectures all over Japan. This development probably was encouraged by the inclusion of *taisō* as a compulsory subject in the Elementary School Law. In the early 1890s, the Sports Day became a regular event during the school year everywhere. Also the patriotism that resulted from the First Sino-Japanese War further encouraged the establishment of the Sports Day. In the same year, the Ministry of Education issued an edict that criticized the focus on teaching of knowledge and emphasised the importance of physical education and moral education (Lincicome 1995: 90-91). In Okinawa for example, there was much more emphasis of the Sports Day as a national event (instead of a local school event and in other areas in Japan). There, the reading of imperial edicts and the singing of the *Kimigayo*, were prominent features of the Sports Day. The first *undōkai*

were joint operations by several schools and held in 1888, the year Mori Arimori was visiting several schools in Okinawa (Yoshimi 1999:13-14).

The *undōkai* that became common in the late 1880s and 1890s resembled more field trips (*ensoku*) or marches (*kōgun*) and the site of Sports Day was usually sea shores, fields, riverbeds or shrine premises. Besides the traditional games, the march to the destined area became an important feature: students were split into groups and were marching in formation to the destination, where they participated in group activities and competitions. These events were called *undōkai* as well as *ensoku* (Yoshimi 1999:14-15).

After 1900, Japanese education also had to adapt to new economic developments. To foster the growing prosperity and continue the process of industrialisation, the Ministry of Education made several changes to the Japanese schooling system. First, compulsory primary education was once again expanded to six years, and vocational subjects were made compulsory in upper elementary school classes. And in the secondary and tertiary education sector new vocational and specialized schools were created to aid the development of a skilled workforce for the industry (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:19-21). During this time, the content of the Sports Day gradually changed. More and more individual sports competitions like, for example, wide or high jumps were incorporated into the Sports Day. This led to a change in the attitude of the children towards the *undōkai* and the focus on competition became stronger during this time. The children perceived the Sports Day as a possibility to display athletic excellence. The characteristic of military training as seen in the early Sports Day became less important (Yoshimi 1999: 29-32). While the *undōkai* was perceived more and more as an examination of the athletic capacity of the children, enhancing the competitive attitude of children was not officially considered the goal of the Sports Day. Excessive competitive spirit among children was often an object of criticism after 1900 and a balance between cooperative and competitive aspects was desired. In order to achieve this balance, several strategies were considered: The children were taught how to cheer and what words to use to show each others support. Furthermore there would be no more individual results, but each team would win points with each competition. With these alterations, not only children

who were competing in games, but also those who watched became active team members, cheering each other on (Yoshimi 1999:36-37).

After the Meiji government achieved its goal of catching up with the leading Western nations, the government could face new challenges in the Taishō period. In order to further improve Japan's situation, several educational, political and cultural reforms were conducted. In 1917 a conference was held in order to re-examine the role of education during this time. As a result, the education system became more open and new public, as well as private, universities and higher schools were established. In a general phase of liberalism, a Liberal Education Movement began to form, highlighting the importance of catering to the individual needs, interests and feelings of the children (Hirata 1999:107).

During this time, the Sports Day began to resemble more its contemporary form. For once, the form of the Sports Day changed. In the Meiji era, *undōkai* were usually practiced in cooperation by several schools. But over time, single school Sport Days became more popular. The reason for this can be found in structural changes at this time. There was an overall trend towards fewer schools with larger numbers of classes (see Table 2). This development was accompanied by elongation of the compulsory schooling period from four to six years in 1907, which led to a rising number of children attending these schools (Hirata 1999:108). Furthermore, political reforms of that time also influenced the Sports Day: A revision of the “Elementary School Law” in 1900 made it necessary for schools to have a space wide enough to act as a school ground. The Sports Day was henceforth often performed at these school grounds, and so the marching to distant destination areas vanished, but instead the event became much easier to view for an audience (Yoshimi 1999:34-35). Finally, in 1926, the financial aid for student accommodation and budget for big events was cut due to the ongoing depression in the 1920s, which also led, according to Hirata, to the disappearance of combined *undōkai* in the early Showa period (Hirata 1999:110).

	1 Classroom	6 Classrooms	12 Classrooms	All
1900:	7090	536	60	7686
1912:	1665	4357	1142	7164

Table 2: Types of elementary schools in late Meiji (Hirata 1999:108)

When we look at the programs of the multi school *undōkai* of the late Meiji and early Taishō era, running competitions (single as well as relay races) were the main focus of the events. When compared to single school Sports Days, multi school events exhibited many more of the characteristics seen in professional sports competitions (Hirata 1999:108).



Picture 4: Taishō era *undōkai* at Shiroko Elementary School

(Source: http://www.edu.city.suzuka.mie.jp/shiro-e/enkakushi/enkakushi_taisyoun_undoukai.html)

This development towards single school *undōkai* influenced also the scenery of the Sports Days; according to oral accounts, the school grounds were decorated elaborately even though this was against government wishes, because it was considered a distraction from the main goals of the Sports Day (Yoshimi 1999:40-41). Often, at the centre of the school grounds, a large flagpole with the national flag (*Hinomaru*) was placed. From this pole, ropes with the flags of every nation (*mankokuki*) were spanned in every direction over the sports ground. Underneath, an organ player was playing, and around him the students would perform. As this practice became more popular it also influenced the Sports Day in general by the singing of national anthem (*Kimigayo*) at the opening ceremony (Hirata 1999:110-111).

The single school Sports Day still consisted (like the multi school Sports Days) of *taisō* exercises, military exercises, running competitions, games, singing competitions, dances and traditional martial arts competitions. But there were

also some new developments: First, the content of these exercises and competitions generally became more diverse. Also, while in the late Meiji multi school *undōkai* sports competitions like running, wide jump, high jump often were the main focus of the Sports Day, during the Taishō era more playful competitions became emphasised and games and performances became more varied. Besides the usual games like tug-of-war, obstacle courses and *kibasen* (mock cavalry battle), new ones like ball-throwing contests (*tamairi*), *tamaokuri*, lottery-running-competitions (*chūsen kyōsō*), spoon race, volleyball and basketball appeared and became common practice. Furthermore, singing and dancing competitions and performances became more varied, also due of the now wide-spread organs. But *heishiki taisō* and other military exercises were still important features (Hirata 1999:111-112).

3.1.3 Japanese Education and the Sports Day during the Time of the Ultrationalism

The American stock market crash in 1929 had an influence on all capitalistic nations, including Japan. Strikes led to social unrest, paving the way for an increased nationalistic and militaristic tendency. The military gained more and more influence in nearly every area in Japan, including education. Moral education (in the form of thought control) became more important, and during the 1930s several education reforms were undertaken in order to strengthen the war efforts. The authorized school books became more and more nationalistic, and militaristic education material became used more frequently (Hirata 1999: 113-114).

Education played an important role in the effective thought control of the imperial state. The government used schooling as a political means to mobilise the people for military expansion. In order to do this, the state issued its National Spiritual Mobilisation Policy and put heavy emphasis on the practice of *heishiki taisō* within schools. Furthermore, physical education was used in order to prepare the pupils for the war with the use of gas masks and even hand grenades. By 1941 military drills were compulsory in all Japanese schools, from

primary schools to universities (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:24-25, Manzenreiter 2007a).



Picture 5: Military style game at an undōkai in 1941
(Source: Kumamoto Nichinichi Shinbun)

The Sports Day itself started to slowly adapt to these new developments. After the Manchukuo Incident in 1931 the militaristic influence became more visible in the *undōkai*. Hirata (1999) compares *undōkai* held in 1930 and in 1936, and made the following observations: First, the amount of running competitions (relay as well as single) was reduced. Second, the amount of *taisō*, as well as competitions where everybody has to participate, increased. Third, the names of dances, songs and games strongly reflected the current (militaristic) situation. He also analysed the contents of a 1938 *undōkai* and found the following characteristics: there were less individual sports competitions, and more group competitions (*shūdan kyōgi*). With the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the militaristic influence became even stronger and nationalistic symbols like the national flag or the national anthem were prominent features of the entrance and the closing ceremony (114-119). It was also during this time that the *undōkai* was renamed to *taiikukai* which according to Hirata (1999) was not just a different name for the same practice, but carried a strong nationalistic connotation (122-123).

3.1.4 Between National Ceremony and Village Festival

For middle schools field trips and *undōkai* were a way “to serve the dual objectives of teaching students discipline and training by encouraging them to act as a group by inculcating a deeper reverence of the Imperial House through visits of the Imperial Tomb and the Kashiwara Shrine” (Shimizu 2007:32). But in order to get the population involved and accept the new school events as a replacement for their local traditional customs, much effort was needed. At the end of the 19th century, the practice of the school ceremonies in elementary schools were emphasised, but Takahashi (1999) believes that these nationalistic measures had not much influence over the students’ daily practices. With one or two exceptions most new rituals were basically a continuation of their seasonal life according to the old Chinese calendar. In order to clear school education from these old customs, new school practices that were strongly tied to the local communities and pupils had to be created. The *undōkai* is a good example of this development. First practiced in 1880, it rapidly became popular and became an important event for the elementary schools. Around the same time several other school events, which were present at earlier times but in an unrefined state, started to take on their form, and began to be performed with much effort and originality. And so the old customs were dispersed by the new rites, created in and from the schools (Takahashi 1999:132).

In an article of the magazine *Fūzoku gahō* from 1892, called “Sports Days and Cherry Blossom Viewing” (*undōkai to ohanami*), the author states that *undōkai* was not a new invention, but rather a continuation of a practice of the Edo era, where *terakoya* teacher would take students to cherry blossom viewing, where they also played various kinds of games. The games, which were now played at Sports Days like flag taking, ball games or running competitions may differ from the ones practiced at the Edo blossom viewings, but according to the author, the event is basically the same. One aspect that clearly distinguished the Meiji *undōkai* from the Edo *hanami* was the emphasis on cooperation, as well as the militaristic character. In some combined *undōkai* several thousand children took part, marching like an army to their destination, resembling huge military

exercises (another practice that started around the same time) (Yoshimi 1999:16-17).

According to Yoshimi, the Sports Day played a mediating role between the old calendar and the new one:

There was a time structure when the conventional shrine festival turned into field day [Sports Day], and field day became the village festival in rural Japan. Then, this time structure was combined with the national government time-frame of the seasonal festival in Kigensetsu and Tenchosetsu. As a matter of fact, in the beginning field days were often held on national holidays in spring and autumn such as the Tenchosetsu and Army and Navy Memorial Day. (Yoshimi NN:14)

The *undōkai* can be seen as such a “typical modern *matsuri*,” which was created as a new means of establishing the authority of the national state. But also, from the beginning it contained some kind of ambiguity, on the one side it clearly represented the Meiji state’s education ideology of creating elite individuals and ensuring strength and fitness of the body, on the other side, the local community tied it to the local practices and village *matsuri*, which were deeply rooted in their collective memories. From the beginning, the Meiji state never provided a clear model for the Sports Day, which the schools had to follow. Rather it was a combination of national education policies that emphasised *heishiki taisō* and group games that were popular in the Edo era (Yoshimi 1999:9).

During the Meiji era, the *undōkai* was often practiced on the Meiji-tennō’s birthday, November the 3rd, something that continued also during the Taishō period, thus indicating a continuous connection of the Sports Day with the Tennō system (Hirata 1999:112). Even though the Meiji government tried to put it into the framework of national discipline and training, the actual Sports Days often deviated from the official framework in reality, and were also perceived by the local population (and in some areas mainly) as a village festival (*mura no matsuri*) (Yoshimi 1999:39-40). During the Meiji era the government again and again issued instructions in order to counter these “distractions” from their own idealised conception of the Sports Day. But not only the government also the public discourse carried by journalists and journals discussed the “*matsuri*-fication” of the Sports Day around 1900 (see Yoshimi 1999). There are also many accounts that at the Taishō *undōkai*, guests of honour were often present, and

that the Sports Day was considered as a *matsuri* for the whole community (Hirata 1999:113).

3.2 Post-War Education and the Sports Day

The radical departure of the post-war education system from the pre-war one was accompanied by some continuity. At the level of philosophy, policies and system of education, the post-war education was a complete denial and overhaul of the old system [...]. At the level of practice, however, there were continuities. (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:47)

After the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, the education system had to overcome severe economic and structural difficulties: the restoration of destroyed school buildings progressed only slowly, and there was a constant lack of teachers. On top of that, the budget was cut by a factor of eight. Therefore, the education system had to rely on donations, voluntary work and the sales of village properties (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:32). Despite (or because of) all these difficulties, the Japanese school system was reshaped fundamentally in the immediate post-war years. A single-track 6-3-3 school system was established, and compulsory attendance in lower secondary schools was enforced throughout the first grade in 1947, to second grade in 1948 and finally to third grade in 1949 (MoE 1957:17). Furthermore, due to structural reforms, pre-war vocational and girl schools were reopened as high schools, and the university system was reformed to feature four-year universities and two-year junior colleges. Administration was drastically decentralised, with local education boards partly taking over the competencies from the Ministry of Education (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:34). The key differences between pre-war and post-war education in Japan as they were described by the *Annual Report of the Ministry of Education* are the aim for more equal educational opportunity, the democratisation of the

educational administration and the reformation of teacher training³ (MoE 1957:15).

Post-war education may be seen as the second radical change in Japanese history. This change did not only affect the structural and organisational dimensions of education, but created a completely new educational ideology.

3.2.1 Post-War Educational Laws and the Course of Study – A New Education Discourse

After the Second World War, the Ministry of Education was divided into two groups arguing about the new direction of Japanese education. One group favoured maintaining the Rescript on Education after the war; a coexistence of “national policy” and “peaceful nation.”⁴ The other group believed the underlying nationalism and feudalism of the Rescript was inappropriate for a peaceful, democratic society. In the end, it was decided that a new Rescript on Education should not be issued, and that “the fundamental principles of future education must be in accordance with the Constitution” (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:32-33).

