

## *“Unsuccessful” Story of Futaba Nursery School as a Pioneer*

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### **Abstract**

It is true that Futaba Nursery School was one of the pioneers for children’s rights and mothers’ protection, and developed its practices in accordance with the situation. However, this does not indicate that its history is a simple heroic tale of the founders. The Futaba Nursery School, which was established in 1900 for children living in Tokyo’s slums, is known as a pioneer in social welfare. As per the analysis of the principal and the founders’ ideas through annual reports, Futaba Nursery School is a success story. However, I argue that there is another aspect that can be discovered by studying the records of attendance. In other words, I insist that Futaba Nursery School could not always meet the demands of the poor. Furthermore, the analysis of the questionnaire survey of retirees that was carried out in the 1970s showed that some of them could not always accept the founders’ philosophy, and the clashes of viewpoints resulted in teachers quitting the school in some cases. Some others quit jobs against their will because of personal reasons; the environment of the workplace was not suitable even though they agreed on the principle of the Futaba Nursery School. Some retirees established or worked at another nursery school by using their experience in Futaba Nursery School. It means that not only one charitable work, Futaba Nursery School, but also several other activities helped children and mothers. In this study, I reexamine the practices of Futaba Nursery School including the “unsuccessful” facts.

Keywords: Nursery School, Records of Attendance

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## Introduction

The Japanese government did not guarantee equal welfare until 1947, when the Constitution of Japan was enforced. Before WWII, private charitable societies worked as welfare organizations for children and mothers. In this context, the Futaba Nursery school in Japan often receives much attention. This school was established in 1900 for children living in Tokyo's slums, and it still runs several nursery schools. The Futaba Nursery School is one of the pioneer institutions for welfare of children and mothers, but it does not mean that its history is a simple heroic tale of the founders. The practices followed in the school did not always work well and included many "failed" experiments. In this study, I have focused on these "unsuccessful" experiments to show not only the limit of this institution but also its ripple effect on other charitable works and nursery schools.

## Analysis of Records of Attendance

In this study, I have analyzed the records of attendance to reveal the unknown actual condition of the Futaba Nursery School from 1928 to 1931. This information can be an essential clue to understand what worked well and what was impossible in private charitable works before WWII. The annual reports of Futaba Nursery School, which have been used in previous studies<sup>1</sup>, listed out its education and operations to contributors, but these narratives might have been glorified by writers or teachers. In order to analyze the actual condition in the nursery school, it is important to consider other documents as well. I found the records of attendance from 1925 to 1943 except some missing papers. In this study, I have focused on the records of 1) Baby Class, the youngest class in 1928; 2) Yuri (Lily) Class, the second youngest class in 1929; 3) Kiku (Chrysanthemum) Class, the second oldest class in 1930; and 4) Ichijiku (Fig) Class, the oldest class in 1931 because there is a list of graduates in 1931 who had written about their family situation though most of these lists are missing. I used the list of graduates to determine the children's information.

These records of attendance and the list of graduates show the basic system of the Futaba Nursery School. The nursery school levied a small amount of school fee in order to prevent for depending too much because annual reports announced<sup>2</sup>. The analysis of the attendance records revealed the details of the school fee. The sum of the fee had basically three grades: full, half, and exemption. The school fee of the children was of the same grade, but there was a case of temporary reduction when a child was sick. I found a pattern in the payment of fees. Some children paid the fees every time they came to school, and others paid the fees on a monthly basis. There were some children who paid the fees for a few months and then cleared off their dues when they could raise money. Even if the children did not pay the fees, they came to

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<sup>1</sup> For example; Norihiko Yasuoka (1999) *Kindai Nihon no Kaso Shakai: Shakai Jigyo no Tenkai (Lower Class in Modern Japan: Development of Social Works)*. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten. /Takeo Shishido (2014) *Nihon ni okeru Hoikuen no Tansyo: Kodomotachi no Hinkon ni Idonda Hitobito (The Birth of Nursery School in Japan: People Who Struggled against Children's Poverty)*. Tokyo:Shindokusha.

<sup>2</sup> Futaba Nursery School, ed., (1985) *Futaba Hoikuen 85 Nen Shi (85 Years History of Futaba Nursery School)*. Tokyo: Futaba Nursery School. p58.

school as before. The records show that the Futaba Nursery School did not intrude their standard one-sidedly on every child and family and tolerated irregular payments.

