GEORGE SANSON once called the history of education in late nineteenth-century Japan 'a useful example of a reaction against foreign influence and a return to tradition in the midst of a strenuous process of "modernization"'. Sansom and others have depicted Japanese education during the first three decades of the Meiji period (1868–1912) as follows: during the 1870s Japanese education was completely dominated by the Western philosophies and principles which were flooding a country newly opened to foreign intercourse after two and one-half centuries of isolation. This extreme Westernization led to a 'conservative reaction' in government and education circles during the 1880s. This, in turn, culminated in the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 and the emphasis on 'traditional' moral education which was the hallmark of schooling in the 1890s. This shift in educational policy on the part of the Meiji government has been seen as 'part of the general swing during the 1880s away from unnecessarily close imitation of the West and back towards more traditional values.'

Is this an accurate characterization of the content of Japanese education during these years? This paper seeks an answer to this question. It is concerned with the traditional and other values which were taught to Japanese primary schoolchildren during these three decades. The hope is that examination of these values will lead to a better understanding of these formative years of Japan's modern educational system. This paper attempts to examine these values as they were revealed in the primary school textbooks of the period. Japanese language and ethics texts have been chosen for scrutiny because these
two subjects took up far more of the children's lesson time than did history and geography, the only other two subjects which appear to have been used extensively for the transmission of values as well as skills and knowledge.4

In education, the shift towards 'more traditional values' is considered to have reached even the highest levels of the comprehensive school system which the Meiji government was constructing.5 However, its greatest impact seems to have been upon what was taught in the primary schools which endeavored to prepare every Japanese child for life in the new society.6 During the Meiji period, primary schooling was carefully designed to impart values as well as to provide elementary scientific

4 Even as late as 1906, a decade and a half after ethics had been made 'the center' of the primary school curriculum, the hours of instruction were as follows in the ordinary primary school course of four years: first-graders had a total of twenty-one school hours a week, consisting of two of ethics, ten of Japanese language, five of arithmetic and four of gymnastics; second-graders had twenty-four hours of lessons a week, consisting of two of ethics, twelve of Japanese language, six of arithmetic and four of gymnastics; third- and fourth-graders both spent twenty-seven hours in school each week, consisting of two of ethics, fifteen of language, six of arithmetic and four of gymnastics. Graduation from this course could have meant the end of a child's schooling or it could have led to entrance in a higher primary school course of two years, three years, or four years. The two grades in the two-year course were each allotted twenty-eight school hours for boys and thirty for girls. Of these, two were devoted to ethics, ten to Japanese, four to arithmetic, three to Japanese history and geography combined, two to science, two to singing, three to gymnastics, for boys two to drawing, for girls one to drawing and three to sewing. The three-year course was almost identical, except that manual training, agriculture and commerce were taught in the final year. The four-year course was also very similar. This apportionment of school time was modified slightly in 1907 but the priorities remained the same. See Kikuchi Dairoku, *Japanese Education* (London, 1909), pp. 117-29. History and geography were obviously not taught to all primary school pupils during the Meiji period. Only those who went on to higher primary school studied these subjects. See John Caiger, 'The Aims and Content of School Courses in Japanese History, 1872-1945', in Edmund Skrzypczak (ed.), *Japan's Modern Century* (Tokyo, 1968), pp. 51-81.

5 For what this shift meant for Tokyo University (renamed the Imperial University in 1886, it became Tokyo Imperial University when Kyoto Imperial University was founded in 1897) see Sumera Gishido, *Daigaku seido no kenkyū* (A Study of the University System) (Tokyo, 1955), pp. 350-1; and Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku, *Tokyo teikoku daigaku gōju nen shi* (Fifty Years of Tokyo Imperial University) (Tokyo, 1932), I.