The general direction of Japanese post-war education was strongly influenced by the General Headquarter of the Occupational Forces, which expressed special interest in Japanese education. They criticized the authoritarian, centralised administration and the multi-track school system that resulted in the creation of elites and the uniformity of the education in pre-war Japan. In their 1946 report they issued several recommendations for a new direction in Japanese schooling: Schools should provide equal opportunities based on abilities, but also respect the individualities of children and remove standardisation of the curriculum. They should further adopt the Japanese phonetic alphabet, as well as the Roman alphabet. The use of Kanji should be restricted. The report also states that a single-track 6-3-3 school system with

³ The education of teachers should be carried out by ordinary universities, instead of Normal Schools as in pre-war Japan.

⁴ The Civil Information and Education Bureau concluded that the Rescript was not at fault, but its use by the nationalistic government. So, not the Rescript should be abandoned, but the rituals which are associated with it.

nine-year compulsory education should be established, Teachers should be retrained and granted the freedom to organize themselves and universities should be open to the public and emphasise general education (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:30-31).

Many of these recommendations were integrated in the immediate post-war educational laws and guidelines. On 31 March 1947, the Fundamental Education Law (*kyōiku kihonhō*) was issued. It declares that “education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound mind and body, as builders of a peaceful state and society” and that “equal opportunity in education, student aid system, nine years of compulsory education, co-education, public nature of school education and the respect for teacher status” should be among the main principles of Japanese education. In addition, the promotion of social education, prohibition against partisan political education, sectarian religious education in the public school and improper controls of education was enforced (MoE 1957:14). With the *kyōiku kihonhō*, a new legal base for the education system was provided and therefore “it repudiated the pre-war education based on the old Rescript, and set out new democratic principles of education, peace and human rights” (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:32).

In 1947, the Ministry of Education also issued the first Course of Study (*gakushū shidō yōryō*) which provided a set of standards for the contents which are expected to be covered in the Japanese schools. While the 1947 Course of Study acknowledged the need for a frame that should govern the education process, it highly emphasised that this frame should also allow teachers to take local disparities and individual characters of the children into account. Moreover, the 1947 Course of Study criticised the frontal, fact-based teaching style at the time, which was seen as strict and limiting, and did not allow individual and creative thought. Teachers were criticised for not having enough initiative to create a lively educational experience, but instead carrying out their lessons mechanically (MoE 1947). Therefore, the 1947 Course of Study was considered more of a guideline and it was not required for teachers to follow it completely. It rather encouraged the independence of the teachers in planning lessons to suit local communities and the children of their schools (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:34-35). In addition, the independence of the schools was stressed: “While today, under

the new system, the Ministry of Education can only outline the basic framework for each area in the 'course of study'. Each school can organize its own curriculum based on the actual needs of the locality" (MoE 1957:22).

The general aims for post-war education that were laid out in the *kyōiku kihonhō* were further specified in the Course of Study. These aims were grouped as aims for the individual life, aims for the family life, aims for social life and aims for the working life. Especially emphasised was the notion of democratic, peaceful education and the respect for everyone's personal freedom. Furthermore, education should also function as a means for creating responsible members of society who "love all people and honour their freedom" but also understand that "everybody is part of a society, and therefore one has to know the ideals and structure of society." Overall the aims are much more concerned with the socialisation aspect of education than knowledge transfer. It states that children have to be given "knowledge for the future job and a scientific attitude that is needed in order to do one's job efficiently" but children should also learn what jobs are important for society (MoE 1947:I).

Another topic of discussion in the 1947 Course of Study was the concept of guidance (*shidō*). It argued for a broader application of the term *shidō*. At its core, guidance was considered the main tool for child socialisation and one of the main responsibilities of schools. The Ministry of Education gives the following definition:

Pupil guidance is one of the important functions whereby a school achieves its educational objectives. Its aim is to improve the pupils' social traits and behaviour as well as to develop the personality, character and ability of individual pupils. It is designed for the better development of individual pupils rather than specifically to prevent problem children or delinquents. It should result in making school life meaningful both to individual pupils and to groups such as classes, grades and the whole school. It covers educational, personal, social, moral, vocational and health guidance among others and is usually provided for each of these areas separately but for the better development of the pupil's personality, all of these areas of guidance should be conducted in a comprehensive manner. (MoE 1971:77-78)

The prior use of the term guidance for teaching practices was considered too narrow (e.g. fact based teaching) according to the 1947 Course of Study. Considering guidance as the main tool for socialisation, the children's behaviour

began to be evaluated in terms of autonomy, justice, responsibility, patience, habits of health and safety, civility, cooperation, leadership and public-spiritedness (MoE 1957:68). Teaching should not only be regarded as the transmission of knowledge, but should ideally follow a process whereby the children learn to apply and use this knowledge for their daily lives. The 1947 Course of Study also gave a more detailed explanation of the ideal guiding process:

1. The aims of learning should be the aims that children themselves consider as their own. Only this way they will try to achieve them with eagerness and enthusiasm.
2. The children have to create their own plans on how to realise these goals. The experience of creating these plans is the foundation for the learning.
3. The children have to realise their plans themselves. Planning and realisation of the plans are intellectual activities that should be encouraged.
4. Through try-outs and experiments the children gain “real knowledge, viewpoints and abilities” and after gaining them, the learning process is complete. If they do not gain enough insight, they have to start again (MoE 1947:IV).

3.2.2 Post-War Undōkai – The Sports Day as a Symbol for Peace

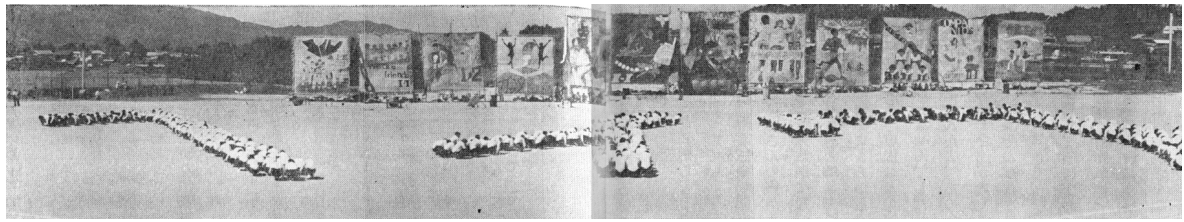
In order to see how these new developments were reflected by the Sports Day, I will discuss Ichimiyas Waichirō's account of the *undōkai* at the Konan Junior High in Shiga Prefecture during the decades after the Second World War. Even though it was decided to abandon all *kokutai*⁵ related rituals after the Second World War in Japanese schools, the Sports Day itself seemed not to be affected by this decision. Many schools, including Konan Junior High continued to practice the

⁵ *Kokutai* (national essence/polity) is a political idea that refers to the national character (volksgeist) of Japan. It is a rather vague term and has a long history, but in general it is understood as the national ideology of Imperial Japan and therefore is strongly connected to state shinto and the Tennō system (see Antoni 1998:166-170). But, “[even] if it were true that few people believed deeply in the mythically-derived concept of the kokutai, from the elementary school classroom onward it radiated a powerful authority that was completely immunized from public criticism not only by the power of the state but by the very social atmosphere” (Karube 2008:48).

Sports Day. This may be the result of its ambiguous meaning that it was perceived as a sports event or local *matsuri* rather than a nationalistic display. Nagase (1981) writes that post-war *undōkai* were often performed as a local variation of the National Sports Festival of Japan (*Nihon kokumin taiiku taikai* - ironically abbreviated as *kokutai*), with the physical education (PE) department being at the centre of its planning stage (23). But in case of the Konan Junior High School, Ichimiya argued that the *undōkai* was not simply a PE or a track-and-field event, instead it was an event that “displays the improvements and advancements of the whole school”. In order to allow the parents to attend, the Sports Day was held on a Sunday in August (usually the second or third). The training period started on the first day of August, lasted for about two weeks and was rather intense: not only PE hours were used for training, but instead a special curriculum was created, containing about four hours of training per day and only two hours of academic instruction. Also, not only the PE teachers were responsible for the training, but every teacher was involved and was responsible for the guidance of specific activities (102-103).

In 1954 the Konan Junior High school started a new *taisō* exercise they called “peace march” (*heiwa kōshin*): the whole student body would form the three katakana characters of the word *heiwa* (peace) during the school’s *undōkai*. The first year students formed the character “he”, the second year students “i” and the third year students the final “wa.” It became a school tradition and an important part of the Sports Day, which according to Ichimiya (1981:99) was regarded as a “great pageant of peace education” (*heiwa kyōiku no daipeejanto*). Ichimiya argued that the introduction of the *heiwa kōshin* was a reaction to the world-political situation: at this point, the Korean War had broken out and the fear of getting involved in another war was becoming stronger, and the “stench of war was even crawling inside the classrooms.” Furthermore, the practice can also be understood as the result of the new political reality in the 1950s with the strengthened reactionism within the education administration. At Konan Junior High, about two thirds of the available teaching positions were occupied by young, leftist teachers, eager to act against conservative and nationalistic developments (Ichimiya 1981:99-102). For example, the song accompanying the “peace march”

was *Midori no sanga*, a song that was chosen to replace the national anthem by the Japanese Teachers Union (Nikkyōso) in 1951.



Picture 6: Kanon Junior High *heiwa kōshin* (Ichimiya 1981:118-119)

The *heiwa kōshin* is an interesting example of how the symbolic meaning can change drastically, while the basic practice or activity remains the same. The parade as shown in Picture 6 strongly resembles in its form pre-war *taisō* marching exercises, only this time reinterpreted for a new socio-political context and new educational discourse of peace and democracy.



Picture 7: *Taisō* (massgame) exercise during a wartime *undōkai*, celebrating the 2600 year anniversary of the mythical founding of Japan (Kumamoto Nichinichi Shinbun)

The peace parade was used to let the students actively think about peace and find their own ways of how to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the word. One year, for example, the students invited parents and listened to their wartime experiences (Ichimiya 1981:106). The *heiwa kōshin* became a tradition. At the time of Ichimiya's descriptions, it was performed over twenty times. But Ichimiya believes that

even though one might think along the lines of 'We did it many years, so we do it this year again ...' and 'because it's a tradition,' only the general form of the peace parade stays static. But within this framework, the students of the Konan Junior

High deal with the questions about war and peace, and why it is necessary to actively try to protect peace every year. (107-108)

The Konan Junior High Sports Day was seen as an important and unique opportunity for students to show their abilities, especially when they do not manage to do so during their academic lessons. The students formed a planning committee (*jikkō iinkai*) especially for the *undōkai* by electing one member of each class. This committee was responsible for the planning and preparation of the Sports Day. They decided on a general theme like “Pursuit of Peace” (*heiwa no tsuikyū*), which should also be represented by each team’s cheering performance backdrop picture. One year the children decided that the backdrops created by each class should be original works, and not copied from *manga*. Ichimiyas (1981) expressed his joy that they even managed to “get pass the naive conceptions of *manga* by themselves (103-104).” There was also a separate planning committee for the *heiwa kōshin* that, similar to the *undōkai* planning committee was composed of the president of the student body, the vice-president and an elected representative of each class. This committee played a central role regarding each element of the peace parade. They thought about the exact form of the march, the practice schedule and the prologue of the parade. Therefore much creativity and originality was needed from the pupils as well as administrative and organisational skills (Ichimiya 1981:106).

At Konan Junior High, the Sports Day is used to show the mental growth of the children as well as the physical one. In Ichimiyas view, there are mental development stages that are appropriate for children at a certain age. This idea of an ideal physical as well as mental development path of children was introduced in the 1947 Course of Study with an elaborate model of children’s developmental stages (see Table 3). Even though they acknowledge that there was no profound scientific base, it provides a detailed depiction of the stages of the children’s physical and mental advancements (MoE 1947:3). When Ichimiya expressed his joy about the children’s overcoming of the “naivity of manga” as well as his appreciation of the planning and organisational abilities of the children, he followed the Ministry of Education’s model.

Stage	Physical development	Mental development
Elementary 1./2. Class	▪ Gain 4-5 cm in height, and 15 kg weight each year. ▪ No visible development of inner organs. ▪ The death rate is decreasing. ▪ Exhausting physical activities can be done, but not ones that need deftly skills.	▪ Egocentric attitude does not allow rational thinking, abstract thoughts are difficult ▪ Emotions are clearly visible, things of interest are continued, others not ▪ Imaginative activities ▪ Emotional phases pass away ▪ 2-3 playmates ▪ Friendships are superficial ▪ Like <i>manga</i> and fairy tales
Elementary 3./4. Class	▪ Gain 4-5 cm in height, and 2 kg weight each year. ▪ No visible development of inner organs. ▪ The death rate is decreasing. ▪ Exhausting physical activities can be done, but not ones that need deftly skills.	▪ Depart from egocentric worldview, start to understand logic thinking ▪ Still have difficulties creating plans ▪ Try to understand things through experimentation ▪ 3-4 playmates ▪ Interest in manga/fairy tales is decreasing ▪ Boys like adventure stories, girls like stories for girls
Elementary 4./5. Class	▪ Gain 3-5 cm in height, and 2-5 kg weight each year. ▪ No visible development of inner organs. ▪ The death rate is decreasing. ▪ Exhausting physical activities can be done, but not ones that need deftly skills.	▪ Egocentric worldview vanishes, more or less logical, rational thinking ▪ Develop a sense for society, understand the relationship between one and the others ▪ Boys like adventure stories, short stories, comedy and folk tales. Girls like stories for girls.
Junior High	▪ Gain 5-6 cm in height, and 3-5 kg weight each year. ▪ No visible development of inner organs. ▪ The death rate is decreasing. ▪ Exhausting physical activities can be done, but not ones that need deftly skills.	▪ Fully capable of logic and abstract thought. ▪ Increase of self confidence, rebellious tendencies. ▪ Friendships become more important - Boys like adventure stories, biographies, comedy and folk tales. Girls like stories for girls.

Table 3: Children's developmental stages according to the 1947 Course of Study (MoE 1947:3)

Practice time for the peace parade lasted eight hours every year. These eight hours replaced normal lessons and the training was built around the students. The sole responsibility for the leadership was held by the head of the peace parade *jikkō iinkai*, who was the president of the student body. Even though the training was not going well sometimes, and the teachers were getting a bit worried, they tried to let the students handle these difficulties by themselves as much as possible. It was thought that “only when the students find their own ways to handle their mistakes and failures they are able to develop real independency.” This sometimes tiresome process of trial and error should be seen as a pedagogical method even though modern teaching methods often focus on cramming of knowledge (Ichimiya 1981: 106-107).

