

Shūdan Seikatsu: Cultural Foundations and Social Practices of Pre-School Education in Japan

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Abstract

Pre-school education in Japan plays a crucial role in shaping social behavior and cultural values during early childhood. Central to this process is the emphasis on *life in a group* (*shūdan seikatsu*), which prioritizes cooperation, harmony, and collective responsibility over individual achievement. This paper examines the cultural foundations and everyday social practices that structure pre-school education in Japan, highlighting how group-oriented pedagogy functions as a key mechanism of early socialization. Drawing on cultural and educational analysis, the study explores how routines such as group activities, shared responsibilities, and teacher-guided interaction cultivate social discipline, emotional regulation, and a sense of belonging among children. These practices are shown to reflect broader Japanese cultural norms, including respect for others, attentiveness to context, and the maintenance of social harmony (*wa*). At the same time, the paper considers how individuality is negotiated within group-centered environments, revealing a dynamic balance rather than a rigid suppression of self-expression.

By situating pre-school education within its cultural and social context, this study argues that Japanese early childhood education serves not merely as preparation for formal schooling but as a foundational space for the reproduction of social values and communal ethics. The findings contribute to broader discussions on culture and education, offering insights relevant to comparative studies of early childhood pedagogy and social formation. The primary objective of this study is to examine how cultural values and social practices shape group-oriented education in Japanese pre-schools. By analyzing everyday routines, pedagogical approaches, and teacher–child interactions, the study seeks to illuminate how *shūdan seikatsu* operates as a foundational principle of early childhood education in Japan. The central argument of this paper is that Japanese pre-school education serves as a critical site for the transmission of cultural norms and social ethics. Through the structured experience of group life, children learn not only practical social skills but also deeper cultural values such as harmony (*wa*), empathy (*omoiyari*), and cooperative responsibility. These practices demonstrate that early childhood education in Japan is fundamentally oriented toward social formation rather than academic competition.

Keywords: Japanese pre-school education; group life (*shūdan seikatsu*); early socialization; cultural values; collective learning; childhood education.

Introduction:

Early childhood education in Japan occupies a foundational position within the country's broader educational and social system. Institutions such as *yōchien* (kindergartens) and *hoikuen* (day-care centers) are not merely preparatory spaces for formal schooling but are central to the social and moral development of children. Since the late nineteenth century, Japanese early childhood education has evolved through the interaction of indigenous cultural values and imported educational models, particularly during the Meiji period. Over time, the emphasis has shifted from academic instruction toward holistic development, with a strong focus on socialization, emotional growth, and cooperative behavior. Post-war educational reforms further reinforced the role of early childhood education as a space for nurturing democratic values, interpersonal sensitivity, and community awareness. Contemporary Japanese pre-schools continue to reflect this legacy by prioritizing experiential learning, play-based activities, and group participation as essential components of child development.

Pre-school education in Japan is widely regarded as the primary stage at which children learn how to function as members of a social collective. Rather than emphasizing individual academic achievement, Japanese pre-schools focus on cultivating social skills such as cooperation, self-regulation, empathy, and respect for others. Daily routines—such as eating together, cleaning shared spaces, and participating in group play—serve as practical lessons in communal responsibility and mutual dependence. This early social formation plays a critical role in preparing children for later stages of education and social life, where group harmony and collective effort are highly valued. The behavioral norms and social expectations learned in pre-school settings often extend beyond the classroom, shaping children's interactions within families, communities, and eventually workplaces.

Central to Japanese pre-school education is the concept of *shūdan seikatsu*, or “life in a group.” This concept reflects a cultural understanding of the self as relational rather than autonomous, emphasizing the interdependence between individuals and their social environment. In educational contexts, *shūdan seikatsu* manifests through structured group activities, shared responsibilities, and collective problem-solving. Rather than enforcing conformity through rigid discipline, Japanese educators encourage children to internalize group norms organically through participation and observation. Teachers play a facilitative role, guiding children to become aware of others' feelings and perspectives while learning to regulate their own behavior. In this way, *shūdan seikatsu* functions as both a pedagogical strategy and a cultural mechanism for social integration.

