

Terakoya (private elementary schools)

These schools were run by self-appointed teachers to teach the 3Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic which meant abacus) to small children. Initially, terakoya was a charity organization but later evolved into a profit-seeking entity charging tuition fees. Normally one teacher taught a few dozen children who received individual assignments. There was no rigid regulation or guideline on schooling age, but most children entered terakoya at the age of seven or eight and stayed until the age of twelve or thirteen. Standard daily curriculum included brush letter writing in the morning and arithmetic and moral studies in the afternoon. There were monthly and year-end exams as well as letter writing exhibitions. Children's education was not compulsory and the Bakufu and han governments neither intervened nor promoted it. As the general public realized the importance of studying letters and arithmetic, a large number of terakoya were established from urban to rural areas contributing to the high literacy among the population.

After the Bakufu fell, the Meiji government took education into the public realm and introduced the national school system. In the eighth year of Meiji (1875), there were about 24,000 elementary schools in Japan, the vast majority of which had been converted from terakoya. This suggests the rough number of terakoya that existed in the late Edo period. In the same year (1875), primary education enrollment was 50.5% for boys and 18.6% for girls.