The records of attendance included not only attendance and fees but also the sums of savings. This revealed the number of children who had participated in the savings project for children, which is one of the characteristics of the Futaba Nursery School. If the children brought their fees and a little extra money for savings to the school in the morning, the teacher gave them postage stamps as same as the sum of their money and the children pasted it on the notebook and stored them. The savings project seemed to be successful. However, according to the savings' records in the record of attendance, most of the children could not attend the savings project. Only 7 children out of 42 graduates participated in the savings project from 1928 to 1931. Particularly, only three children continued to save money for more than one year. There was the gap between the ideal of teachers and the fact. Even though this savings project was a good idea for the children, its effect was limited.

There was a range of living standards among the children. According to the list of graduates in 1931, 8 out of 42 graduates lived in Hahano-Ie (Mother's House), which was a dormitory for poor mothers and children that was established in 1922 by the Futaba Nursery School. When mothers and children, who lost their father for any reasons, could not rent an apartment because of their poverty or some other reasons, they relied on this cheap dormitory. They worked as cooking staff or cleaning staff in the dormitory, Futaba Nursery School, or other cooperative institutions. This indicates that these 8 children and mothers belonged to the poorest category. The annual report in 1922 introduced that the rent of the dormitory was from 3.5 to 4 yen. In contrast, the highest rent among graduates was 38 yen, which was about 10 times the rent of the poorest.

In addition to payment of fees and participants of savings, the way to organize classes was revealed by the records of attendance. The age-specific education in separate classes and the school term beginning in April, which were generalized in Japan, had not been organized strictly; however, in the nursery school, even if there were four classes by age, their graduation was held in March. For example, the entrance and promotion of older class were not always held in the month of April. In many cases, the promoting time was April but 7 out of 42 graduates, i.e., Boy C, Boy L, Boy N, Girl A, Girl G, Girl N, and Girl Q, changed classes irregularly. This may be due to their birthdays. Girl A, whose birthday was in December, was promoted in January from the second youngest class to the second oldest class in 1928, which means that she was promoted earlier than others, but she moved to the oldest class in

		Boy C	Boy L	Boy N	Girl A	Girl G	Girl N	Girl Q
		the number of attendance days						
1929	April				5	15		
	May		22		4	11	13	
	June		25	24	20	24	24	
	July		26	10	21	16	25	
	August	10	27		20		25	
	September	21	24	16	17	20	23	4
	October	22	24	17	23	24	25	20
	November	21	21	18	24	23	24	21
	December	21	22	16	21	16	22	22
	January	5	21	12	21	13	22	15
	February	10	22	3	22	5	21	9
	March	10	20	5	20	8	19	5
1930	April	24	24	22	24	23	23	21
	May	25	26	17	24	22	27	26
	June	25	25	8	21	7	25	24
	July	17	17		17		17	16
	August							
	September	25	25	16	25	20	25	18
	October	25	25	17	22	17	25	24
	November	24	24	20	22	20	24	23
	December	23	23	15	20	17	23	5
	January	21	21		18		21	12
	February	22	21		22		23	15
	March	20	19	6	17	8	17	20
1931	April	23	24	17	21	17	24	24
	May	22	17	20	14	21	26	26
	June	26	23	19		21	26	26
	July	22	15	6	15	7	27	26
	August	26					26	12
	September	25	18	21	25	20	25	19
	October	26	2	20	25	20	26	26
	November	23	11	13	23	18	23	23
	December	26		14	21	15	26	26
	January							
	February							
	March							

Figure 1  
(Colored boxes are months when children's class changed.)

April next year as same as others. Similar situation was also found in the cases of Girl G, Girl Q, Boy C, and Boy N. Furthermore, the period for the same class was not always one year. Some children belonged to a particular for a few months and changed their class, others studied in the same class for two years. Thus, children of different ages were mixed in one class. In other words, the Futaba Nursery School considered the development of each child instead of their age.

