

Marie Höjlund Roesgaard. *Japanese Education and the Cram School Business: Functions, Challenges and Perspectives of the Juku.* Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2006. 203 pp. No price listed, cloth, ISBN 978-87-91114-91-5.



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Marie Roesgaard's book is the first English-language book-length attempt to grapple with the role of "cram schools" within the Japanese education system. Given the almost complete absence of a social-scientific literature on *juku* in English or Japanese, Roesgaard's book does scholarship on Japanese education a great favor by providing an initial classification of different types of *juku*. Moreover, through this classification, she opens up an entire field of new questions for further research.

Few discussions of the Japanese system of education fail to mention the important role that *juku* play in this system. Typically associated with such clichéd portrayals of Japanese education like "exam hell" and the "koyoiku mama," *juku* have long been seen as serving the needs of Japanese students and their parents in increasing chances at being admitted to elite educational institutions at subsequent levels of education. Roesgaard discusses the different varieties of *juku* that exist on a continuum, from the most competitive and competition-oriented ones to other *juku* that are more

holistic in their educational aims and emphasize care-giving aspects to a greater extent.

Roesgaard organizes her book into three sections, presenting the context, the players, and the motivations and situations of players involved in the *juku* business, respectively. Given the paucity of existing data, Roesgaard's most important contribution comes in parts 1 and 2, rather than in the analytical conclusions that she provides in part 3. In her introduction, Roesgaard gives an overview of the role of *juku* within Japanese education. While this discussion helps to situate *juku* within the system of education, it also reveals one of the shortcomings of Roesgaard's approach. When faced with incomplete and inadequate data, Roesgaard continues to work with these data as "the best thing we have got" without further subjecting it to sustained, critical scrutiny. The many surveys that her discussion relies on are thus presented in a fairly uncritical fashion even though Roesgaard herself raises important doubts about their validity. While I am sympathetic to the attempt to make do with inadequate data, I think that some of the data presented are so flawed that

they ought to be disregarded entirely. None of the surveys discussed seem to include any discussion of the definition of *juku* in their questions, including official surveys that do not distinguish between different types of *juku*. This is particularly ironic given the impressive contribution Roesgaard makes, especially in pointing to the diversity of *juku*. Likewise, Roesgaard bases a significant portion of her claims on surveys conducted by Benesse Corporation, a large player in the supplementary education market. It should be noted critically, that these surveys would appear to have to be aimed at market research rather than any more social-scientific understanding of *juku*. While this may not disqualify these survey results automatically and entirely, Roesgaard gives readers few reasons to trust these surveys to the extent necessary to bolster her claims and conclusions.

The introductory discussion also remains somewhat unclear on the precise aims of the book. While many of the important questions raised by the role of *juku* in education are mentioned and touched upon (the role of Monakasho [Ministry of Education] policies regarding *juku*, the consumer choices made by parents, the relationship between *juku* and conventional schools, etc.), Roesgaard does not address these questions in a focused or systematic manner, nor does she select any one of them for particular scrutiny. While this is understandable given the dearth of an existing literature on *juku*, it detracts somewhat from the overall impact of the book in setting the scene for further research.

Part 1 of the book concentrates on presenting a typology of *juku*. Given the undifferentiated treatment of *juku* in the existing literature, this is a contribution that is not to be underestimated. Roesgaard proposes to classify *juku* along eight different dimensions: competitive vs. nurturing environment; focus on entrance examinations vs. concentration on current schoolwork; connection to regular schooling; academic grouping of stu-

dents; teaching materials used; size of the school in terms of students attending and number of branches, if any; admission procedures; and nature of advertising. While some of these variables are discussed primarily in dichotomous terms, they add up to a continuum of *juku* types clustered around four distinct varieties: *shingaku juku* with their focus on exam preparation; *hoshu juku* concentrating on remedial work; *kyosai juku* that cater to students in danger of falling between the cracks of educational institutions for academic or social reasons; and *doriru juku* that offer little instruction, but instead focus on the practicing of basic skills. Because the differences between these types reflect parents' and students' choices as well as students' position in conventional schooling, Roesgaard convincingly presents this categorization as capturing the most significant variability among *juku*.

Part 2 of the book presents exemplary case studies of *juku* and places them within the classificatory scheme introduced earlier. While Roesgaard makes a significant contribution in this area as well simply by beginning a scholarly discussion of *juku*, the descriptions and analysis of the *juku* covered in this section are relatively thin. Given limited site visits to the *juku*, Roesgaard largely reproduces the *juku*'s view of themselves and their teaching. Nevertheless, her introduction to some of the most well-known *juku*, like Kawai-juku offers glimpses into institutions that are often portrayed in the popular press and extensively analyzed in Japanese advice manuals, yet rarely examined by scholars. It should be emphasized that by offering case studies of Yotsuya-Otsuka, Nichinoken, and SAPIX, Roesgaard provides a glimpse into the very top-end of middle-school entrance examination preparation. Interestingly, one of the *juku* portrayed here, Yotsuya-Otsuka, was acquired by another education corporation, Nagase Brothers, in September 2006 in a sign of the consolidation of an industry facing a declining customer base. By comparing different *juku* and placing them within her analytical scheme, how-

ever, Roesgaard significantly bolsters her important message as to the diversity of the *juku* market. Her discussion of the nurturing aspects of *juku*, in the *hoshu* category especially, also corrects the often-heard misperception of *juku* as devoted exclusively to exam preparation by rote learning and drill.

Part 3 of the book attempts to place the previous chapters in a more analytical framework focused on "The Whys, the Hows and the Future." Initially, this section addresses the curious position *juku* occupy in Japanese educational policy-making, as Monkasho has largely ignored their existence except for some discussions of *juku*'s potential role in life-long learning initiatives. Yet, *juku* have been profoundly affected by educational policy, for example through the thinning of curriculum content and the abolition of Saturday schooling.

Some of Roesgaard's classificatory discussions are quite novel and original. For example, her emphasis on the care-giving functions of and contributions by *juku* points to an important, understudied, and perhaps increasingly significant element in the establishment of *juku*, especially in urban areas.

Throughout the book, Roesgaard discusses the financial expenditures for education that families incur by sending children to *juku*. Nationwide average expenditures would seem to suggest that, in a nation as rich as Japan, *juku* attendance might not have implications for social stratification. Yet Roesgaard's portrayals of some of the most ambitious *juku* show that for a so-called "elite course" of exam preparation with costs upward of ¥1mio even the budgets of middle-class families may be stretched in metropolitan areas.

Given the lack of an academic literature on *juku*, despite the prominent role these schools play within the education system, Roesgaard's book is assured an important place in the literature on supplementary education. As an initial volley, Roesgaard provides some of the important

groundwork for further research by offering a classification of *juku* and by raising many of the pressing and interesting questions that will make further work on *juku* an important part of the literature on Japanese education, especially in a time of widespread worry about the public school system.

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