In this sense, the Konan Junior High *undōkai* clearly reflects post-war *kyōiku kihonhō* and the 1947 Course of Study. According to Ichimiya, “the Sports Day holds an important position among those ‘many occasions and places’ of education” (Ichimiya 1981:105). These “many occasions and places” are a direct

reference to the second article of the *kyōiku kihonhō*, which states that “education has to be realised on all occasions and all places” (MoE NN:2). Also, the student involvement and planning approach clearly reflects the concepts of *shidō* as formulated in the 1947 Course of Study. In the formulation of common goals between students and teachers, and the trial and error process, as well as the freedom of the children to fail, these aspects follow the path laid out in the Course of Study.

Furthermore, the egalitarian and democratic notion of the new education system was reflected by the Konan Junior High *undōkai*. For example, they established the rule that each class member had to participate in order to avoid each class just letting their best runners participate. This included a handicapped boy. The whole class discussed how he should participate. Or, in order to judge the cheering contest, a team of judges was formed. It consisted of teachers, the school principal, the town mayor and also one representative of each class (Ichimiya 1981:104-105). The emphasis on harmonious and group building elements was quite strong. In this sense, the Konan Junior High Sports Day is also in line with the government’s attitude towards the aims of extracurricular activities. For example, they sent notices on the operation of athletic clubs in lower and upper secondary schools to each board of education: “[...] Being regarded as a part of school educational activities, the activities of school athletic clubs are to be guided soundly by teachers without undue emphasis on playing to win (MoE 1958:48).”

3.2.3 The Child Centred and Community Based Sports Day

In the 1950s, voices within the Ministry of Education expressed criticism of the immediate post-war education: there was too much emphasis put on pupil initiative, which tends to make a great difference in individual scholastic knowledge; the curriculum lacks consistency through the two school levels; and the subject for moral education is missing (MoE 1957:22-23). So, this liberal attitude of the Ministry of Education came to an end rather quickly in the 1950s. The government tried once more to increase its influence over education through a number of initiatives. For example, they tried to restrict teachers’ freedom and

monitor their performance. They also acted against the decentralisation of the education administration and put more emphasis on the standardisation of textbooks.

These reforms led to nationwide, often violent uprisings by teacher unions (and other organizations), but in the end the Ministry of Education regained control over textbooks, reintroduced moral education to the national curriculum and finally issued a new Course of Study in 1955, which was more prescriptive in nature and was also legally binding in contrast to the 1947 version (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:36-38). The 1955 revision of the Course of Study for elementary and lower secondary schools was based on the Curriculum Council, which consisted of 32 members, including university professors, teacher consultants of elementary and lower secondary schools, and “lay persons of broad knowledge and experience” (MoE 1960:20). It was put into action in 1958 and put special emphasis on the following areas: moral education; improvement of teaching fundamental subjects like Japanese and arithmetics; promotion of science and technical education; improvements of teaching contents in history and geography; vocational and personal guidance (MoE 1960:4).

Especially the creation of dedicated hours for moral education was the source for much debate. The contents of this moral education concerned “basic patterns of behaviour in daily life, moral sensibility and judgement, development of individuality and creative attitude toward life, moral attitude and practice as a member of both national and local communities.” Moral education is not only given through hours of instruction but also in extra-curricular activities (MoE 1960:23).

The Ministry’s concept of guidance was also refined to fit their new education policy: Four objectives were listed as concrete objects of guidance in elementary schools: get pupils to understand and acquire the daily and basic behaviour patterns; get pupils to increase moral sentiments, judgment between good and evil, right and wrong; assist in the development of individuality and the cultivation of creative attitudes towards life; and get pupils to form and increase those kinds of moral attitudes and to desire to put them into practices which are demanded of a member of a democratic nation or community (MoE 1959:22-23). Furthermore, the teachers training in guidance became also more centralised: The “[...] central

government has been conducting lecture courses on pupil guidance training courses for lower secondary school counsellors [...]” (MoE 1971:77-78).

Within the 1958 revision of the Course of Study, the position of extra-curricular activities within the Japanese educational framework was specified again:

Extra-curricular activities in Japan aim at the harmonious development of mind and body through desirable group activities and at the development of personality and practical attitudes for improving life. The activities are somewhat different from one school to another, but the most common are ‘student government’, ‘home-room activities’, ‘club activities’, ‘class room guidance’ and ‘school events’. These activities play an important role in deepening human relationships between teachers and pupils among pupils. (MoE 1971:72)

During the 1950s, the Ministry of Education was also getting more concerned with the safety regarding school activities in general. For example, the 1958 Annual Report of the Ministry of Education states that there had been an increase in the amount of injuries of pupils during school excursions and other outdoor activities. In compulsory schools, eight percent of the total enrolled pupils were injured every year in such accidents (MoE 1960:69). As a result, the Ministry of Education issued several circulars requesting the authorities concerned to have “a definite educational aim in planning an excursion and to use every caution to avoid accidents” (MoE 1957:68).

Within this context of increased centralised control of the Japanese educational system by the Ministry of Education, Nagase Kenji (1981) describes the changes of the *undōkai* at the Hanaguri Elementary School over the course of ten years since the beginning of the 1970s. In his descriptions we can see how he responded to the aforementioned developments by using the ambiguity of the Sports Day to his advantage. During that time, Nagase was a teacher at this school and responsible for the *undōkai*. The Hanaguri Elementary School is located southwest in the prefecture Saitama in the middle of a *danchi*⁶ area. During the 1970s about 1000 children attended the school, which Nagase

⁶ *Danchi* are public-housing complexes created by Japan Housing Corp. in response to the housing shortages after the Second World War in the 1950s -1970s. Located in suburbs and equipped with conveniences like flush toilets and separated bedrooms for parents and children *danchi* were “homes most Japanese could only dream about”. They aided the creation of a new urban middle class and promoted the development of nuclear family in Japan (Botting 2003).

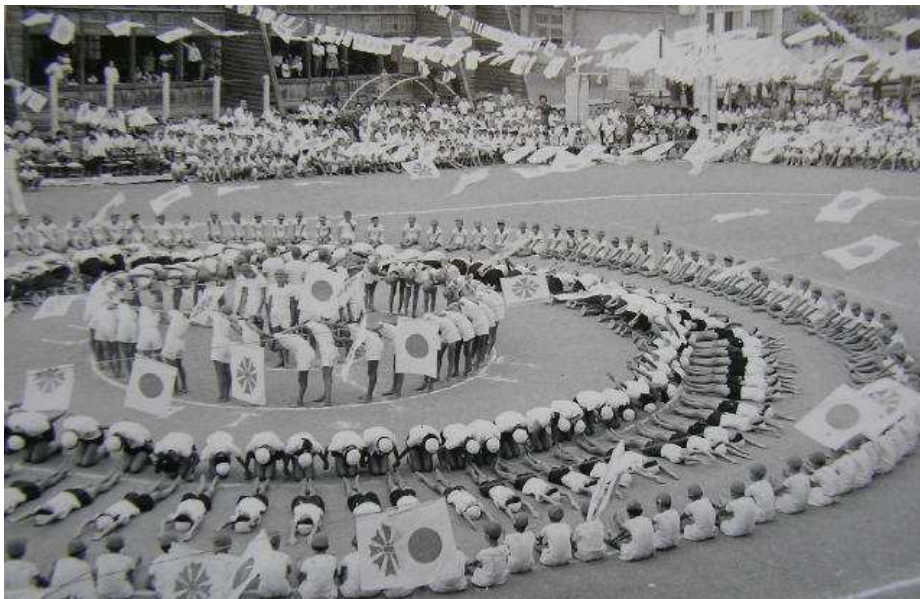
describes as an exemplary *danchi*-school (*tenteiteki na danchikō*). Most of the parents of the Hanaguri pupils were working in Tokyo as *sarariiman*, who often got transferred and moved into town and away. The constant stream of new students at the school made it a difficult place to work (17).

The school was founded in 1970, and national symbols like the *kimigayo* and the *hinomaru* were floating around in the school, as part of a newly established nationalism after the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Furthermore, administrative jobs as well as teaching jobs were quite insecure at this time. During that time many of the big schools in town practiced big events modelled after the National Sports Festival of Japan (*kokutai*), with the teachers at its centre. I considered it an old-fashioned practice which leads to the absence of the children (*kodomo fuzai*) (Nagase 1981:17-18).

Like Ichimiya, Nagase was worried by the political developments of the times. In the national flag and anthem he saw representations of a new Japanese nationalism as shown in the 1964 Olympic Games and the National Sports Festival. The 1964 Olympic Games were of “utmost importance for the revival of the nation” and its acceptance in the world community (Niehaus/Seinsch 2007:12). They were able to show the world that it finally had overcome the post-war struggles and was now again among the world’s top (economic) powers. During this time the Japanese government propagated the Olympic Movement nationwide by publishing educational materials and distributing them to every primary and secondary school. Their aim was “to place sport at the service of a harmonious development of human beings and to contribute to a peaceful world and at the same time strengthen Japanese self-awareness [...]” (Masumoto 2007:33). In this sense, the 1964 Olympic Games also brought a re-establishing and affirmation of the *Kimigayo* and the *Hinomaru* as national symbols on a nationwide scale (Tagsold 2002:73).

Furthermore, in the Ministry of Education’s discourse, physical education was once again linked to the newly created subject of moral education. The 1958 Annual Report states that “physical education was given great impetus as a result of the scheduling and holding of the Asian Games in Tokyo in 1958” (MoE 1960:65). In 1958, the first National Sports Day was established in 1958. According to the Annual report, the aim was to popularize and promote physical

education and activities of recreation among the people. Also, public physical education facilities were opened to the public without fee and local communities took part in sports and recreation activities (MoE 1960:69). To foster the link between the new Japanese self-awareness and Japanese education, the use of the national flag and anthem in school ceremonies was pressed by the Ministry of Education, but faced strong opposition from teachers and socialist groups (Tagsold 2002:70).



Picture 8: Nisshin Elementary School *undōkai* in 1964: School flag and *Hinomaru*
 (Source: http://cmsweb1.torikyo.ed.jp/tnissin-e/modules/menu/main.php?page_id=160&op=change_page)

The first *undōkai* at the Hanaguri Elementary School was organized by the PE department. Their plan was similar to the *koku(min)tai(ikutaikai)*-inspired events mentioned above, containing extensive use of the *Kimigayo* and the *Hinomaru*; which lead to discussions inside the teaching department about which form the Sports Day should take. Even though many wished for a more “child centred” *undōkai*, the Sports Day was organised by the PE department because of time restraints. Nagase states that while the result was orderly and well organised, it lacked spirit (*seiki*) and liveliness (*katsuryoku*) and he especially criticized the opening ceremony and the running competitions. The opening ceremony focused entirely on the teachers, the school principal and guests of honour. Furthermore, the running competitions were created in such a way that fast children could

achieve good results, while slower ones would be left behind, something that according to Nagase was against the egalitarian principles of Japanese education (Nagase 1981:18-20).

In these senses, the teachers of the Hanaguri Elementary School envisioned a Sports Day that reflected the 1947 Course of Study much more than more recent developments in the government's educational discourse. Within the framework of the Sports Day, the teachers tried to react to certain socio-political developments within the Ministry as well as the general public that they deemed unfavourable. Even though the next three *undōkai* were done in the same manner as the first, the teachers' visions slowly started to take concrete forms. Also, the students of Hanaguri Elementary School wished for a different *undōkai* experience, and especially the girls expressed their wish to do "interesting games" such as *bōtaoshi* and *kibasen* like the boys were doing. This led to further discussions among the teachers about the character of the *undōkai*, and for the future Sports Days they decided that the children should be the main actors and the local community should be incorporated (21).

The first step towards these goals was the improvement of the requirements and the general framework of the *undōkai*. It was a common practice until then that the PTA and important local personalities were invited to the Sports Day and they were expected to pay *hanadai* (flower money), which covered the costs of the *undōkai*. According to Nagase and other Hanaguri teachers, this contradicted their vision of the Sports Day, even though without *hanadai*, the costs for the materials and the prices for the students could not be covered by the school budget. So they decided to refuse "flower money," even though it was not possible to allocate enough money from the school budget. Instead they emphasised the improvement and more precise planning of costly events (Ichimiya 1981:22-23). It was not easy for the Hanaguri teachers to assemble the money required for the Sports Day without relying on the people's charity. Maybe the Sports Day did not fit in with the new role that the Ministry of Education had envisioned for education, being a "means to develop the human resources required for the targeted economic growth." Therefore the budget was allocated to the areas which promised the best economic output. This move resulted in the further diversification of Japanese high schools, aiming at training "high level

human resources” (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:40). In order to provide educational institutions that can provide the diverse abilities and aptitude required by the industry, technical colleges were established in 1962 to provide lower secondary school graduates with a technical education (MoE 1971:3). In the words of the Ministry of Education: “In recent years, however, the necessity for reappraising the existing system has been increasingly voiced with the aim of realizing the basic ideal of equal education opportunities as well as meeting the requirements of a modern industrial society.”

The second step of improving the Hanaguri Sports Day was to remove the *koku(min) tai(iku taikai)*-style opening and closing ceremonies, and replace them with new ceremonies that reflected the child-centred character of the *undōkai*. This included the removal of the oath of the children, and the singing of *Wakai ryoku*, a song commonly used at the *kokumin taiiku taikai*. Instead of *Wakai ryoku*, a school song was created by the school’s music club and a speech from the president of the school body was formally included in the opening ceremony. Another point is that it was decided to replace the *Hinomaru*, which had a prominent place on top of the flagpole of the school during the *undōkai*, with the school flag, since for Nagase and his colleagues it was a symbol of a newly established nationalism, and therefore the removal of the *Hinomaru* from the school ground was of great importance for them (Nagase 1981: 23-24).