6 It took until 1910 to get the elementary school-aged population in school. In 1875, 35.19 per cent of this population was attending school; in 1880, 41.06 per cent was in school; in 1885, this percentage rose to 49.62 per cent but twice as many boys as girls were school-goers; in 1890, 48.93 per cent of the primary school-aged population attended school; in 1900 the percentage was 81.48, and this consisted of 90.55 per cent of the boys and 71.73 per cent of the girls in the school-aged population; in 1905, the total percentage of school-aged children in primary school was 95.62; five years later it exceeded 98 per cent. See Kaigo Tokiomi, *Japanese Education: Its Past and Present* (Tokyo, 1968), p. 65.
knowledge and to teach the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic. Some of these values were obviously new and foreign—the very idea, for instance, that samurai and commoners, boys and girls, should attend the same schools must have shocked many people during the early years of the period. But many of the ideals taught to Meiji schoolchildren would have been very familiar to young samurai pupils or even to commoners who went to school before the Meiji Restoration of 1868 brought a group of modern nation-builders to power. Such traditional values included frugality, obedience, patience, endurance, courage, selflessness, modesty, decorum, harmony and honesty; with prime importance placed upon loyalty and filial piety. Indeed, the other values were usually treated as a part of one or both of these two essential qualities.

Charges of extreme Westernization against the primary schools of the 1870s are not unfounded. The textbooks used in these schools were often direct translations of Western works. Translations of the writings of English and American moral philosophers may have been intended to give Japanese children some appropriate ethics to accompany the Western scientific and technical information they were being asked to absorb, but they must have been confusing to many teachers as well as pupils. The five sets of textbooks which the Ministry of Education recommended in 1873 for use in ethics classes in primary schools were all translations of Western books. The education ministry itself published an ethics text, Sushin ron (A Discussion of Morals), which was almost a word-for-word translation of The Elements of Moral Science written by Francis Wayland for his philosophy students at Brown University in Rhode Island. The most popular ethics textbook of the 1870s was, however, an eleven-volume series entitled Taisei kanzen kunmō (Moral Stories from the West). Its first three volumes were a direct translation of a French book written to teach French youngsters to respect God and the laws of the second republic; the remaining volumes were a translation of a work on moral philosophy published in the United States in 1868. Samuel Smiles's Self Help with its theme of 'Heaven helps those who help themselves' was also used as an ethics textbook.

10 Ibid., pp. 62–3. This popular handbook for the poor but ambitious was first published in London, England, in 1867. The title of the Japanese translation was Determination to be successful in Western Countries (Seikoku risshi).
Much of the content of the Japanese language readers of the 1870s also bore a striking resemblance to American and European textbooks. As Karasawa Tomitarō has pointed out, the first Japanese readers published by the education ministry were straight translations of the *Marius Wilson Readers* widely used in the United States. Most of the lessons were awkward translations of passages used to teach contemporary American children how to read their native tongue. A majority of the illustrations in this translation depicted individuals dressed in Western clothing in scenes with Western-style furniture or buildings. Such pictures may have helped young Japanese struggling with the first volume in this series to understand what the lesson about the cat on the bed and the lesson about the game of baseball were about, but these could hardly have been familiar scenes to them. The lesson, in the same volume, which instructed the child to get up in the morning and thank 'God' for seeing him safely through the night must have been very puzzling indeed.

Although the use of such books was widespread, even in the 1870s the content of Japanese language and ethics courses was by no means solely Western. The Primary School Regulations issued in September 1873 stipulated that ethics lessons in the first and second grades should not use textbooks but instead should be given orally by the teacher. Since the majority of the teachers came from the Confucian-educated samurai class, it is highly likely that many of their talks on morality concerned loyalty, filial piety, respect for status and authority in a hierarchical social order, and all the virtues which were to be cultivated along with these qualities. Moreover, in the 1870s there were still primary schools which used Confucian ethics textbooks dating from the Tokugawa period. In 1874, of the three ethics books which were added to the education ministry's approved list, two had been popular books with Tokugawa schoolmasters. Such official approval may have been more of an indication of the ministry's awareness of the country's severe shortage of textbook and teaching materials than of government sanction for Confucian morality. Nevertheless, these two Confucian ethics texts not only remained in the primary schools but stayed there with official approval.

Similarly, the *Wilson Reader* by no means dominated all language classes in the 1870s. The year after its publication, it was joined by

11 Karasawa, *op. cit.*, pp. 68–73. This first reader series was published in 1873.
12 See Kaigo Tokiomi and Naka Arata (eds), *Nihon kyōkasho taikei: kindai hen (A Collection of Japanese Textbooks: The Modern Period)* (hereafter called *NKT*), IV, 100–63.
14 Ibid., p. 61.
another Ministry of Education reader series which became as popular as the Wilson Reader series. Indeed, towards the end of the decade this Shōgaku tokuhon (Primary School Reader) of 1874 was used even more often than was the Wilson Reader. Unlike the Wilson Reader, it contained a good number of lessons which dealt with loyalty and filial piety and drew their morals from Japanese history. Although earlier volumes in this five-volume series contained information about practical and scientific subjects, the thirty-seven lessons in volume four, for example, all had moral or Japanese historical themes. Most of the themes were taken from Japanese samurai traditions or from famous illustrations of Confucian conduct in ancient China. Some of the lessons, however, were abstract discussions of moral conduct.

