Paper Title: Rinji Kyōiku Kaigi 1917-19: a reform in education – progression or retrogression

Name of Author: Shunichi Ikeda
Institutional Affiliation: The ANU

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Abstract
This paper will look at the Rinji Kyōiku Kaigi (1917-19) education reforms in the Tiashō period. These were major reforms in the history of education in Japan, but ones whose significance has not been thoroughly examined.

It is well known that education in Japan underwent two major reforms in its modern history. The first was the shift from a system in the feudal period to the system based on western education in the beginning of the Meiji period. The second was the reform that took place after World War II, based on recommendations by an American mission. This reform had the goal of changing a system long considered to be a continuation of the Meiji period system.

However, considering the various political, economic and social changes which occurred during that time, it is inconceivable that the system introduced at the beginning of the Meiji period could remain intact until the end of World War II. Indeed, the Rinji Kyōiku Kaigi served to expand the Meiji education system in response to these changes. After some of the proposals and suggestions in the report of this reform were implemented, a considerable number of changes took place in the 1920s and 1930s in the areas of higher education and women’s education in particular.

It is also widely recognised that the Taishō period was known as “Taishō Demokurashii” and liberal ideas and thoughts were accepted in many parts of society. On the other hand and contrary to the popular understanding of Taishō among contemporary scholars, the Taishō period was also a time when a strong reaction to this trend became apparent. World War I has just ended and the government felt an urgent need to bring up young people with a proper understanding of Japan’s position in the world and with a firm idea of traditional values in that context.

By using social indicators as objective sources of evidence, this paper will evaluate some of the reports issued by the Rinji Kyōiku Kaigi and investigate whether or not they contributed to improvement of education and to the ensuing social change in the late Taishō and early Shōwa periods.