Group-Oriented Pedagogy:

Group-oriented pedagogy forms the pedagogical core of Japanese pre-school education. Unlike educational models that prioritize individual achievement or competition, this approach emphasizes cooperation, collective responsibility, and mutual adjustment. Learning is structured around group activities that require children to negotiate roles, manage conflicts, and coordinate actions with others. This pedagogical orientation does not eliminate individuality but situates it within a relational framework. Children are encouraged to express themselves while remaining attentive to the needs and emotions of the group. Teachers guide behavior indirectly, allowing children to learn social norms through experience rather than through direct instruction or punitive discipline. Group-oriented pedagogy thus reflects a culturally embedded educational philosophy that values harmony and interdependence as essential components of social life.

The practices of group-based education in Japan are deeply informed by the cultural concepts of *wa*, *omoiyari*, and *shitsuke*. **Wa**, commonly translated as harmony, refers to the maintenance of balanced social relationships and the avoidance of overt conflict. In pre-school settings, *wa* is cultivated through

cooperative activities, turn-taking, and the resolution of disputes in ways that preserve group cohesion. **Omoiyari**, or empathy, emphasizes sensitivity to others' feelings and situational awareness. Children are encouraged to recognize the emotional states of their peers and to adjust their behavior accordingly. This emotional attunement is fostered through teacher modeling, group discussions, and shared experiences, reinforcing the idea that social interaction requires attentiveness to others. **Shitsuke**, often understood as discipline or proper upbringing, refers to the gradual internalization of socially acceptable behavior. Rather than relying on strict rules or punishment, Japanese pre-schools emphasize self-regulation and moral development through repeated practice and gentle guidance. Together, these concepts form an ethical framework that underpins group-oriented educational practices.

Education as Cultural Reproduction:

This study also draws on the theoretical notion of education as a process of cultural reproduction, wherein schools function as sites for transmitting dominant cultural values and social norms across generations. Pre-school education in Japan exemplifies this process by embedding cultural expectations within everyday routines and interactions. Through participation in group life, children learn not only how to behave in educational settings but also how to function within the broader social order. Cultural reproduction in this context does not imply rigid indoctrination but rather the subtle reinforcement of shared values through lived experience. Japanese pre-schools reproduce cultural ideals of cooperation, emotional sensitivity, and social responsibility while allowing space for adaptation and change. Understanding education as cultural reproduction thus provides a critical lens for analyzing how group-oriented pedagogy contributes to the continuity of Japanese social life.

The development of pre-school education in Japan reflects the broader historical transformations of Japanese society, particularly the interplay between indigenous cultural practices and modern educational reforms. Although formal early childhood institutions emerged relatively late, the foundations of pre-school education can be traced to traditional child-rearing practices within families and local communities, where social norms, discipline, and group consciousness were cultivated through everyday interaction. Before the institutionalization of early childhood education, Japanese children were primarily socialized within extended family structures and village communities. Learning occurred informally through observation, imitation, and participation in communal life. Practices such as shared labor, festival participation, and collective rituals played an important role in fostering cooperation and social responsibility from an early age. These pre-modern modes of child socialization laid the cultural groundwork for later group-oriented educational practices.

The formal introduction of pre-school education in Japan began during the Meiji period (1868–1912), a time marked by rapid modernization and the adoption of Western institutional models. The first kindergarten (*yōchien*) was established in 1876 at the Tokyo Women's Normal School, influenced by Friedrich Fröbel's educational philosophy. While Western pedagogical ideas emphasized play and child-centered learning, Japanese educators selectively adapted these concepts to align with existing cultural values. Rather than emphasizing individual creativity alone, early Japanese kindergartens incorporated group activities and moral instruction that reflected Confucian and communal ideals. The state viewed early childhood education as a means of cultivating disciplined, socially responsible citizens who could contribute to the nation-building project of modern Japan.

Pre-School Education in Modern Era:

During the late Meiji and Taishō periods, pre-school education expanded gradually, though it remained limited to urban and middle-class populations. In the early Shōwa period, especially during wartime,

early childhood education became increasingly influenced by nationalist and moralistic objectives. Group discipline, obedience, and loyalty were emphasized, and educational practices were aligned with state ideology. Despite this politicization, the emphasis on collective behavior and group participation continued to reinforce the centrality of *shūdan seikatsu* within educational settings. Pre-schools functioned as spaces where children learned to subordinate individual desires to group goals, reflecting broader societal expectations of conformity and unity.