The first three lessons were such discussions. Lesson one on 'Diligence' stated that there were few differences in native intelligence and that these could all be overcome by diligence. Lesson two explained that sincerity and diligence made a man great and discussed the virtues of patience and endurance. Lesson three announced that poverty motivated men to work harder and reminded its young readers that hard work and diligence would be rewarded. The next three lessons dealt with learning by doing (jitsu gaku), the importance of polishing one’s practical learning with theoretical academic studies and the advantages of emulating great men in history. Accordingly, the following five lessons dealt with 'greatness' in Japanese history, especially acts of loyalty and filial conduct. These stories were followed by another dealing with loyalty: a mother who had already lost two sons in the service of her sons’ feudal lord helped to keep her surviving three boys steadfast in their commitment to their lord. Eight other lessons also concentrated on loyalty. Lessons twenty-six and twenty-seven, for example, stressed that loyalty to one’s lord or master was the most important of all virtues and that one should be completely loyal even if one’s master happened to be stupid or cruel. Three lessons dealt specifically with a wife’s loyalty to her husband. The other strong theme in this reader was the limitless obligation of children to their parents. A total of twelve lessons were devoted to this topic. Filial examples ranged from that of the three sons who touched an emperor’s heart by pleading that they be taken as slaves to keep their father from

15 NKT, IV, 712.  
16 Ibid., pp. 221–40.  
17 Lessons seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, ibid., pp. 223–6.  
banishment, to famous Chinese examples of dutiful offspring, to two examples from Western history, to a lesson which showed that even monkeys take care of their mothers. There were also lessons about love and appropriate status relations among siblings. One such lesson warned that the younger brother should not surpass the elder. The book ended with a Japanese story and a Chinese story which both illustrated the benefits of learning.

As the above suggests, this reader, which may have been the most widely used of all the language texts of the 1870s, was neither a direct nor an adapted translation of a Western work. During this decade Japanese primary schoolchildren were given a heavy diet of 'Western Learning,' including 'Western morality,' but they were by no means completely cut off from their past or from the values which had dominated at least the upper echelons of their society for hundreds of years. Different schools and teachers used different texts and methods, making regional disparity considerable. Enterprising teachers sometimes substituted teaching materials that were practical, interesting or familiar to their pupils when they found recognized textbooks unsuitable. There is also evidence that, even though the Western learning presented in many primary schools was extremely difficult for the children to grasp, they often studied it seriously and found it interesting. Yet many parents did not consider this learning relevant to their children's lives. Consequently, they often preferred to send their children to the private schools which had not yet come under strict government control and continued to offer a practical reading, writing and arithmetic course, very much like the one many commoner children had known before the Meiji Restoration.

20 During the 1870s, textbook selection and other aspects of educational authority were to a great extent still in the hands of the local administrations. Prefectural governors had the power to enact all regulations for public schools, subject to approval of the Minister of Education. See Saionji Kinmochi, 'National Education in the Meiji Era', in Okuma Shigenobu (ed.), Fifty Years of New Japan (London, 1910), II, 161-74.

21 Teachers were permitted to substitute Japanese police regulations for morals textbooks about Western law. Some teachers gave their pupils tales of the forty-seven loyal rōnin and the warrior leader, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-98), instead of lessons from translated works. See Karasawa, op. cit., pp. 64-7.