When we look at recent *undōkai*, the influence of physical education as laid out in the *shidō yōryō* is visible, and so the *undōkai* began to resemble a PE exercise too much. [...] From the beginning, the *undōkai* developed a historicity that incorporated the form of competitive meetings as well as the opportunity for general recreation of the local communities. And especially in urban areas like the town of the Hanaguri Elementary School with its rapid urbanising, a community based *undōkai* is of great importance. (Nagase 1981:25)

In order to put more emphasis on the children and to give the children more responsibility, the student assembly as part of the overall organisational structure of the school was to be put more in the spotlight of the sports day (25). Also, it is important to take the requests and wishes of the children more seriously. Often they have been denied with reasons like “the plan for the *undōkai* was finished so late, so we have not time ...” or “Could the children achieve these aims? No, they

are just elementary school children, so it's not possible" (25). In order to achieve the aforementioned points, the teachers around Nagase developed four principles for the *undōkai* in 1977:

1. The Sports Day is based on both historical and contemporary meaning. Pupils and their parents act together to create a fun Sports Day, and the ties with the local community will be deepened.
2. To make the *undōkai* a success, the autonomy of the pupils should be strengthened.
3. Through the *undōkai*, it should be emphasised how important it is for the children to get exercise.
4. The pupils should understand the importance of a fair spirit through reglemented group activities (26).

These principles were put into action by creating a *jikkō iinkai* that also included students, which was at the centre of the organisational and operational activities. They also established class assemblies about the Sports Day, where students could make requests. Finally they organised class PTAs, in order to push the concerns of the parents and the community (Nagase 1981:26).

At the Hanaguri Elementary School, much like at the Konan Junior High, the children were placed at the centre of the preparations by the creation of an organisational framework in the form of the *jikkō iinkai*. But Nagase also stressed the importance of the incorporation of the community. This is interesting on two accounts. First, because of the urban surrounding of the *danchi*-town, no "traditional" village community exists. Then again, Nagase, who is clearly conscious of the role the *undōkai* played regarding village festivities, the emphasis on this communal elements suggest that one aim of the Hanaguri *undōkai* was also the fostering of a communal spirit with the school at its centre. Second, the *undōkai* was actively used to counter uprising nationalistic tendencies, by replacing rationalistic symbols like the *Hinomaru* and the *Kimigayo* with different ones like the school flag, or the *undōkai* song. Therefore it was used as a means to act against governmental discourses during that time.

3.3 Summary: The Invention of the Sports Day and its Changing Meaning

The aim of this chapter was to give a general overview of the developments of schooling in Japan and to describe the creation and changing as well as ambiguous nature of the Sports Day. The Sports Day was established in mid-Meiji Japan, and its introduction followed the model explained earlier (see 2.3 Ritual Change). The *undōkai* was the result of a complex process: On the one hand, the Meiji government as a disciplining power tried to regulate time and body of its citizens using institutional tools like a new calendar or modern schooling. They established a new set of rites, which lacked emotional affection needed by the people in order to accept them. After years of struggle and refinement, a new set of school rites emerged, which also started to mediate between nationalistic state rituals and local *matsuri*. But it also led to the conflicting demands of nation and community, which build a form of ambiguity that is part of all *undōkai*.

By the Taishō era, the basic structure of the Sports Day was finally established throughout Japan. It was an event practiced by each school on their school grounds. It became a performance, with its own stage and audience. The basic form and structure of the Sports Day would not be altered from that time on, but new socio-political realities would influence the content on a symbolic basis. During the early Shōwa era for example, the Sports Day reflected the general ultranationalistic discourse of the time, by emphasising nationalistic symbols during the ceremonies, renaming or replacing activities with more “appropriate” ones and focusing more on militaristic *taisō* exercises. The end of the Second World War marked a major change in Japanese education and all Rescript based rituals were ordered to stop (Okano/Tsuchiya 1999:33), the Sports Day continued to be practiced. In the official discourse on education by the Ministry of Education, the Sports Day was considered as “special activities” (*tokubetsu katsudō*) and therefore part of a process of student guidance (*shidō*) and therefore the moral education of the children. The Ministry’s conception of guidance was defined in the Course of Study and its revisions (see Table 4).

Year	Area	Characteristics of Revision
1951	Teaching Subjects Extra-curricular activities	Enrichment of individual lives and development of the abilities of the individual to the fullest extent possible.
1958-1962	Teaching subjects Moral education Extra-curricular activities School events	Strengthening moral education. Upgrading basic scholastic abilities and expanding scientific and technological education. Improving aesthetic education. Providing an education which can meet the future careers and personalities of pupils Integrating elementary and lower secondary education
1971/72	Teaching subjects Moral education Special activities	Harmonious and continuous development of pupils as human beings. Development of personality, ability and traits of pupils Careful selection of content of education Flexibility in the number of teaching hours. Improvement of physical education and special educational activities. Integration of elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education.

Table 4: Basic principles of curriculum development and points of revision (MoE 1971:50)

While the first Course of Study emphasised its dedication to peace education by promoting a decentralised, democratic education system, subsequent revisions aimed to undo this development by reintroducing moral education and enforcing a stronger centralised control. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education tried to push the schools to include the national flag and anthem in their school events. Unionised teachers strongly opposed this development, but events like the National Sports Festival of Japan or the 1964 Olympic games had far-reaching influence on the re-affirmation of the national symbols. In this new discourse, a connection between sport and moral education was once more emphasised and the Sports Day once more allowed some opposition to the conservative Ministry of Education. As shown in two examples, teachers used the Sports Day for reaffirmation of post-war educational ideals like democracy, egalitarianism and peace education while opposing nationalistic tendencies by removing symbols like the *Kimigayo* and the *Hinomaru* from the event and emphasising the role of the community. This fits into Okano and Tsuchiyas (1999) general argument that the interpretation of the education discourse in post-war Japan can be seen between two poles:

At one end of the continuum is the position that interprets the so-called 'reverse course' initiatives in the 1950 (e.g. centralization and the reintroduction of moral education and patriotism) as legitimate and appropriate measures to rectify 'excesses' [...] imposed by the Americans, who dominated the Allied Occupation forces; and that such changes were unsuitable for Japan [...]. At the other end of the continuum is the position that vigorously upholds the universal virtue of the initial post-war education reform, and contents that subsequent changes to it have been regressive in term of their perception of democratic education [...]. (50)

In this chapter I discussed the first two "radical changes" in Japanese education. Both, the introduction of modern schooling in Japan during the Meiji era and the new education ideology following the Second World War, cannot be seen as complete breaks with the past, as they allowed some continuities. I decided to end my historical discussion in the 1970/80s, since educational reforms starting in the 1980s led to several changes within the educational framework of Japan. These reforms are the foundation of today's Japanese education and greatly influenced Western views of Japanese schooling (see Tsuneyoshi 2004). Therefore I will discuss the developments of this timeframe in the next chapter as part of the context of the contemporary *undōkai*.

4 Ethnographic Discussion: The Sports Day in Today's Educational Context

In order to show what role the Sports Day plays in the contemporary educational context in Japan, I will give a detailed analysis of the Handa Junior High *undōkai* I described briefly in the prologue of this thesis. In addition I will also use observations and materials from other schools I visited during my research. These schools were the Handa Elementary School (located in the same district as the Handa Junior High) and the Chikokuchūō High School in Fukuoka.

The Handa Junior High is one of four public junior high schools in Kokonoe, a small town located in the centre of Kyūshū. The town mostly consists of farms and rural tourist spots like hot springs and nature parks and has a population of just a bit above 10,000 people. It has six public elementary schools but there are no private schools and no high schools. After graduating from junior high school, most students attend high school in bigger cities like Fukuoka or Oita, or at least want to. All the schools in Kokonoe suffer from declining number of students. This is especially the case with the elementary schools, and there is an ongoing discussion about closing some of the schools.

Before I start with the analyses of the Sports Day, it is necessary to give a quick overview of the contemporary Japanese educational discourse. Therefore I will discuss developments from the 1980s onwards. During this time the foundation was laid in order to reinvent the Japanese school system once more, even though unlike the radical changes in the Meiji era or the post-war years, it was a gradual change lasting over several decades (and is still continuing).

4.1 Japanese Education since the 1980s Nakasone Reforms

In the 1960s and 1970s Japanese education faced, despite all its achievements, new problems. School violence, bullying, non-attendance, and classroom disruption and the notorious university entrance examinations came under the

spotlight and were sensationalized by the media. “Children who cannot keep up with classes” (*ochikobore*) became a popular term as well as a social problem and the Japanese education discourse started to be led by this perspective (Tsuneyoshi 2004:368). So, even though Japan’s educational system allowed Japan’s rise to one of the world’s economic superpowers after the Second World War, it also became the object of heavy criticism during the 1970s and 1980s. This criticism was based on the assumption that Japanese education was too restrictive, lacked the room for creativity and had no international perspective. Combined with other important factors like the new demographic reality (e.g., the radical decrease in birth rate) this led to the initiation of the National Council on Educational Reforms (*ringi kyōiku shingikai*) by Prime Minister Nakasone in the mid 1980s (Burnett and Wada 2007:4-5). This was the starting point for education reforms which took decades, and are still going on, slowly transforming even the most basic elements of Japanese post-war education like the single track 6-3-3 system or its egalitarian character.

Nakasone even criticised the heart of Japanese post-war education, the Fundamental Law of Education. He argued that even though it is a “very good thing and contains many excellent points,” and that it was “appropriate when it was created,” it was not appropriate in the current context. Elements like history, community, home and nation were not incorporated, instead it emphasised elements like independence, individualism, friendship and peace (Hood 2001:100)

In 2006, the Fundamental Law of Education was finally revised. One of the major changes was the inclusion of patriotism as an aim of education. The Law states that education should “nurture a tendency to love one’s country and value its culture and tradition” (MEXT 2006:3) and the terms “home” (*kyōdo*) and “community spirit” (*kōkyō no seishin*) were included on several occasions. According to Hood, the emphasis on the community was part of Nakasone’s regional revitalisation policy and he “hoped that local boards of education could be given more opportunity for local innovation through a reduction in centralised control, while maintaining certain national standards.” Even though the Japanese Education system is in its nature centralised, it is wrong to assume that there are no differences between the various regions. These differences will increase even

more due to “regional revitalisation,” as “boards of education are encouraged to react according to the demands of their own area rather than simply implementing directives from the central administration, which left them with little ability to innovate in the past” (Hood 2001:122). Hood concludes that although “the picture of a uniform education system was never entirely accurate, it seems certain that in the future there will be even greater flexibility and the regional differences will be increased and become more apparent” (Hood 2001:123). Moral education may also be seen to have a close connection with the role of local communities and traditions in general. Even before the reforms, the link between school and local communities was quite strong with institutions like the PTA and was further increased by the school district system⁷ (Hood 2001:119). The Council tried to strengthen the bond between schools and communities by several measures:

One way [...] has been the greater accessibility to school facilities for members of the community [...]. Rinkyōshin [= *ringi kyōiku shingikai*] also hoped that the community could become more involved in school education, through the use of community members as part-time instructors, particularly in sports, science and in community and regional history. (Hood 2001: 122)

Hood argues that it is easy for outsiders to quickly become suspicious of moral education and seeing it as ideological indoctrination. But he also states that people who were able to experience the content of these moral education have the tendency to be “favourable in their judgement, because they never came across programs with political content, but rather programs that focused on fundamental matters as the value of life, the foolishness of fighting, the importance of friendship, and problems of old people.” Furthermore these lessons and the content they represent were reinforced by other school activities. These included various themes such as “importance of order, regularity, co-operation, thoughtfulness, participation, manners, endurance, hard work and high aspirations, freedom, justice, rights, duties, trust, the individual's place in groups such as the family, school, nation and the world; harmony with and appreciation of nature; and the need for rational and scientific attitudes towards human life” (Hood 2001:81-82).

⁷ Every child has to visit the elementary school within each district.

A result of the educational reforms was what Tsuneyoshi (2004) calls “low-pressure education” (the Japanese term for this concept was *yutori*). With this,

the Ministry encouraged the new scholastic views of *ability* (*shin gakuryokukan*), which was the key term for the 1989 reforms. The new abilities emphasized such aspects as *child-initiated motivation, thinking skills, and the child's interest*. [...]. Western scholars have praised Japanese math for their problem-solving and child-initiated approach, whereby the teacher poses a problem, the children discover the concepts behind it, often in a hands-on situation, sometimes using cooperative learning. This pattern, what is now referred to as the typical Japanese pattern [...] is partially a product of this era. (Tsuneyoshi 2004:368-369)

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education now emphasised education according to individual character and abilities. Reflecting Nakasone's beliefs, that there is too much quality and not enough individuality, abilities like thinking, judging and action for oneself are necessary. In other word, “priority must be placed on the promotion of education based on a new concept of scholastic ability” (Hood 2001:132-133). In the end, more emphasis is placed on “according to one's ability” than “equality”:

“[...] so-called individually tailored teaching (*shujyukudo*), ability grouping Japanese style, is a national agenda, and various primary and secondary schools have been designated by the Ministry of Education to focus on the strategy. In a Ministry survey of primary and secondary schools nationwide, at both the primary and lower secondary school levels, the majority of public schools had adopted ability grouping in some form, although many schools bring in an egalitarian element, such as letting the child the instructional level.” (Tsuneyoshi 2004:366)

Many critics of Japanese education felt that a fully egalitarian approach “tended to ignore the aspirations of those who have proceeded with greater ease, and it also compounds the problems for those falling behind as the amount they have to catch up with continues to increase” (Hood 2001:132). So, even the internationally appraised egalitarian approach to Japanese elementary education was no longer the case, even though in the foreign perception it was still one of the more prominent images of Japanese education and even promoted in fairly recent publications (Tsuneyoshi 2004:366). This relationship between tracking (education according to ones abilities) and an egalitarian approach to schooling is

probably the most interesting aspect of the recent developments. But it is not the only image of Japanese education that will have to be revised abroad. The “examination hell” is another one. The Japanese sociologist Kiriya argues that the pressures of the exams may not have been that extreme in the first place, but that they also have significantly decreased. Reasons for this can be seen in the demographic change, and also the low pressure education, which led to the dropping of required subjects of the entrance examinations. More so, surveys showed that Japanese students are studying fewer hours than ever, even compared to Western students (see Tsuneyoshi 2004).