The school tried to accept various situations of the poor family with respect to the payment of fees, entrance, and changing classes. Nevertheless, many children dropped out every year. This means that the school could not respond to all the requests of the poor who hoped to commute. For example, in the second youngest class in 1928, 14 out of 42 graduates belonged to the nursery school. During this school year, 41 children quitted and 23 out of them commuted to the nursery school for only less than 10 days. In the second oldest class in 1929, 25 children dropped out later. In the oldest class, 17 children dropped out. Moreover, one of children belonging to the second oldest class, died due to unknown reasons after he commuted the nursery school for 20 days. The younger were the children, the more was the number of withdrawals. Although several children or parents tried to connect Futaba Nursery school seeking for help, all of them could not agree with the principle or activities followed in the school.

On the other side, graduates tended to belong to the Futaba Nursery School for a long period. Thus, children who arrived at graduation could adapt to the nursery school without dropping out and continued to receive supports for a long time. The number of such children who studied in the school for less than one year is 8, for less than two years is 13, for less than three years is 14, and more than three years including just three years is 7. In the longest case, Girl L, who lived in Hahano-Ie (Mother's House), continued for three years and three months. Even though the Futaba Nursery School opened its gates for all the poor families, only a part of them could connect with its supports.

Studying in the Futaba Nursery School did not always mean complete rest for the children. In June 1931, eight children had been affected by measles, and three children were sick in the oldest class. They were probably infected in the Futaba Nursery School. An annual report shows that one nurse was stationed in the nursery school every day, and the teachers were allowed to take the children to a nearby hospital. Access to medical treatment was another characteristic of the school. Nevertheless, children suffered from diseases in the nursery school. The nursery school tried to prevent such misfortunes and also managed access to medical care, but it does not mean that such a consideration always succeeded.

### **Analysis of Questionnaire Survey of Retirees**

I found that not only children and parents but also teachers could not always accept the founders' philosophy or environment at work. According to the questionnaire survey of the retirees that was carried out in the 1970s, some of them who worked in the nursery school before WWII declared certain discords among the teachers, which resulted in the teachers quitting the school in some cases. Teacher A, who worked from 1934 to 1935, said that "I could not agree with why a private charitable work had to support the fact such as poverty and illness, which continued to accumulate,

and I could not stand (this job) for a long time.” Teacher B said, “I always felt that unless I devote my all life to the nursery school, this job was unfit for me and I quit because I could not do that.”

Others quit jobs against their will due to the following reasons; marriage, move, overwork, illness, and low wage, even though they agreed to the principles of the Futaba Nursery School. This suggests that teaching in the nursery school was a hard job, which sometimes caused overwork and illness among the teachers and was not suitable for married women.

Some retirees established or worked at other nursery schools by using their experiences in Futaba Nursery School. This means that not only one charitable work, i.e., Futaba Nursery School, but also several activities helped children and mothers. Teacher A, who quit her job because of disagreement with the principle of charitable work, said “after all, I joined a social movement. I believe that its basis was established in Futaba Nursery School” and “Futaba Nursery School is my home with which I cannot morally break off.” In this case, even if she had gone against the principle of Futaba Nursery School, she had great impact through her job and eventually came back to another social movement. Teacher C, who worked from 1927 to 1934, retired because she established another nursery school in Yokohama city. Teacher D, who worked from 1927 to 1930, went to the United States to study at the National Training School, which was the Methodist persuasion and a girl’s college of social work, after she quit her job. Teacher E, who worked in 1931, has been the Director of various nursery schools and kindergartens. In this way, although some teachers did not choose to continue their work at the Futaba Nursery School, they kept contact with charitable works or education in their own way. Futaba Nursery School was one of the important career paths for them.

## **Conclusion**

It seems that the Futaba Nursery School, as a famous pioneer, had a perfect success history. However, the nursery school did not respond to all of the poor’s needs. Some children could form the habit of going to the nursery school and saving money and try to improve their life with teachers. On the other hand, it was impossible for many children and parents to accept the rule or something of the nursery school and hence, they dropped out. Although the nursery school tried to come through their needs, it was difficult to meet all the demands.

However, the teachers who retired from the Futaba Nursery School for other personal reasons tried to cultivate their skills in the area of social works and nursery schools: established new nursery school, studied abroad for social works, or devoted their lives to other social works. These actions lead the next stage of the social work field. The “unsuccessful” aspect of Futaba Nursery School has left room for improvement, and many actors could participate in its development. The Futaba Nursery School had been never complete as static and stable charitable work, but it was always variable and produced the hint to improve.

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