22 Ibid., pp. 77-8. Smiles's Self Help was a best-seller in Meiji Japan.

The ‘conservative reaction’ is generally considered to have begun in the late 1870s. In 1877 the influential Confucianist, Nishimura Shigeki (1828-1902), expressed a concern that the primary school curriculum was too far removed from the daily life of the masses and that its lack of Confucian moral teaching would have a deleterious influence on the people. In 1879 Motoda Eifu (1818-91), the emperor’s Confucian tutor, wrote ‘The Great Principles of Education’ (Kyōgaku taishi) which purported to be the Emperor’s sentiments concerning what he had seen during his inspection of schools in northeast Japan during the previous year. This document severely criticized the Western-style ethics texts as responsible for the decline in public morals. The Japanese family system and loyalty to the state were being destroyed; students were being taught high-sounding academic theories and empty arguments, which would make them useless as government officials and trouble-makers as citizens. Disaster could be averted only if education were ‘founded upon the Imperial ancestral precepts, benevolence, duty, loyalty, and filial piety, and Confucius were made the cornerstone of our teaching of ethics.’

In 1880 the Ministry of Education published a morals textbook by Nishimura Shigeki which attempted to make Confucian ethics an important part of the primary school curriculum. Interestingly, Nishimura’s book often depicted filial piety, loyalty and other Confucian virtues with illustrations from Western history. Thus this publication has been seen as a transition from the Western ethics texts of the 1870s to the Confucian ones of the 1880s. But the Western examples in his book may have reflected Nishimura’s personal interest in Western writing and ideas—Confucianist though he was—as much as they signified the general popularity of this kind of material or government policy.

In 1881 the Ministry of Education grouped popular ethics textbooks into categories on the basis of suitability, advised against the use of some, and banned outright other translations of Western works. Included among the banned was Fukuzawa Yukichi’s (1835-1901) Tsūzoku kokken ron (A Popular Account of Sovereignty) and Fukuzawa did not take kindly to this kind of censorship. Indeed he later wrote:

Around 1881-82, the government began to advocate in education the queer

24 Herbert Passin, Society and Education in Japan (New York, 1965), p. 82.
25 Shively, op. cit., p. 327. Inoue Kowashi wrote an objection to this for Itō Hirobumi which stated that ethical principles were not the concern of political officers. See Kaigo, Inoue Kowashi no kyoiku seisaku, p. 934.
26 See NKT, II, 6-37.
policy of Confucianism. For the alleged purpose of examining school texts, the Ministry of Education gathered up the general run of original books and translations in the country, and its officials met and decided whether to approve or to reject them. It also brought together old-fashioned Confucianists to compile readers, and otherwise staged the farce of trying to restore past customs in a civilized world. The books written and translated by me were adjudged to be harmful and without value as school texts; ridiculously enough, not one passed the inspection.28

In 1882 the government decided to make ethics courses ‘the center’ of the primary school curriculum. Even non-Confucianist modernists in the government like Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), Mori Arinori (1847–89) and Inoue Kowashi (1844–95) were concerned that the people develop a strong loyalty to their new nation and the emperor at its head. Although they had no wish to ‘go back’ to a purely Confucian education, they were quite willing to use familiar Confucian precepts to develop an ethos of unquestioning loyalty among the masses.29

Motoda Eifu put the recommendations of his ‘Kyōgaku taishi’ into a primary school ethics textbook which the Imperial Household Ministry published in 1881 and forwarded to all schools the following year. The contents of this work, Yōgaku kōyō (Essentials of Learning for the Young), stressed loyalty and filial piety as interlocking ideals, but the language was so difficult that the children found it generally impossible to understand. Consequently it was used only in the upper grades and among teachers as a reference text.30 Motoda’s work was an extreme example of Confucianist hopes, but from the year following its publication until the end of the decade, officially approved authors banished most of the famous foreigners who had been appearing in ethics texts. These 1880s books drew heavily upon The Book of Filial Duty, The Analects of Confucius and a Japanese work, Yamato zokkun, an early eighteenth-century handbook of morality and etiquette for the ordinary samurai class.31

28 Quoted in Shively, op. cit., p. 328.
29 See Kuno Osamu and Tsurumi Shunsuke, Gendai nihon no shisō (Tokyo, 1956). Kuno and Tsurumi have suggested that in Meiji Japan the masses were educated to believe that the emperor’s authority was unlimited, while those who received a higher education and as a result joined the ruling elites accepted a kind of constitutional monarchy theory. ‘The Meiji rulers made the people as a whole worship the emperor as an absolute monarch and, after mobilizing the energy of the people for governing, they adopted a constitutional monarchy theory as a secret technique for governing.’ (ibid., p. 132). For an account of Inoue Kowashi’s ideology and attitude towards Confucianism see Kaigo, Inoue Kowashi no kyōiku seisaku, pp. 934–45.
30 NKT, II, 685–6. For the textbook itself see ibid., pp. 128–63.
31 Karasawa, op. cit., p. 115.
While Mori Arinori was education minister, from 1885 until his assassination in 1889, all ethics texts were banned from the schools. Mori instructed teachers to give ethics lessons orally and to break habits of over-dependence upon textbooks. He took a dim view of the Confucian teachings in existing moral texts, finding them 'too old-fashioned, too unscientific to use as a basis for building a really strong authoritarian state.' After Mori's death these textbooks were reintroduced and given the prominence they had enjoyed before Mori became education minister.