Japanese education is regarded as aiming to the whole person education that aims to get a balance between mental intellectual, moral and physical development. It is not only a means of teaching knowledge and skills, but also to develop spirit (*kokoro*) and “it is because of this that Monbushō’s emphasis on further development of *kokoro* in the curriculum reforms [...] caused a certain degree of surprise amongst educationalist in other countries, while it was seen as a natural move by ‘virtually all Japanese’” (Hood 2001:81). In Japan school is not simply a place where knowledge is passed on; it is where *rippa na ningen* (admirable human beings) or “well-rounded responsible members of society” are produced. This ideal is related to the philosophy of “whole-person-education,” which is not just the cramming of knowledge but the creation of individuals equipped with social skills (Kuwayama 1996). In Japan *chiteki* (intelligent) is a positive and desirable attribute, but it often carries negative meanings like *tsumetai* (cold, inhumane). Another expression of intelligence – *atama ga ii* means being clever, but it can mean being dishonest, cunning, and untrustworthy, depending on the context. Therefore, parents as well as teacher are concerned by brilliant but immature students. They say things like “being intelligent is not enough” (*atama ga ii dake ja dame*); cognitive skills represent only one kind of intelligence (Kuwayama 1996:130).

This “holistic” view on education can be seen primarily at Japanese primary schools, which usually pay much attention on personal development by following an experiential approach to learning. This is contrasted by a text-centred lecture format which is characteristic of high schools. Junior high schools can be regarded as a transition between both extremes, as they “combine a lecture

format for academic instruction with a broad range of 'non-academic' activities that emphasize the development of the 'whole' person." Teachers are now for the first time subject specialists, and a division between academic and non-academic activities is reinforced: "Middle school retains the elementary school emphasis on the whole person but also puts increasing emphasis on an efficient teacher-centred approach to instruction geared to future entrance exams" (Fukuzawa 1996:239). To promote student involvement and to create a social order middle schools use a different approach than elementary schools. Instead of incorporating non-academic content into academic classes, the two things are clearly separated. Japanese middle schools students spend more time on non-academic activities than American ones. They are required to join a "weekly club", or attend long homeroom periods as part of their schedule and other activities,

like field trips, ceremonies, special events, and preparation time for special events pepper the school calendar with so many breaks from regular classes that there are few weeks when classes are not cut to accommodate some special activity. Along with extra-curricular clubs, these special activities are designed to increase student participation and sense of belonging to the school. [...] The non-academic side of middle school also includes the concept of life style guidance (*seikatsu shido*). (Fukuzawa 1996:245)

Kuwayama (1996) sees *tokubetsu katsudō* as distinctive features of Japanese primary and secondary education. They focus on four areas: the homeroom, the student association, clubs, and the school. The last category is called *gakkō gyōji* (school activities) and is further divided into five categories:

1. rituals (e.g., entrance and graduation ceremonies);
2. cultural events (e.g. cultural festivals, concerts, movies, art exhibitions, special lectures);
3. safety, health care, and physique (e.g. traffic safety guidance, emergency training, health checkups, sports days, athletic tournaments);
4. travel and group stay (e.g. field trips, excursions, outdoor activities); and
5. labour and service (e.g. campus beautification, trips to local workplaces, voluntary community service) (112).

The most discussed element of Japanese childhood socialisation is probably group life (*shūdan seikatsu*). Lauren Kotloff explains in her article, how Japanese

preschool experience socialises children to *shūdan seikatsu* and teaches them to identify themselves with the group and how to work toward collective goals by doing daily classroom activities (1996: 66). Through this, the children create a “strong emotional bond and [their] sense of collective identity [...] toward their group motivate the desire to work for the sake of the group.” They create a collective identity and the group members adopt the goals of the group as their own and feel a sense of personal pride with the achievement of their collective goals (Kotloff 1996:67). The group is a basic principle of organisation in all schools, but even more so in elementary schools, where “everything is easier [...], because each group provides order” (Lewis 1995:85). Cave (2007) states that “there is no doubt that Japan’s primary schools have played a key role as places where children have learned the cooperation and the empathy that are central to the interdependent self” (43). Groups do not only help the socialization of the children, but also encourage cooperative learning, and so create an environment where children discover their strengths and help each other with their weaknesses (Lewis 1995:81). Being part of a group is seen as “natural, pleasurable, and even essential to being fully human” (Lewis 1995:90), at least by Japanese elementary teachers. This is hardly surprising, as cooperative learning does have a long history in Japan. The earliest articles on this subject were published in the Taishō period (Lewis 1995:94).

Japanese teachers regard groups and the basic skills for inner group interaction as something that has to be taught (Lewis 1995:90). Learning how to function as a group does not just start in elementary school, but is an important part of pre-school education (see Tobin et al. 1989, Ben-Ari 1997, Lewis 1995). It is a long lasting process, from pre-schools, where children experience exuberant freedom as well as slowly cooperation and self-control (Cave 2007:33). In elementary schools, groups are the basis of the social organization and there is also much emphasis on the healthy, active (*genki*) child. In junior high schools, more emphasis is laid on self discipline, as the “unambiguous childhood” of the elementary school is now left behind (Cave 2007:192). Even though the focus starts to shift towards the upcoming entrance examinations, the group aspect is still highly regarded and expressed in school events as well as in extracurricular activities such as sport clubs. These club activities are mandatory in most public

junior high schools (LeTendre 2000:149). High school life can be seen as a continuation of these trends (see Rohlen 1983).

The absence or the decrease of social interaction is often seen as the reason for behavioural problems of children (Cave 2007:15) and thereby the focus on groups as the basic means of classroom organization can also be dangerous. Lois Peak (1989) describes problems such as hyperactivity, hitting, unwillingness to attend school or group activities as the by-products of the radical changes that children experience during their first steps in *shūdan seikatsu* (40-63). Intergroup competition might occur, causing less successful groups to lose their motivation or children would start to dislike less able children (Lewis 1995:88-89). Also in junior high schools there is a shift towards emphasis on social control through peer pressure; being part of a hierarchy is now more important than being part in lively groups where “mutuality and communality are the overarching concerns” (Cave 2007:35). This discussion and the resulting juvenile delinquency led to an anew discussion about the importance of moral education. Traditionalist voices within the Japanese education discourse argued that the great amount of freedom and independence of Japanese children led to a neglect of social responsibilities and therefore schools should emphasise the children’s “whole-person”, that become members of society, who will know how to behave appropriately (Hood 2001:80).

4.2 Preparing the Sports Day

While the Sports Day itself is held during September each year, the preparations start several months earlier. I believe the training period is the most important time for the socialisation aspect of the Sports Day. Therefore I will discuss the organisational aspect and training methods, and how they relate to the above mentioned characteristics of Japanese education.

4.2.1 Organisation and Planning

In June 2009, the teacher responsible for that year's Sports Day – a third year homeroom teacher – created the Guidelines for the Execution of the Handa Junior High Sports Day (*handachū jisshi hyōryō*). This guideline provides a basic outline about the aims, the organisation and the timeframe until the event. It provides useful information about the allocation of rights and duties as well as several other aspects regarding the planning process of the Sports Day.

The *handachū jisshi hyōryō* starts by giving four explicit aims of the Sports Day:

1. to nurture and improve bodily strength and health, but also to accumulate a set of sporting activities (*taiiku katsudō*) as well as cultural activities (*bunka katsudō*);
2. to learn the importance, and the positive aspects of groups, and to develop independent and practical attitudes by achieving things together and deepening one's belonging and self-realization as part of the group;
3. the whole school (the students) is involved in the preparation and the operation of the Sports Day. During the whole process of preparation the student body and the Sports Day Planning Committee (*taiikusai jikkō iinkai*) are at the centre of the process (this aids the development of the leaders);
4. to foster the cooperation with the local community and to try to create a place for improvement of the cultivation of the whole community.

Besides these aims, the guideline also describes a set of fundamental objectives for the Sports Day and defines the relationship between the teachers and the students (especially the *jikkō iinkai*) in more detail. The plan as well as the general direction was decided by the teacher conference, but more detailed aspects of the planning and administration of the Sports Day were to be decided and carried out by the students themselves. However teachers should give the students an appropriate amount of guidance during the process. To illustrate these abstract guidelines, the creation of the final program for the Sports Day, is a good example. The teachers provided the following outline:

Group activities	Whole school	Opening and closing ceremony; warm-up, folk dance, whole-school-relay; <i>cheering</i> competition; “Eye of the Taifun” competition
	Grades separated	One competition involving the parents and students, and one competition just involving the students for each year
	Boys/girls separated	Two activities
Sport activities	Whole team relay	
PTA activities	Two activities (the year before there were three activities done by the PTA, but the parents suggested that two are enough)	

Table 5: Basic activity plan provided by the *handachū jisshi hyōryō*

While this plan gives a basic outline for the program of the Sports Day, it does leave out several blank spots for the *jikkō iinkai* to fill out, as well to create an ordered timetable for the Sports Day. These parts were decided during the Committee meetings during July. The leader of the *jikkō iinkai* described these meetings to me as quite as rather short and easy. He told me that they decided to “do it basically like the year before,” and argued that as the previous year’s Sport Day was considered as a success by everyone, they felt they should show that they were able to achieve the same, and that the activities they decided on were an important part of the Sports Day.

The *taiikusai jikkō iinkai* as well as the *ōendan* (cheering group) were established in June after the Guidelines for the *undōkai* were approved by the teacher conference. The planning committee was formed by a representative by each class (in this case the committee included six members), who were previously voted in a homeroom-session by their classmates. The committee itself also voted for a president, a position usually filled out by a third year student.

Western books of Japanese school anthropology often describe the Sports Day as run by children with little hardly involvement from adults (Benjamin 1997, Conduit/Conduit 1996). I would argue that this is not the case, at least not in elementary schools and junior high schools. Teachers play a vital role during the planning and organisation of the event. I also noticed a lot of anxiety during the weeks before the event in teachers directly involved in the Sports Day. Especially the homeroom teacher of the sixth grade at the Handa Elementary School was put under a lot of pressure. It was the first time he was responsible for the Sports Day since he joined the teaching staff and so he saw himself under constant observation from the children’s parents and the other teachers.

When we take a closer look at the organisational structure of the Sports Day we can see a dual structure of teacher positions and student positions (see Table 6). The general planning and organisation was headed by the teachers planning committee, which consists of the supervisor to the student body, the head of the PE department and the student *taiikusai jikkō iinkai*. The next step down the organisational ladder consisted of an extended *jikkō iinkai* and basically the whole teaching staff: Each teacher is responsible for a specific activity (e.g., three legged race competition, dance, etc.) and had to work with the team leaders during the training periods. Finally, there was an executive board, which was responsible for administrative and executive elements of the Sports Day, like broadcasting, the scoreboard, etc. These positions were filled out voluntarily by students and they were supported by their homeroom teachers. But while in students tend to see them as more important, it was the teachers' side which created the main guidelines for the *undōkai* and teachers were involved in every aspect of the planning activities. For example, when discussing the roles and hierarchy of the organisational side of the Sports Day, the homeroom teacher of the third class said the following:

I am responsible for the general plan of the *undōkai*. That is because I am the homeroom teacher of the third class [and therefore responsible for student body activities]. Other teachers were responsible for different competitions or games. The homeroom teachers from other classes do also hold important positions, but I am the one responsible for everything.

<i>Position</i>		<i>Members</i>	<i>Position</i>		<i>Members</i>
Teacher Positions	Planning committee	Student assembly supervisor & PE department	Student Positions	Taiikusai jikkō iinkai	Group of the student body
	Teacher conference	All teaching staff		Extended jikkō iinkai	Jikkō iinkai Team leader/vice leader Ōendan leader /vice leader
	School year assembly	Homeroom teachers		Executive Board	Students with executive positions

Table 6: Organisational structure of the *undōkai* in Handa Junior High

According to LeTendre (1994), this is characteristic for Japanese Junior High schools, which aim is to socialise children to function inside the hierarchical order of Japanese society. He argues that

By rotating through many positions, teachers learn the entire working of the school after five to eight years and can thus instruct new teachers as well as students in how to conduct their duties. Similarly students will have rotated through most of the positions, except for the various president positions, by the end of their three years. A major portion of a child's time in middle school is devoted to learning how to work in highly organized, hierarchical patterns of work. (273)

In this sense, teachers act as experienced “senior members,” which are more experienced in the patterns and dynamics of society than the “junior members” (LeTendre 1994:278). The mirrored structure allows each student to have a specific “senior member,” who they can refer to and learn from. In this sense, teacher involvement in the planning and organisational aspects of the Sports Day is not only important but also crucial for the socialisation process.

Teacher Positions		Student Positions	
Principal		Student Body President	
Vice Principal		Student Body Vice-Presidents	
Head of Curriculum Affairs Section			
Head of Student Guidance Section			
Grade Committee Chairs	Ninth Eight Seventh	Class Presidents	Ninth Eight Seventh
Heads of Other Sections and Academic Department Chairs		Heads of Student Committees	
Teacher without Homeroom Duties and Non-Teaching Staff		Member of various Student Committees	

Table 7: Hierarchy of teacher and student positions in Japanese middle schools (LeTendre 1994:274)

I see the Sports Day as another example where this parallel organisational structure helps the students to learn what Le Tendre (1994) describes as “techniques for self-management (i.e. peer management) by direct experience with and connection to the self-governance of the school” and therefore it is important that

every aspect of the students lives [...] is supervised and managed by some committee or section. Crucial to this division of labour is the fact that the entire school is managed by teachers and students, with teachers occupying the guiding

or managing roles [...]. Moreover, senior students are expected to instruct junior students in the correct way to carry out their tasks. (273)

4.2.2 Learning the Ritual

The two weeks leading up to the Sports Day were quite demanding for everybody involved. We just have to take a look at the school curriculum for the weeks before the Sports Day (see Table 8) in order to see how much time and effort was involved. About half of the school day is used for Sports Day practice in one form or another. During this period the children wear their gym outfit the whole day.

		Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4		Unit 5	Unit 6	
2.9.	1 Year	Class	Training	Class	Class		Boys/Girls Training	Group-Training	Jikkōiin/ Ōendan
	2 Year	Class	Class	Training	Class				
	3 Year	Class	Class	Class	Training				
2.9.	1 Year	Class	General Rehearsal				Group- Training		Jikkōiin/ Ōendan
	2 Year	Class							
	3 Year	Class							
4.9.	1 Year	Class	Class	Class	Training		Boys/Girls Training	Group-Training	Jikkōiin/ Ōendan
	2 Year	Class	Training	Class	Class				
	3 Year	Class	Class	Training	Class				

Table 8: Handa Junior High curriculum during the Sports Day preparations

The training sessions were usually helmed by the children themselves. This took a lot of coordination effort, since each team was further divided into different subgroups. Training could involve a specific grade, boys and girls separated or groups specific for different competitions. Therefore students do not only belong to one specific group during the time but to many groups and may held different positions within them. Many children also hold an administrative position (e.g., being on the broadcasting team or being responsible for the scoreboard), so as well as being able to work in a group, the ability to switch between the groups is of great importance. For example, each member of the *jikkō iinkai* also belonged to the red or white team, but during the team training sessions they are also expected to judge the performance of the teams.

Another interesting example is the gender aspect of the *undōkai*. Manzenreiter (2007b) shows that compulsory schooling is an effective means of producing gender roles. Especially “physical education (PE) is a standard element of the curriculum for the sound and healthy raising of pupils. Yet it also reproduces social inequality based on gender differences” (123). By analysing the content of the Course of Study for PE as well as club activities for secondary schools (*bukatsudō*) he concludes that “[class] room lessons and self-administered club activities function as sites for the gendered display of hegemonic forms of both femininities and masculinities” (140). One might assume that the Sports Day may be another element in this construction of gender identities, especially since the main teams are also divided into boys/girls for several activities and training sessions (see Table 8). I do not believe this is the case, at least not at the *undōkai* at Handa Elementary and Handa Junior High. At both school Sport Days, there were no distinctive “female” or “male” roles to be filled out. They wear the same outfits, participated in the same activities, and were equally involved in organisational activities. While the leader of the red team was a third year boy, the leader of the red team’s *ōendan* was a third year girl, also wearing the same black uniform as the other members of the group.

One of the reasons for the indifferentiation regarding gender roles is the young age of the children in elementary school. Generally at this age they have PE together. It’s in the third and fourth year when “[teachers] are expected to pay attention to the awakening awareness of sexual differences” (Manzenreiter 2007b:129). It seems that the application of gender roles becomes stronger the higher up children climb in the educational system. Manzenreiter (2007b) shares this view by arguing that sports club attendance beginning in secondary schooling “clearly show the tension between dominant and subordinate masculinities and femininities and that these are played out through the acceptance and refusal of different forms of sport activities” (141).

While the Sports Days at both schools in Handa were pretty much gender neutral, the Sports Day at the Chikushichūō High School in Fukuoka provided a different image. The cheering performances had both female and male cheering groups performing. The female *ōendan* members all sported cheerleader outfits complete with pompoms and performed dance choreographies to pop music. The

boys on the other hand wear traditional black and white *ōen*-uniforms and their performances evoked rather martial arts displays than cheerleading performances. Furthermore instead of pop music they were only accompanied by Taiko drums and their own shouts (*kiai*).



Picture 9: Girls/boys *ōen* performances at Chikushichūō High School

Seeing that the division into girl/boy subgroups does not really lead to an actual display of gender role during the event (at least not in elementary and junior high schools), I believe that this division is just a means of creating another set of groups for the Sports Day, much like the building of groups according to school year or team colour. The ability to “switch” between social roles and group contexts is an important aspect of childhood socialisation in Japan. According to Peak (1989), this form of cultural behaviour is one product of Japanese socialisation. It can be seen as a continuation of the distinction between home and the outside world, reflecting the Japanese concepts of *uchi* and *soto*. The school, therefore, is responsible for the children’s socialisation to the *soto* realm (with its group-oriented organisation, which is fundamentally different from the social environment at home) (36-37). But the socialisation in the *shūdan* environment, the school, should not be reflected in the children’s behaviour at home, rather they should learn to switch between the two social codes (Peak 1989:39).

As discussed earlier, learning in ritual happens by repetition of bodily practices and mimicry. In that respect it can be seen as familiar to the traditional learning of classical Japanese art. Whether it is learning water-colour painting or martial arts, it “is about copying, [...] mimicry and suffering together, learning through performative experience and action” (Köpping 2006:146). Peter Köpping

(2006:147) further argues in his article about dance rituals in rural Japan that “the dance performances depend largely on the notion of mutual learning in process, what we might label rehearsal, becoming the central feature of ritual practice”, and it is in this rehearsal practice where the solidarity among the village community is created. This rehearsal practice is where I see the main social-generative power of the Sports Day. A sixth year student describes his experiences at the Sports Day as the following:

We experienced hardship and learned endurance [...] at the sports day in autumn. We tried our hardest and managed to achieve great success making human pyramids and in coming third for the Fighting Spirit Prize. Everyone gave all they had in the cheering. [...] We became more than friends, we became comrades (*nakama*). (Cave 2007:62)

It is the constant training and shared hardship several weeks prior to the Sports Day that helped the children to achieve a goal (for example the human pyramid) through hard practice. They learn the “importance of interdependence and cooperation in the most physical form” (Cave 2007:176). A young teacher told me something similar. She argued that it is important that children “really work hard and sweat together”, only so “important memories” could be created. If the Sports Day would “just be for fun,” it would not be able to bring the children together

During the preparation time, students who are part of the organisational team, usually come home late. As shown in the curriculum above, at the end of each and every school day, another meeting of all the organisational bodies of the Sports Day is held. These meetings usually lasted about one hour and while some time was used to discuss the next day’s schedule, most of the time was used to reflect on the day’s training sessions and how to improve on them. According to Lewis (1995), reflection is one of the main means to teach children how to act in and as a group. Children are constantly asked to reflect on their own role in the Sports Day. Lewis also gives us an interesting example: When the elementary school teacher asked the children what is most important during the Sports Day, many children gave answers like “run as fast as possible” or “to give one’s best”. But the answer that received the most appreciation from the teacher was “to be able to stand still during the opening and closing ceremony”. The child thought about its weaknesses and how to overcome them to make the Sports Day a success for everyone (40-42).

A teacher at Handa Junior High school explained to me that the Sports Day has another socialisation aim. It should help to improve the general behaviour of the children, help them to improve their daily self-management, e.g. to be on time and not to forget things. This improvement should also be carried over to academic classes. In this sense, the *undōkai* can also be seen as part of a more general life-style guidance (*seikatsu shidō*), which is an integral part of Japanese whole-person education. According to Fukuzawa (1996), *seikatsu shidō* encompasses classroom management or disciplinary activities to achieve the goals of healthy, social, emotional and physical development, optimal academic performance and early detection and prevention of discipline problems. This is especially true for junior high schools, where total reliance on lecturing style alienates many students who cannot succeed in the traditional classroom setting. In fact, “by several indices the middle school is the most problematic level of Japanese schooling”. Following the Japanese White Book on Youth, the highest rates of problems like, school violence, bullying and school refusal are during middle school. Even though these problems seem quite tame compared to drug problems or violence in American schools, they are taken quite seriously by Japanese educators (LeTendre 1994:245-246).

LeTendre (1994) argues that guidance “contains an idealized model of the teaching and learning process that is central to Japanese secondary education [...] (261).”

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|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discipline is inseparable from academic instructions ▪ The effectiveness of control rests on warm interpersonal relations between students and teachers ▪ Affection alone is not enough, school can and should engineer a social environment organized to support school goals. ▪ Teachers should give all students toward one explicit ideal of student behaviour ▪ The goals of both school and home – the success of the child – are identical, and require home-school cooperation |
|--|

Table 9: Five basic assumption about *seikatsu shidō* by Fukuzawa 1996:246

Especially interesting is Fukuzawa's fourth assumption, because

teacher used a limited set of appeals for good behaviour. They used the term *chugakuseirashii* as a norm defining appropriate behaviour; stressed the tendency

of uncorrected, minor problem to avoid inconvenience to others; stressed the tendency of uncorrected, minor problem to avoid inconvenience to others; played up the tendency of society to judge individuals by their group affiliation and groups by the behaviour of individuals; and played on the personal bonds they develop with students. (Fukuzawa 1996:252)

4.3 Performing the Sports Day

The Sports Day at Handa Junior High was held on the second Sunday in September. On this occasion, all the accomplishments and hard work of the children would be presented to their family and friends. The official timetable (see Table 10) states that the event was to begin at nine o'clock in the morning, having a one hour lunch break at twelve o'clock, and finally be finished at three o'clock in the afternoon. The fact that they were able to keep in time, even though many games required quite complex preparations and some competitions had more of an open ended character to them, and we were able to begin the lunch break only a few minutes after twelve o'clock shows how well organised the event was and how professionally all were completing their tasks. It seems remarkable, but we also have to keep in mind that every child who attends Japanese compulsory education experiences the *undōkai* at least nine times, but much likely more often. Therefore I argue that the ritualised form of the event helps the learning of cultural behaviour that is part of the aims of the *undōkai*.

Morning			Afternoon		
Ceremony	Opening	School	Ōen	Oen competition	School
Taisō	Stretching	School	Group	Bōtaoshi	Boys
Ōen	Whole school ōen	School	Group	Race	2 Grade
Ōen	Ōen competition	School	Group	Game	3 G/P
Single	Race	1 Grade	Group	Game	Girls
Group	Game	2 G/P	Dance	School Dance	School
Singe	Race	3 Grade	Ōen	Oen Competition	School
Group	Game	Boys	Relay	Race	School
Group	Viva! Taiya	Girls	Dance	Dance	PTA
Group	Game	1 G/P	Group	Eye of the Taifun	School
Group	Three legged race	3 G/P	Dance	Folkdance	School
Group	Race	PTA	Ceremony	Closing	School
Group	Tug-of-war	School			
Group	Tug-of-war	PTA			
	<i>PTA Greeting</i>				
Relay	Whole-school-relay	School			

Table 10: Final schedule of the Handa Junior High Sports Day

In the following chapter I will discuss three dominant discourses of the Sports Day. The first concerns ambiguity towards nation and local communities. The second is about the role of groups and the competition between these groups. The third discourse is maybe the most interesting and complex regarding the Sports Day and Japanese education in general: the display of individuality at the Sports Day.

4.3.1 Nation and Community

The Sports Day began with an opening ceremony at Handa Junior High which resembles closely the “child-centred” approach described earlier (see 3.2.3 The Child Centred and Community Based Sports Day). During the entire ceremony I could not help but notice the absence of the national flag and anthem. To be more precisely, the *Hinomaru* was there, but only as part of the *mankokuki* decoration of the sports ground, and was not put in a special position, like it was common since the Taishō-era. This may seem a bit strange because official Ministry of Education regulations require the use of *Hinomaru* and *Kimigayo* at all official school ceremonies, and general statistics indicate that the national symbols are used practically everywhere (Hood 2001:71-72). Hood states that these statistics do not say much about how these symbols were used during the events. For example the *Kimigayo* could only be played briefly without words, or the *Hinomaru* may be hidden out of sight due to local opposition (Hood 2001:75). There are even cases where the *Hinomaru* was only raised in the principal’s office (Hood 2001:193). So to speak, at the Handa Junior High *undōkai*, the national flag was hidden in plain sight. It was there, clearly visible to everyone, but at the same time it was hidden or absorbed by dozens of other flags.

In total contrast to this is another school’s Sports Day. At the Chikushichūō High School in Fukuoka, the very first point of the opening ceremony (as well as the last one in the closing ceremony) was dedicated to the national flag. There were three flagpoles at different heights next to the school’s sports ground. The *Hinomaru* was raised on the central and tallest pole, on the second tallest the

prefectural flag, and at the lowest the school flag. Furthermore, while at Handa Junior High the first speech was held by a student, the first and only speech of the opening ceremony at Chikushichūō High was held by the school's principal, even though they state on their website that the centre of their Sports Day ought to be their third year students to display their leadership skills.

Handa Junior High	Chikushichūō High School
Opening words	Official announcement
School hymn	Raising of national/prefectural/school flag
Return last year's victory trophy	Return last year's victory trophy
Speech of the student body representative	Speech by the principal
Speech of the principal	Oath of sportsmanship
Safety instructions	Safety instructions
Explanation of point allocation rules	
Oath of sportsmanship	
Closing words	

Table 11: Undōkai opening ceremony at Handa Junior High and Chikushichūō High School

The Chikushichūō High School is a school that prides itself with its long history and emphasis on traditions (Chikushichūō Kōtōgakō 2010:1), so it may be reasonable to think that this conservative attitude is also reflected by its Sports Day. I talked to one of the school's teachers, who grew up in New York during the 1970s and considered himself as a "leftist and child of the Beat Generation," during the course of the sports day he became more and more upset about the nature of the event, stating that it restricted the students minds and creativity, and that he thought that it was a bad thing, but as long the school's culture didn't change, the *undōkai* wouldn't change.

There was hardly any direct influence of the MEXT regarding the Sports Day at the Handa schools. When I asked the teachers whether they were having specific guidelines or requirements about the Sports Day, I always received a negative answer like the following by the teacher responsible for the Handa Junior High:

I really don't know. I have never looked into it. We [the teachers of Handa Junior High] plan the activities of the *taiikusai* based on our own experiences. Therefore when a new teacher comes to our school, he might bring new elements to the Sports Day based on his or her experiences. So the *undōkai* always changes a little bit. [...] The Course of Study only refers to school events (*kyōji*), but not specific events like the *taiikusai* or the *bunkasai* (Culture Festival).