Following Japan's defeat in 1945, pre-school education underwent significant reform under the influence of democratic ideals and educational restructuring. The post-war education system sought to distance itself from militaristic and authoritarian practices, placing greater emphasis on child welfare, emotional development, and democratic participation. Pre-school education was reoriented toward fostering independence, creativity, and interpersonal understanding. However, the group-oriented nature of Japanese education was not abandoned. Instead, *shūdan seikatsu* was reinterpreted within a democratic framework that emphasized cooperation, mutual respect, and shared responsibility rather than obedience. This balance between individuality and group consciousness became a defining characteristic of post-war Japanese pre-school education.

In contemporary Japan, pre-school education continues to evolve in response to social changes such as declining birth rates, increased female workforce participation, and growing cultural diversity. The distinction between *yōchien* and *hoikuen* has gradually narrowed, with integrated early childhood education and care systems emerging to address new societal needs. Despite these changes, the emphasis on group life remains central. Daily routines, collaborative play, and shared responsibilities continue to serve as key mechanisms for socialization. At the same time, educators increasingly seek to accommodate diverse learning needs and encourage individual expression within group settings. This historical continuity and adaptation demonstrate how Japanese pre-school education has maintained its cultural foundations while responding to modern challenges.

Cultural Foundation of Group Life:

The emphasis on group life in Japanese pre-school education is deeply rooted in long-standing cultural values that shape social relations and individual identity. Rather than viewing the individual as an autonomous unit, Japanese society has traditionally emphasized relational identity, in which the self is understood through its connections with others. Pre-school education functions as one of the earliest institutional spaces where these cultural assumptions are actively cultivated and normalized.

Japanese conceptions of the self are fundamentally relational, privileging interdependence over individual autonomy. From early childhood, individuals are encouraged to perceive themselves as members of a social collective, responsible for maintaining harmonious relationships within the group. In pre-school settings, this relational orientation is reinforced through shared activities that require cooperation, coordination, and mutual awareness. Children learn that their actions have consequences for others and that social life depends on collective effort rather than personal assertion. This communal orientation does not negate individuality but situates it within a broader social framework. Children are encouraged to develop personal interests and abilities while remaining attentive to the expectations and needs of the group. Such an understanding of selfhood aligns closely with the pedagogical emphasis on *shūdan seikatsu*, where social belonging is considered essential to personal development.

Cultural values are transmitted in Japanese pre-schools largely through implicit rather than explicit instruction. Everyday practices—such as greeting rituals, group meals, shared cleaning duties, and collective play—serve as informal lessons in social responsibility and moral conduct. Through

repeated participation in these routines, children internalize norms of cooperation, patience, and respect without the need for overt moralization. This form of implicit moral education reflects a broader cultural preference for learning through experience and observation. Teachers model appropriate behavior and gently guide children toward self-regulation, allowing them to learn from social interaction rather than from strict rules or punishment. Over time, children develop an intuitive understanding of acceptable behavior within group contexts.

A key cultural foundation of group life is the cultivation of emotional sensitivity and social awareness. Children are encouraged to recognize and respond to the feelings of others, fostering empathy and emotional intelligence from an early age. Teachers often intervene in conflicts not by assigning blame but by helping children reflect on how their actions affect others. This emphasis on emotional attunement supports the maintenance of social harmony and reinforces the importance of mutual consideration. Learning to “read the atmosphere” and adjust one’s behavior accordingly becomes an essential social skill, developed through everyday interactions in group settings. Such practices contribute to the formation of socially competent individuals capable of navigating complex interpersonal environments.

The cultural foundations of group life in pre-school education are reinforced by continuity between home, school, and broader social institutions. Values emphasized in pre-school settings often reflect expectations within families and communities, creating a consistent framework for socialization. Parents, educators, and society at large share common assumptions about appropriate behavior, cooperation, and responsibility. This continuity strengthens the effectiveness of group-oriented education, as children encounter similar social expectations across different contexts. Pre-school thus serves as a bridge between familial socialization and participation in wider social institutions, preparing children for the group-based structures they will encounter throughout their educational and professional lives.

Ultimately, group life in Japanese pre-schools functions as cultural preparation for participation in society. By learning to operate within a group, children acquire not only social skills but also a cultural understanding of cooperation, harmony, and shared responsibility. These foundational experiences shape patterns of behavior and interaction that extend far beyond early childhood. The cultural foundations of group life therefore reveal pre-school education in Japan as a critical site of social reproduction and cultural continuity. Through everyday practices and interactions, children are gradually integrated into a social world that values collective well-being alongside individual growth.