It must be noted, however, that readers for language instruction, the subject which took up by far the greatest amount of the primary schoolchild's lesson time, did not show a corresponding turn towards Confucian values in the 1880s. In fact, some of the readers published during this decade not only continued to carry a great deal of factual information of a Western scientific nature, they also paid much less attention to Japanese Confucian and samurai morality than did, for example, the Primary School Reader of 1874 discussed earlier. Such a reader was the popular Jinjō shōgaku tokuhon (Ordinary Primary School Reader), a seven-volume series published by the Ministry of Education in 1887 for use in grades one to four of ordinary primary school after completion of a primer. It was designed more to help children develop their 'thinking' and 'spirit' than to teach them vocabulary and facts. Accordingly it contained few of the lessons about the physical environment carried by earlier readers. Instead there were many simple stories about children, animals and everyday life; it contained Japanese folk tales, proverbs and adaptations from Aesop's Fables and other foreign sources—three lessons in volume six related the story of Robinson Crusoe.

One interesting aspect of this series was how few lessons were devoted to filial piety and loyalty. Out of a total of 257 lessons in the entire series only seven dealt with loyalty and five with filial piety. Lesson twenty in volume two was about serving the country and respecting soldiers; lesson three in volume five was the story of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) and his loyalty to his emperor; in volume six one lesson was about the Japanese flag, two were about the loyalty of Kusunoki Masashige (?–1336) to the throne, two more told of Masashige's son, Kusunoki Masatsūra (?–1348) and his loyalty and

32 Shively, op. cit., p. 328.
33 Kaigo, Inoue Kowashi no kyoiku seisaku, pp. 909–16.
34 NKT, V, 787–8.
35 Ibid., pp. 22–166.
Filial piety. Filial piety was the theme in lesson twenty-four of volume one which urged obedience to one’s mother, of lesson seventeen in volume four which told the reader to be good and true to his parents and to follow his elder brother’s leadership, of lesson eighteen in the same volume, a story about kind mice feeding a mother mouse, and of lessons thirty-one and thirty-two in volume six, the stories about Kusunoki Masatsura’s filial piety and loyalty.  

From the late 1870s into the 1880s, ethics courses received increasing official concern. In 1884, for instance, a school inspector reported that he was shocked by the state of moral education during his inspection tour of the prefectures of Yamanashi, Nagano and Gifu. Although the primary schools had recognized ethics textbooks, he found the pupils ignorant of the ‘justice and righteousness’ that existed between the sovereign and his subjects. ‘When I questioned the school pupils as to who the sovereign and the subjects (kunshin) were, they replied: “The sovereign is the emperor. The subjects are the Prime Minister (dajodaijin) and the government officials.” They did not know that they themselves were the subjects.’ This inspector was most distressed to find that not only the children but the teachers too talked unreservedly about emperors in Japanese history without using the most honorific forms of polite language.  

Certainly there is evidence that young Japanese of the 1880s were capable of shocking not only school inspectors but ethics teachers as well. The following incident illustrates the kind of difficulty teachers could get into even when they were not overly-dependent upon textbooks but were teaching from the heart. An old Confucianist was explaining the meaning of filial piety to primary school-children with an illustration from the Twenty-Four Examples of Filial Conduct, a part of the Confucian canon of Chinese classics. He told the tale of the filial offspring who went out and lay down upon the ice, melting it with his body temperature in order to procure the fish that swam beneath the ice for his parent’s meal. The children replied that before the man’s body could have melted the ice he would have died. The teacher explained that this did not happen because of ‘heaven’s will.’ The skeptical children then wanted to know what ‘heaven’s will’ consisted of; they were not at all interested in the moral of the story.  