The Sports Day (especially at elementary schools) is an event in which not only the community, but also different generations come together. For older generations a lot of memories and nostalgia is present at the Sports Day. Traditional elements help to allow the older generation to participate in the Sports Day. For example, as soon as the music for the stretching exercise started, many of the parents and grandparents knew what to do: they found themselves some free space and joined in the exercises. At the Handa Elementary School for example, dances are an important means of incorporating audiences and creating a sense of tradition. A sixth year homeroom teacher of Handa Elementary School told me:

Here at Handa Elementary, [...] we always perform a *bon* dance at the *undōkai*. It is something that not only the parents know but also the grandparents. So everybody can join in and dance together.

Another similar example was the folk dance at the Handa Junior High School. Watching the more or less enthusiastic performance of the pupils, I found myself next to two mothers. One of them remarked how nostalgic (*natsukashii*) this was for her, and asked the other one, if she also remembers the dance from her childhood. Her answer was that of course they had the same thing at her school's *undōkai* and soon they decided, together with other parents and teachers to join the ranks of the dancers.

The sense of community was important at the Sports Day in the Handa district. In a sense it was even more important than the school teams themselves. The official program of the Sports Day included a small map of the sports grounds, on which the tents for the audience were divided into West Handa, East Handa, and Central Handa, referring to geographic areas in Handa.

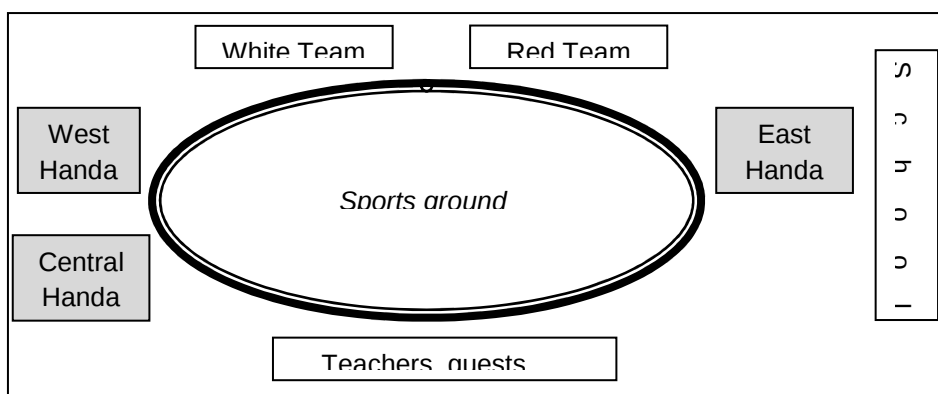


Table 12: Layout of the Handa Junior High undōkai

Each area also got each own colour (east – yellow, west – blue, centre – red, but a different kind from the deep red (*kurenai*) of the red team), which they used for the two PTA competitions. Even though the PTA activities had no direct connection or influence on the final results, they were carried out in a serious manner. Regarding one of the PTA competitions, the tug-of-war, I noted:

While I was watching the Sports Day a middle aged man came up to me and asked me in broken English if I would like to join the centre team for the upcoming PTA tug-of-war. I told him that I was neither parent nor teacher at the school and therefore did not know if it would be acceptable for me to join. He just laughed and said that was no problem. As he tried to write down my name on his list, he suddenly stopped and asked me where I stayed in Handa and if I were here with somebody. When I pointed over to our place under the East-Handa tent and told him that I was with the Nagao family, he stopped writing and started looking around. Just wait a minute, he said and run off to another man. After they talked a bit and then came both back and explained to me, that since I am with a family from the East-Handa block, I could not participate for any other team in the PTA competitions. But they already put me on the list for the East-Handa PTA team, so I could enter the tug-of-war for the right team.

The PTA competitions are not about the school, the children or their teams, they are about the neighbourhoods. It did not matter that I was not a member of the Handa Junior High PTA nor related to any of the students, what mattered was the local area to which I belonged. As I described in the prologue, these were the same people that assembled in the morning to put up the tents together (and took them down after the Sports Day). In other words the PTA tug-of-war was an example to show the neighbourhoods' cooperation in a friendly contest. This

element of incorporation of community was completely missing at the *undōkai* at the Chikushichūō High School, since students came from various places all over the prefecture (and even further away) to attend the school and often were living in boarding facilities. The tents in the Chikushichūō High School's map were all just labelled as "audience" without any further differentiation. As a result there were no activities that involved the PTA (or the families or teachers). In this sense the Chikushichūō High School *undōkai* was truly a "child-centred" Sports Day, but was also lacking communal aspects and therefore missing the families' emotional affection.

4.3.2 Groups

Most activities at the *undōkai* I visited were considered as group activities. These could either been competitions or performances (by the whole school). Most of the games like *kibasen*, *bōtashi*, tug-of-war or *tamairi* have a long history. They were performed since Taishō or early Shōwa era Sports Days. But one important element (with regard to socialisation) of the historical *undōkai* was missing: *taisō* exercises were also almost completely absent from the Handa Junior High *undōkai*. At the opening ceremony, there were *rajio taisō*-style warm-up exercises, but *taisō* in the form of exercising or other military styled activities as well as mass games were absent. Another common form of *taisō* performed at the Sports Day (even though it was not at Handa Junior High), is *kumi taisō* (group *taisō*). Human pyramids were probably the most well known example of *kumi taisō*. With this activity, and other similar activities, children express their interdependence in its most physical form (Cave 2007:176). One of the parents I talked to told me proudly that his high school was well known for their seven level high human pyramid. He even searched his old high school photo album in order to show me what they had accomplished. He also lamented that students today were not capable of doing such high pyramids anymore. He thought they lacked the "samurai spirit" which was missing from contemporary Japanese education. .

In today's Sports Days, cheering (*ōen*) seems to have taken the place of *taisō* exercises. This view is also echoed by a Handa Junior High teacher, who answered my question whether there are differences in the *undōkai* today and his

own school days that much more emphasis is placed on *ōen* activities today. Like *taisō*, they are also group exercises and used by the children to display their spirit. But *ōen* does also give some students the chance to shine by being part (or even better by leading) the groups cheering team (*ōendan*). The members of the *ōendan* are the stars of the Sports Day. In their stylish black uniforms they stand out from the other team members in their PE outfits. The *ōendan* of the teams compete with each other in terms of complexity of their performances and their spirit (as visible by their loud shouts and cheering songs).



Picture 10: White team's *ōen* performance

At Chikushichūō High School the *ōen* competition was certainly the most impressive display. Led by their *ōendan*, the teams (each consisted of over 300 students) performed over ten minute long performances. I noted:

After the lunch break I noticed that there were significantly more people in the audience than before. During the *kibasen* competition, many started putting up photo- and video cameras on tripods. During this time I sat in the area of the teaching staff which was right opposite the teams' set-ups, and therefore it was the place where you had the best view over the action. It was segregated from the audience's area with a rope, a boundary which was respected during the whole Sports Day. But just before the *ōen* competition was about to start, teachers removed the rope and gestured to audience members that they should come closer. Soon, the front of the teacher area was filled with video cameras and photographers. After the competition ended, the people took their photo and video

equipments and returned to their respective places and the boundary between teachers and audience was rebuilt.

In the case of Handa Junior High, *ōen* competition had another important function. They were used to “equalise” the final results. If one team seemed to fall behind in the sports and group competitions the team of judges would give them more points for their *ōen* performance in order to keep their spirit high.

Other than *ōen* performances, the group competitions were considered the highlights of the Sports Day. These competitions include games like *kibasen* and *bōtaoshi* and can be quite exiting. They spread an air of real danger and to be frank, I could not believe such activities were endorsed by schools. The anthropologist Benjamin (1997) shared my feelings when she described *kibasen* at her son’s school *undōkai*:

In this event the forty-five members of each color team divide themselves into groups of five, four of whom put their arms around each others’ shoulders to support a fifth person who sits on their shoulders wearing a paper samurai hat. The point of the game is to protect your own paper hat while trying to capture or dislodge those of the other teams. [...] Several games such as this one looked potentially dangerous to me not like activities that schools would encourage. (99)

According to a handbook for *undōkai* activities, *kibasen* is an event suitable for high school, junior high and the higher classes of elementary school (Ōta/Aoki 2006:213-215). At the Sports Day at Handa Junior High, they did not perform a Horse Battle, simply for the reason that there were not enough students. But I was able to experience *kibasen* at the Sports Day at Chikushichūō High School in Fukuoka. It was an even more dangerous form of the competition, since it was not the aim to capture a paper hat from the enemy but to wrestle him down from his “horse”. A large amount of care was put into its preparation. The performance of this event was so important that at the main rehearsal the Horse Battle was done by playing *janken* (Rock, Paper, and Scissor), just to make sure nobody got injured before the big performance.

With activities such like these, the *undōkai* itself is highly competitive. The points of each team are constantly updated, and a committee is watching over the correct awarding of points. But as soon as the event ends, all sense of competitiveness is gone. At Handa elementary school, the each team met a last

time after the event to congratulate themselves for their effort, and then the teams were suspended. The price cup of the winning team was given back and spent the rest of the year in the entrance hall of the school, surrounded by pictures of the *undōkai*, but without any clear indication which team had won.

4.3.3 Individuality

On the program of the Handa Junior High *undōkai* all events that were marked as individual competitions (*ko*) were running competitions. And even they expressed the children's dedication to their team instead of allowing them showing off individual excellence. The runners were never called by their names, just by their team colours. There was also no progressive narrative, with the winners going on to the next round. Instead the children score points for their team. Even the last place earned some points for the team. One parent told me that during his school time, that was not the case, only the first two or three placed were rewarded, but this was changed, in order that also children who are not fast runners have the feeling of helping the team.



Picture 11: Individual competitions: running

As mentioned above, there is no competition between individual students (at least officially). The only competition is between the teams fighting for points. During *undōkai*, vigorous competition between teams and even between the mothers or fathers of a class is enthusiastically encouraged by the teachers, principals, and spectators watching the races. Tobin et al. (1989) state that the group solidarity felt by the losers is perhaps even more keenly felt than the collective sense of accomplishment of the victors (41). This is an interesting thought and clearly resembles what teachers and also students told me. But it

just does not match the complexity of the situation. Children can be quite sensitive of their own accomplishments as well as failures. The students of Handa Elementary School and Handa Junior High I talked to were often not pleased with their performance in the running competitions (or other games), regardless of their team's performance. During my early literary research, one of the first books about the Sports Day I encountered was *Undōkai de ichiban ni naru hōhō* (How to become the Best at the Sports Day) by Fukashiro Senshi (2004). This book describes a training method that should allow allows children to achieve first place in the running competitions.

Despite of all the emphasis on team and group solidarity, children also use the Sports Day as a stage to present themselves individually. I observed pupils separating from the group while they were waiting on the field for their turn to pose for pictures on several occasions. The display of individual children was generally stronger at the elementary school *undōkai* in my experience. At the beginning of each running competition, the runners were introduced by their names. However during the contest they were just referred to by their team colour. The parents of elementary school children I interviewed all viewed the Sports Day as a chance to view their children's physical and mental growth. At the same time, some of the parents of Junior High or High School students expressed much less eagerness to attend every Sports Day. For example, a mother told me that this year, she will not attend her daughter's High School *undōkai*, because she had already been there last year.



Picture 12: A boy singles himself out and poses for pictures

Several individual students are in the spotlight of the *undōkai* regardless their athletic abilities. These students are the team leaders, the *jikkō iinkai* members, the *ōendan* members, etc. They show leadership skills, act as model students and often show ambition. The leaders of the *jikkō iinkai* have the honour to give a little speech at the closing ceremony and at the Chikushichūō High School Sports Day, the names of the *jikkō iinkai* members were published on the program as well as other students who take on specific roles in their teams.

Hood (2001) argues that when discussing individuality in Japan, one has to be careful because there is a differentiation between individualism in Japanese and Western context:

In the past, such things as individual right and social justice have not been a central part of the education system. [...]. However, these areas are now being developed so that (Japanese) 'individualism' (*kosei*) does not lead to selfishness, immaturity and a reduction in social responsibility, which have often been associated with (Western) 'individualism' (*kojin shugi*) [...]. It is the qualities of 'independence', self-control, endurance, a sense of responsibility, a feeling of togetherness, consideration for others, and a sense of gratitude' that most parents wish to have instilled in their children [...]. (126)

This differentiation has always been part of the Sports Day. The eagerness of showing off one's sporting excellence was considered as selfishness and was not to be encouraged even in modern Japan (see 3.1.2 Modern Education and the Birth of the Sports Day). Discussing the contemporary school system, Merry White (1998) states that "Japanese teachers think that competition creates division and pulls a child toward a negative individualism" (88-89). Therefore, this kind of behaviour was not encouraged at the Handa Junior High *undōkai*. As mentioned before, at running competitions, at the end everybody gets points for their team. But at the same time the event allows children to express "positive individualisation" (*kosei*), not by showing their individual strength but by their role within the group life (*shūdan seikatsu*) of the school.

4.4 The Sports Day: A Risky Performance

In this chapter I discussed the most important aspects of contemporary undōkai. With its focus on teams and group building aspects it can be considered as an important part of *shūdan seikatsu*. It follows distinctive patterns of Japanese guidance like the parallel organisational structure of students and teachers and lets the children take over organisational and administrative functions, but not without teacher guidance and supervision.

I believe that the socialisation process happens largely during the extensive preparation time. During this time the children spend most of their (school) day in their various groups and work hard together to achieve a common goal. All the effort is necessary, because many of the games and competitions performed at the Sports Day are rather complex and might be considered dangerous by Western standards. There is the risk of children (or participating teachers or parents) getting injured. While you probably cannot have a sport event at schools without minor injuries like scratches or bruises, I was quite surprised by how dangerous some of the activities performed at the Sports Festival were. But, many parents I talked to did not worry much. For example, the father of the third year student argued that:

The *undōkai* is safer now [compared to my school days]. For example, activities like *kibasen* were much fiercer in the past, but today teachers keep a close eye on the student so nobody gets hurt. But the children became weaker, it is still risky.

He is also not worried much about the possibility of his children getting hurt during the Sports Day, or the resulting injuries:

Children have a flexible body, so they won't get really hurt. [...] And if I was worried about such things, I would not be able to let my children do anything at all.