Social Practices in Japanese Pre-Schools:

Social practices in Japanese pre-schools provide the concrete, everyday context through which cultural values and group-oriented pedagogy are enacted. These practices are not incidental but carefully embedded in daily routines and interactions, enabling children to experience group life (*shūdan seikatsu*) as an integral part of learning. Through participation in structured and unstructured activities, children gradually acquire social competencies, emotional regulation, and a sense of collective responsibility. Daily routines form the backbone of social life in Japanese pre-schools. Activities such as morning assemblies, group greetings, shared meals, and closing reflections are designed to foster a sense of belonging and collective rhythm. These routines emphasize synchrony and mutual awareness, encouraging children to adjust their behavior in accordance with the group. Participation is valued over individual performance, and children are encouraged to move, sing, eat, and work together. Through repetition, these shared routines help internalize social norms and cultivate habits of cooperation and attentiveness to others. Play occupies a central position in Japanese pre-school education and functions as a key medium for social learning. Group play activities—such as

cooperative games, role-playing, and outdoor physical activities—provide opportunities for children to negotiate roles, resolve conflicts, and develop communication skills. Rather than intervening immediately, teachers often allow children to work through disagreements collectively, fostering problem-solving and peer mediation. This approach enables children to learn the dynamics of group interaction organically. Play becomes a space where social rules are tested, refined, and internalized, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and mutual respect.

One of the most distinctive social practices in Japanese pre-schools is the emphasis on shared responsibility. Children participate in tasks such as cleaning classrooms, arranging learning materials, and caring for communal spaces. These activities are not treated as chores but as collective responsibilities that contribute to the well-being of the group. Through shared care, children learn the value of cooperation, accountability, and respect for common property. Such practices reinforce the idea that maintaining a harmonious environment is a shared obligation rather than the responsibility of authority figures alone. Teachers in Japanese pre-schools typically adopt a facilitative rather than authoritarian role. Instead of issuing direct commands, they guide behavior through subtle cues, modeling, and reflective questioning. This indirect approach encourages children to become aware of social expectations and to regulate their behavior independently. Teacher–child interactions emphasize emotional support and social understanding. When conflicts arise, teachers often focus on helping children understand the perspectives and feelings of others rather than imposing immediate solutions. This method supports the development of empathy and self-regulation within group contexts.

Peer interaction plays a crucial role in social learning within Japanese pre-schools. Children spend extended periods interacting with the same group, allowing stable relationships to form over time. These sustained interactions enable children to experience cooperation, conflict, reconciliation, and collective problem-solving. Through peer relationships, children learn social norms not as abstract rules but as lived experiences. The group itself becomes a powerful agent of socialization, reinforcing acceptable behavior and shared values through everyday interaction. While group life is emphasized, Japanese pre-school practices also accommodate individual differences. Children are encouraged to express their ideas and emotions, provided these expressions remain sensitive to group dynamics. Teachers recognize and support individual needs while maintaining a collective learning environment. This balance between individuality and group orientation reflects a nuanced educational philosophy in which personal development and social harmony are mutually reinforcing rather than oppositional.

The Role of Teachers in Group Socialization:

Teachers play a central role in shaping group life in Japanese pre-schools, functioning not as authoritative instructors but as facilitators of social interaction and emotional development. Their pedagogical approach reflects a culturally grounded understanding of learning as a social and relational process. Through subtle guidance, modeling, and mediation, teachers create an environment in which children learn to navigate group dynamics and internalize social norms. In Japanese pre-schools, teachers are primarily responsible for maintaining the conditions that allow group life (*shūdan seikatsu*) to function effectively. Rather than directing children through explicit rules or commands, teachers structure activities that naturally require cooperation and collective engagement. By organizing the physical space, scheduling routines, and designing group-based tasks, teachers encourage children to experience interdependence as an everyday reality. This facilitative role allows children to take active responsibility for their own behavior within the group. Teachers intervene selectively, enabling children to learn from interaction and experience rather than from constant adult supervision.