Mori Arinori was the enemy of the Confucianists when he became education minister in 1885 but he did not favor encouraging this kind...
of skepticism among the masses. Nor did he approve of American and English influences which put first priority upon individual efforts and rewards. Since his goal was an obedient, disciplined population loyal to the new state, to him individualism and utilitarianism were as undesirable ideologies as Confucianism. In fact Mori's 'Japanism' could incorporate Confucian values more easily than Western individualistic ones. Consequently, regardless of whether the dominant influence in the education ministry was Confucianist or Mori, during the 1880s ethics taught from Samuel Smiles and Francis Wayland rapidly receded into the past.

Out of this concern for the morals of the people on the part of both Confucianists and National Statists came the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890. Indeed, the final draft of the rescript was largely the work of the Confucianist Motoda Eifu and the National Statist Inoue Kowashi who had no use for 'narrow-minded Confucianists' but had a great deal of use for some Confucian principles.\(^39\) The rescript reads in part:

\[\ldots\] Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein lies also the source of Our Education. Ye, Our Subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore, advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall ye not only be Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.\(^40\)

The rescript had implications beyond formal education at all levels, but its promulgation meant that authors of primary school ethics textbooks during the 1890s would base their writings on the celebration of loyalty and filial piety in the rescript, and that such ideals as modesty, trust, affection, decorum and courage would be introduced as qualities which reinforced loyalty and filial piety.

Most ethics texts published during this decade followed such a pattern. For instance, Shōgaku shushin kun (Primary School Ethics), published by the education ministry in 1892, contained a story of a


\(^40\) This is from the official translation of the rescript.
faithful dog who repaid his master's kindness by saving his life, a
story about Tokugawa Ieyasu's (1542–1616) decorous attitude towards
his deceased comrade-in-arms, one about a woman who, brought up
in the lap of luxury, bore the deprivations of her married life heroically,
and one about an honest soy sauce vendor who, when he became a very
rich man, went to great lengths to locate a person who had extended him
aid when he was poor. From about 1900 onward, the year *Shushin
kyōten (A Code of Ethics)* was published, primary school ethics texts relied
heavily on the presentation of famous individuals in history as models
for character-building. *Shushin kyōten* consisted of four volumes for the
grades of ordinary primary school and two for those of higher primary
school. The personalities of the heroes of this series were presented in
great detail. Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856), an agricultural tech-
nologist of the early nineteenth century, was the subject of no less than
twelve of the thirty lessons in volume one of the higher primary school
set. The filial piety, friendship, determination to succeed, benevolence,
frugality, endurance, purity, public-spiritedness, forthrightness, ability
to learn from his errors, courage and sincerity of this paragon of virtue
were all described in this volume. Volume three of the ordinary
primary school series featured such characters as Kumazawa Banzan
(1619–91) and his learning, Wake no Kiyomaro (733–99) and his
loyalty, Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714) and his modesty and learning,
and Watanabe Kazan (1793–1841) who was good to his teacher, never
neglected his studies, was kind to his parents and siblings, began life
as a poor boy but rose high in the world and consequently became the
hero of eight stories in this volume.

Certainly ethics texts published after the 1890 rescript contained
heavy doses of loyalty and filial piety. But, although both the ideal
Confucian society and the new Japan were hierarchically ordered
worlds, there was always room in primary school ethics textbooks for
individuals whose rose suddenly from very humble beginnings. And
‘rising in the world,’ ‘risshin shusse,’ was unmistakably associated with
Smiles’s *Self Help* and the Horatio Alger ethos which had come from
nineteenth-century America and England. Volume three of the
*Shōgaku shushin kun* of 1892 carried an interesting lesson on the duties
of a wife. It contained instructions which any good Confucianist would
have approved of, but it also maintained that a wife must work actively
for her husband’s advancement in the world, for his ‘risshin shusse,’
an activity which would probably call for something other than
Confucian-approved submission and obedience and traditional Japanese

patience and endurance.\textsuperscript{44} A Shushin kyōten lesson for fourth graders had nothing to do with traditional morality. It was a step-by-step set of instructions for dealing with incidents involving friction between foreigners and Japanese nationals. The children were warned against doing anything that might ‘bring shame to the country,’ and advised, in the last resort, to seek a public judgment to settle any disputes they might have with foreigners.\textsuperscript{45}