The mother of a third year student argued that "there are *hardly* any real accidents like broken bones, just many small wounds and scratches." She was not worried about her children to participate in more risky competitions like *kibasen* or *bōtaoshi*:

We also did the same things [when we were young]. Also the teachers are supporting them, so I am not worried. I feel more like cheering for the children.

But there is another form of risk involved at the Sport Day. Leo Howe (2000:69) called it the extrinsic risk of rituals, the one of incorrect performance. During the performance of ritual the performing community identifies itself and presents itself to an audience (Jennings 1998:167). During the Sports Day not only the children, but also the teachers and the school itself present themselves. Among the audience are not only the families of the children but also members of the community and future students of the school. Therefore nothing may go wrong. The result is intense teacher supervision and a high degree of practice and preparations (Rohlen 1983:163). The level of this extrinsic risk also differs from school to school, as Rohlen shows in his study of five high schools. At a school with a high academic level teachers hardly feel the need to interfere, while at other schools "achieving a good showing is quite difficult, and there is much tension and anxiety among the faculty around these days" (Rohlen 1983:202-203).

5 Conclusion: The Socio-Cultural Role of the Sports Day in Japanese Childhood Socialisation

“It is OK not be the best, you are definitely special anyway”⁸

The main aim of this thesis is to give a thick description of the Sports Day in Japanese schools. First, I attempted to create a theoretical model that allows us to create such a description that incorporates the functional elements of socialisation as well as the cultural meaning of *undōkai*. Research on such school rituals often focuses on the functional aspects, but in my opinion by doing so, they may exclude a very important aspect. They cannot explain the ambiguity as well as the personal affection of people to the ritual. For example, an asahi.com article from September 2010 features the story of a junior high *undōkai* on the small island Hashirajima in the Japanese Inland Sea. This *undōkai* was probably the last one, since the last and only pupil of the school will graduate this year. Even though he was the last and only student of the school (and the island - the population of the island is just about 200 people, with over 80% are of retirement age), the *undōkai* was held in a similar fashion as at “proper” schools. This includes several weeks of training (Asahi Shinbun 2010). This may seem absurd when discussing the Sports Day from a strictly functional approach, given that some of the main effects of the Sports Day, like the fostering of *shūdan seikatsu* is completely irrelevant since there were no groups to build.



Picture 13: The last *undōkai* of Hashirajima (Asahi Shinbun 2010)

⁸ “Number one ni naranakutemo ii, motomoto tokubetssu na only one” – The beginning line of the song *Sekai ni hitotsu dake no hana* by the pop group SMAP. The Song is often used during the Sports Day (Scherman 2010:21).

But even though the socialisation functions of the Sports Day are limited in the case of Hashirajima, it is still considered as something important by the island's community. In this case the Sports Day is more effective on the "cultural-symbolic" side than the "social-practical" side.

Using a semiotic conception of culture, we can see the *undōkai* as a cultural symbol, or a system of symbols. And such a symbol may be, as Geertz (1987) suggest, "a model *for* something" as well as "a model *of* something"⁹ (53). This fine distinction allows us to differentiate between two modes of the Sports Day on an analytical basis. On the one hand, the *undōkai* provides a model of cultural behavioural patterns that were considered appropriate for the children to learn and thus plays a major part in school socialisation. On the other hand, the ritual is a practical activity which is performed, and through its performance it creates meaning. Therefore, the *undōkai* can also be seen as an interpretation of, or a model of, Japanese culture.

5.1 The Sports Day as a "Model for" Japanese Culture

The Sports Day is part of the official Japanese curriculum as a special activity (*tokubetsu katsudō*) (MEXT 2008a:23-24; 2008b:106-107). These special activities constitute together with moral education and club activities (*bukatsu*) the means of childhood socialisation through student guidance (*shidō*). Therefore the *undōkai* has some specific functions in the framework of Japanese education. The concrete aims are the nurturing of a healthy body, the socialisation to group life (*shūdan seikatsu*), the improvement of the self-management of the children and the strengthening of the ties between the school and the local community.

The first aim probably does not need much explanation. The Sports Day is all about physical education. The training program is intense and at least for a couple of weeks physical activities are the main form of activities in Japanese schools. Especially parents and teachers consider the physical aspect of the Sports Day as very important. Parents I interviewed were often much worried by the lack of active recreational activities of their children. They state that TV,

⁹ All emphasis added me.

videogames and computer had become the main form of entertainment for the children and they were spending too little time playing actively outside the house.

The socialisation to *shūdan seikatsu* is another obvious goal of the *undōkai*. The third year teacher of Handa Junior High argued that the Sports Day is important

because it is a lesson for the children's heart and soul (*kokoro no jugyō, seishinteki na mono*). The children today unusually play videogames alone or with one friend. During the *undōkai* they can learn how interesting it is to achieve something as a large group, to really work hard together. That is why events like the Sports Day are important; otherwise children would graduate without such experiences.

At its core, the Sports Day is a competition between two (or more) teams. The sense of competition is needed in order to strengthen the solidarity of the teams. But on the other hand, the sense of competition must not be too strong; otherwise it would disrupt the harmony of the school. One reason why this balance may be achieved is that the winning team does not get any real reward. The winning team's trophy is rather an ornament to the opening and closing ceremony than a real reward, since the teams were disbanded immediately after the Sports Day and the trophy returned to the principal's office. The motivation of the students has to come from intrinsic factors.

The Sports Day gives also some students the chance to shine individually. They may see it as a chance to achieve their own goal by carrying out important roles. For example, one of the members of the Handa Junior High *taiikusai jikkō iinkai* members had ambitions to get into an academic High School in Oita, despite his rather average school performance. He hoped that his homeroom teacher would help him getting into the school due to his role in the Sports Day. This reflects a consciousness of the students towards the new reality of the notorious entrance exams, where alternative ways to fact-based exams (like personal recommendations by teachers) are possible (see Tsuneyoshi 2004).

The local community can be incorporated in the *undōkai* in various ways. The most obvious way is the role audience of the ritual. But members of the community may also take an active part in every aspect of the Sports Day. At Handa Elementary School, local people acted as special instructors during the

training sessions for various games like tug-of-war. The families of the students also actively participate in the event. At the schools in Handa, the parents played an important role (at the Elementary School even more than at the Junior High). On the other hand, at the Sports Day at Chikushichūō High there was only one competition that involved the student's families, *tamaire*, and even then, the parents were not involved, but mostly the students' grandparents and little brothers and sisters.

It is not only important to see which aims are ought to be achieved with the Sports Day, but also how. LeTendre (1994) argues that in

diverse Japanese life, expertise is assumed to flow from experienced to non-experienced personnel over a long period of time in a stable situation. Japanese believe that group interaction is vital to the organizations' ability to put knowledge to use. Effort and dedication are emphasized over ability. For most tasks, there is some notion of a pattern or form (*kata*) that should be learned by heart. Senior members are expected to be more versed in these patterns than junior members. And, perhaps most importantly, the social context is everything. (278)

5.2 The Sports Day as a “Model of” Japanese Culture

Many of the people I spoke with during my fieldwork in Kokonoe tended to describe the *undōkai* as a display of “Japanese culture” (*Nihon no bunka*). Nitta Yoshiko and Senjūma Chiko argue that while Sports Day started as a translation of English athletic meetings, with its combination of competitive elements, playfulness and demonstrative elements, it developed into an “independent Japanese form” (1995:61-52).

A third year student's father told me the following:

We all experienced the Sports Day every year since we were young. Therefore it became something like a national event (*taikūsai wa kokuminteki kyōji ni natte iru*). That is why I don't think too much about the danger. Festivals (*o-matsuri*) can also be quite dangerous and many accidents happen, but we don't get rid of them. Or think about the bull fights in Spain, they are dangerous, but they don't stop them, because they are traditions. The Sports Day is also such a tradition.

The Sports Day may be seen as a cultural performance. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the *undōkai* was always part of a greater discourse about nationalism. In its extreme form, it was in line with the ultranationalistic ideology of Imperial Japan. With its heavy emphasis on militaristic *taisō* exercises and excessive use of nationalistic symbols it was part of the process of mobilisation and militarisation of Japan's future soldiers. But the ritual nature of the Sports Day allowed also its use against a dominating education discourse. Resisting the new emphasis on using the *Hinomaru* and *Kimigayo* at school events in the 1960s, the teachers of the Hanaguri elementary school replaced the national flag with their own school flag and the anthem with their school song. They placed the Sports Day under the concepts of child-driven education, but also at traditionalism and localism. While these examples are extremes, they show how the Sports Day can be seen as a representation of its socio-political context of the time.

The Sports Day can also be seen as a self-interpretation of the actors: For example, a student of Handa Junior High argued that the Sports Day was a chance to show their family and friends their *chūgakuseirashisa* ("middleschool-ness"). In the introduction I mentioned that for junior high students it is important to differ between the elementary school *undōkai* and the junior high school *taiikusai* (while most adults did not make the effort to differentiate between them). One way to see how they view their "middleschool-ness" is by looking at the team mottos.

White team's motto	Red team's motto
「霸巔煌」	「義」
<i>ha ten kō</i> ¹⁰	<i>gi</i>
supremacy summit gleam	righteousness

Table 13: Team mottos of the Handa Junior High *undōkai*

Each team has its own group motto, which is decided by the students themselves. At Handa Junior High these themes were chosen to express the children's capability of using difficult *kanji* (including complex wordplays) as well as their grasp of abstract concepts like *gi*, which refers to one of the five cardinal virtues

¹⁰ *Hatenkō* (破天荒) also means groundbreaking, epoch-making

of Confucianism. A young teacher told that “this is typical for Junior High School students. They want to present their knowledge to differentiate themselves from elementary pupils.”

5.3 Final Remarks

The Sports Day is arguably just a small wheel in the machine of Japanese schooling, but thanks to its active bodily and performative aspects it surely is an impressive praxis to witness. It did not only survive countless educational reforms but also managed to maintain a basic structural integrity since the Taishō era. Over time a lot of different (sometimes even contradicting) meanings were inscribed into the “cultural palimpsest” of the Sports Day. This palimpsest allows many of these meanings to still preserve in the discourse of the *undōkai*: Whether the ambiguity of between national ceremony and local matsuri, the militaristic elements, the 1947 Course of Study with its conception of *shidō* and its developmental model of children or the new discourse on sport, leisure and health in the 1960s, they all left traces that are still visible today.

Of course I do not purport that this thesis created a complete record of all the meanings present in the “cultural palimpsest” of the *undōkai*, but it delivers a solid foundation from where future research can depart, add new layers and distinctions and aid a deeper understanding of an cultural practice that is much more than as what “some commentators view as an odd quirk of Japanese education” (Lewis 1995:61).

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Appendix

Abstract (Deutsch)

Undōkai und *taiikusai* sind beides Bezeichnungen für eine Veranstaltung, welche jedes Jahr an sämtlichen japanischen Schulen abgehalten wird: des Sportfest. Dieses weist stark ritualisierten Charakter auf. Es ist eine Veranstaltung, welche sich Mitte der Meiji-Zeit etablierte und spätestens in der Taishō-Zeit seine grundsätzliche, noch heute gültige Form annahm.

Gleichzeitig hat das Sportfest aber auch ganz explizite pädagogische Ziele zu erfüllen. Es soll ein wichtiger Eckpfeiler von *shūdan seikatsu* sein: die Sozialisierung hin zu Gruppen gilt spätestens seit den 1980er Jahren in der westlichen Fachliteratur als grundsätzliche Organisationsform in japanischen Schulen. Ziel der Sportfeste ist es, eine von den Schülern möglichst selbst organisierte Veranstaltung abzuhalten, um den Schülern selbst ihre Reife zu beweisen. Aber ebenso wird das Sportfest als geeignetes Mittel angesehen, dem (vermeintlichen) Bewegungsmangel der japanischen Kinder entgegenzuwirken. Das Sportfest wird somit als eine wichtige Veranstaltung für die körperliche sowie die geistige Entwicklung der Schüler angesehen.

Basierend auf den Überlegungen von Clifford Geertz lege ich mit dieser Arbeit eine dichte Beschreibung des Rituals *undōkai/taiikusai* in japanischen Schulen vor, das sowohl seine sozialen Funktionen sowie dessen inhärenten Bedeutungen in Betracht zieht. Das Sportfest ist eine Veranstaltung, in dem komplexe gesellschaftliche Diskurse über Individualität, Gruppen, Gemeinschaft und Nation aufeinander treffen und Bedeutungen durch sämtliche Beteiligten in einem performativen Prozess neu ausgehandelt werden. Das Ergebnis ist eine Aufführung von japanischer Kultur, interpretiert von den Schülern, Lehrern und Familien selbst.

Academic CV

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Academic Conferences & Workshops

27.03.2010: 2010 International Graduate Workshop „Global Economic Crisis and Socio-Cultural Changes“, Chungang University, Seoul, Role: Discussant/presenter, Presentation: “The Social Functions of the Sports Day in Japanese Education – Ritual and Performance in Japanese Schools.”

20.05.2010: Workshop “Aktuelle Politische Spannungsfelder in Ostasien“, Department for East Asian Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna. Role: Co-organiser/Workgroup leader. Workgroup: “Konzeption des Sicherheitsbegriffes in Ostasien.”

5/6.03.2011: UTCP Graduate Student Conference 2011 “Reconsidering the Dynamics of ‘Boundaries’: Subjectivity, Community and Co-Existence “, University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, Tokyo. Role: Presenter, Presentation: “Undōkai: A Cultural Performance Between Nation, Community and Individual.”

Publications

MÜHLEDER, Peter (2010): „The Social Functions of Sports Day in Japanese Education: Ritual and Performance in Japanese Schools“, Chungang University (ed.): *2010 International Graduate Workshop*. Seoul: Chungang University, 49–66.

BRÖTZNER, Karin and Stefan FUCHS and Frank HERBERG and Johannes KIENER and Peter MÜHLEDER (2010): “Ein Projekt der Selbstgestaltung. Reflexionen über die Organisation und Durchführung des Workshops „Aktuelle politische Spannungsfelder in Ostasien“, *Minikomi* 78, 33-37.