A defining feature of teacher practice in Japanese pre-schools is the use of indirect guidance. Instead of correcting behavior overtly, teachers often rely on suggestion, example, and reflective questioning. This approach encourages children to recognize social expectations and regulate their behavior autonomously. Moral learning occurs through participation and observation rather than formal instruction. Teachers model appropriate conduct—such as patience, cooperation, and empathy—providing children with behavioral cues that are gradually internalized. This method aligns with the broader cultural preference for implicit learning and minimizes confrontation or overt discipline. Conflict among children is treated as an opportunity for social and emotional learning rather than as a disruption to be immediately suppressed. Teachers guide children in recognizing the feelings of others and understanding the consequences of their actions. Rather than assigning blame or imposing punishment, teachers encourage dialogue and reflection, helping children reach resolution collectively. Through such mediation, children develop emotional literacy, empathy, and problem-solving skills. Teachers support this process by validating emotions while guiding children toward socially acceptable behavior that preserves group harmony.

Teachers actively cultivate empathy (*omoiyari*) and social awareness through daily interactions. By drawing attention to the emotional states of peers and encouraging children to consider others' perspectives, teachers foster sensitivity to social context. This emotional attunement is considered essential for successful participation in group life. Classroom practices such as group discussions, shared storytelling, and reflective activities provide opportunities for children to articulate feelings and develop interpersonal understanding. Teachers' consistent emphasis on emotional awareness reinforces the importance of mutual consideration in social relationships. While teachers maintain responsibility for classroom order and safety, they consciously limit the exercise of overt authority. This balance allows children to develop autonomy within the boundaries of group expectations. Teachers provide a secure framework in which children can experiment with independence while remaining accountable to the collective. This pedagogical balance reflects a culturally informed approach to education in which authority is exercised through guidance and trust rather than control. As a result, children gradually internalize social norms and develop the capacity to function responsibly within group settings.

Ultimately, teachers in Japanese pre-schools act as cultural mediators who transmit social values through everyday practice. By embodying cultural ideals such as harmony, empathy, and cooperative responsibility, teachers help children internalize these values in meaningful ways. Their role extends beyond instruction to include the cultivation of social character and cultural competence. Through their interactions and pedagogical choices, teachers ensure that group life in pre-schools serves as an effective foundation for children's integration into broader Japanese society.

Individuality within the Group:

Although Japanese pre-school education places strong emphasis on group life and collective harmony, individuality is not entirely subsumed within the group. Rather, individuality is shaped, expressed, and negotiated within a relational framework. Japanese pre-schools aim to cultivate children who can express their own feelings and preferences while remaining sensitive to the needs and expectations of others. This balance reflects a culturally specific understanding of individuality as socially embedded rather than oppositional to collective life. In Japanese educational contexts, individuality is understood in relational terms, emphasizing self-awareness and self-regulation within social interaction. Children are encouraged to recognize their own emotions and intentions while learning how these affect the group. This form of individuality prioritizes adaptability, emotional sensitivity, and social responsibility over assertive self-expression. Pre-school practices allow children to develop personal identities through interaction rather than isolation. Individual traits emerge through participation in

shared activities, where children learn to adjust their behavior according to situational demands and group dynamics.

Japanese pre-schools provide structured opportunities for children to express opinions, emotions, and creativity, particularly through play, storytelling, and artistic activities. However, such expression is guided by implicit social boundaries that emphasize respect for others and group cohesion. Teachers encourage children to speak and act in ways that acknowledge the presence and feelings of peers. This pedagogical approach teaches children that self-expression carries social responsibility. Rather than discouraging individuality, it frames personal expression as something that must be negotiated within shared social space. Within group-oriented environments, differences in temperament, ability, and background are addressed through inclusive practices rather than segregation. Teachers observe individual needs and provide subtle support to ensure that each child can participate meaningfully in group activities. Children learn to accommodate differences among peers, reinforcing tolerance and mutual understanding. Such experiences contribute to the development of social flexibility and empathy, enabling children to navigate diversity within collective settings. The group becomes a space where differences are acknowledged and managed collaboratively.

Scholars and critics have occasionally argued that the strong emphasis on group harmony in Japanese education may suppress creativity or discourage assertive individuality. Concerns have been raised about conformity and peer pressure, particularly in later stages of schooling. While these critiques warrant attention, evidence from early childhood education suggests that pre-schools strive to balance conformity with emotional security and self-development. At the pre-school level, group-oriented practices are generally experienced as supportive rather than restrictive. The emphasis on belonging and emotional safety often provides a foundation from which children can explore individuality with confidence. In Japanese pre-schools, individuality is often defined less by uniqueness and more by social competence—the ability to participate effectively in group life. Children who can communicate feelings appropriately, cooperate with peers, and respond sensitively to social cues are considered to be developing healthy individual identities. This conceptualization challenges Western notions of individuality centered on independence and self-assertion. Instead, Japanese early childhood education promotes an understanding of individuality that is compatible with collective harmony and social cohesion.