Language readers of the last decade of the nineteenth century also contained messages about loyalty and filial piety. Teikoku tokuhon (The Imperial Reader) of 1893, the first reader published after promulgation of the education rescript, consisted of a primer with unnumbered lessons, seven volumes with about thirty lessons in each book, and another four similar volumes for higher primary school grades. Books one through five, which were used from the first to the fourth grade, contained fifteen lessons on loyalty to only four on filial piety. Yet even the fifteen dealing with loyalty amounted to only one-eighth of the total number of lessons in this volume. This series also preached affection among siblings, the importance of school and studies and respectful attitudes towards parents and teachers, but a good deal of its content was simple children’s stories and practical information, especially about the physical environment.\textsuperscript{46}

A picture of late nineteenth-century Japanese education which portrays a wave of heavy Westernization during the 1870s, followed by a strong traditionalist reaction against this in the 1880s which led, in turn, to an amalgam of traditional and National Statist values in the last decade of the century is by no means a completely distorted portrait, but it is a greatly oversimplified version of what actually happened. It is important to remember that when Western values were paramount in government educational circles, some primary schoolers were still receiving their moral instruction from handbooks familiar to Tokugawa tera koya pupils. Long after Confucian precepts had been put into the ethics textbooks a utilitarian innovator like Ninomiya Sontoku was held up as a model for character-building. It is also important to

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 392.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 630. The lesson read as follows: ‘Since the thirty-second year of Meiji [1899], foreigners have been able to live within Japan freely. Therefore contact between them and our nationals will become more frequent. Thus we point out the proper attitude to take towards them. 1. Follow the correct way, by no means bring shame to the country. 2. Do not despise or humiliate foreigners without reason. 3. If a foreigner acts insolently, find out why and calmly make approaches to him. 4. If something must be disputed with a foreigner seek a proper public judgment.’
\textsuperscript{46} NKT, V, 434–514.
remember that ethics lessons were given once or at most twice a week while Japanese language instruction took place every day. And the language readers, although full of value content, contained much less traditionalist or statist morality than did the ethics books.

Those who seek the roots of Japan's course of imperialism in the twentieth century in the indoctrination which began in the primary schools of Meiji must remember that at no time during the Meiji period did one of the three main groups of values, which may be called Western, Confucian-traditionalist and National Statist, completely drive out any of the other two groups. Throughout the Meiji period all three groups remained, in varying degrees, in the primary school textbooks; indeed, they stayed in these texts until the end of the Second World War. A potential for imperialistic expansion can perhaps be found in Meiji language and ethics texts, but this is surely not the only potential these books contained.

The Meiji child was presented with a rich if sometimes confusing array of ideals. Assuming that formation of the mature adult's system of values begins in childhood, the citizens of Meiji Japan had rare opportunities to choose among different systems of morality, or at least to become acquainted with different systems. One might have gained the beginnings of an ideology of individual self-reliance and achievement in a Meiji classroom. Or one might have made one's start towards becoming a Confucian gentleman. Or, as the Meiji oligarchs hoped, one might have acquired a staunch allegiance to the country's official moral code and thus developed an undying loyalty to the Japanese emperor and nation. Some of the best Japanese minds of our day have aimed much thoughtful criticism at the 'shallowness' of the values of their compatriots who opposed the official morality from Meiji onward. Yet perhaps this ability for self-criticism, which today

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48 See, for example, Kuno and Tsurumi, *op. cit.*, and the essays in Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics* (London, 1969). In one of these essays (pp. 4–5) Maruyama illustrates the limitations of the absorption of some Western values with a quotation from a Liberal Party leader, Kōno Hironaka (1849–1923), who went to prison for his opposition to the government in 1883: 'I was riding on horseback when I first read this work ['On Liberty']. In a flash my entire way of thinking was revolutionized. Until then I had been under the influence of the Chinese Confucianists and of the Japanese classical scholars, and I had even
seems ‘so Japanese’, comes in part from an awareness of more than one system of moral standards, an awareness that is in part a gift of the Meiji textbooks and their successors.

been inclined to advocate an “expel the barbarian” policy. Now all these earlier thoughts of mine, excepting those concerned with loyalty and filial piety, were smashed to smithereens. At the same moment I knew that it was human freedom and human rights that I must henceforth cherish above all else’ (the italics are Maruyama’s).