The negotiation of individuality within group contexts in pre-school education has long-term implications for social behavior in Japanese society. Early experiences of balancing personal desires with group expectations prepare children for later participation in educational institutions, workplaces, and communities where cooperation and mutual adjustment are highly valued. Thus, individuality within the group is not a contradiction but a defining feature of Japanese pre-school education. It reflects a culturally grounded approach to personal development that integrates selfhood with social belonging.

Contemporary Challenges and Changes:

While Japanese pre-school education remains deeply rooted in the principles of group life (*shūdan seikatsu*), it faces contemporary challenges arising from demographic, social, and cultural transformations. These challenges necessitate adaptations in pedagogical practices, classroom organization, and educational policies, reflecting the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. One of the most significant challenges is Japan's declining birth rate and changing family composition. Smaller family sizes and increased participation of women in the workforce have altered the social context in which children are raised. Pre-schools are increasingly required to accommodate

children who may have less prior experience in large-group interaction, making the facilitation of socialization and cooperation more complex.

Additionally, dual-income households often place higher demands on early childhood education for care as well as learning. Pre-schools must balance educational objectives with caregiving responsibilities, which has led to the emergence of integrated early childhood education and care (*nintei kodomo-en*) systems that combine the functions of traditional *yōchien* and *hoikuen*. Contemporary classrooms are becoming more diverse in terms of children's abilities, cultural backgrounds, and family experiences. Early childhood educators are increasingly challenged to address differences in development, language, and social skills while maintaining group cohesion. Inclusive education practices, such as differentiated instruction and cooperative learning strategies, are being integrated to ensure that all children can participate meaningfully in group activities. Multicultural education has also gained importance due to increased migration and internationalization. Teachers are required to mediate between maintaining cultural traditions and fostering an inclusive environment that respects diversity.

Global trends in early childhood education, such as child-centered learning, creativity, and inquiry-based approaches, pose both opportunities and tensions for Japanese pre-schools. While group-oriented pedagogy remains foundational, educators are exploring ways to integrate these pedagogical innovations without compromising the cultural principles of harmony, cooperation, and mutual responsibility. Digital technologies and educational media present additional considerations. Incorporating technology must be carefully managed to avoid undermining face-to-face social interaction, which is central to the development of group competencies. Modern pre-school education in Japan also faces challenges related to teacher workload and professional development. Teachers are expected to manage complex classrooms, support individual needs, and foster group cohesion simultaneously. Ongoing professional training and support are essential to equip educators with the skills needed to navigate these multifaceted responsibilities. Despite these challenges, Japanese pre-schools continue to emphasize the transmission of cultural values through group life. Adaptations in pedagogy and classroom organization demonstrate the flexibility of *shūdan seikatsu* in responding to contemporary societal demands. Children continue to develop social competencies, empathy, and collective responsibility, while educators find innovative ways to accommodate individuality and diversity.

These contemporary changes highlight the dynamic nature of pre-school education as both a site of cultural continuity and social innovation. By negotiating the tensions between tradition and modernity, Japanese pre-schools remain effective in fostering group-oriented socialization while preparing children for a rapidly evolving society.

Conclusion:

This study has explored the cultural foundations and social practices of pre-school education in Japan, with particular emphasis on *life in a group* (*shūdan seikatsu*). Japanese pre-schools prioritize collective participation, cooperation, and social responsibility, embedding cultural values such as harmony (*wa*), empathy (*omoiyari*), and discipline (*shitsuke*) into daily routines. Through shared meals, collaborative play, group cleaning, and structured classroom activities, children develop social competence, emotional intelligence, and relational awareness. Teachers serve as facilitators rather than authoritarian figures, guiding children to internalize social norms and navigate interpersonal relationships while balancing group cohesion with individual expression. By situating children in relational frameworks, Japanese pre-schools integrate personal development with social harmony, preparing children for broader societal participation.

This study contributes to educate on early childhood education, cultural socialization, and comparative pedagogy by highlighting how Japanese pre-school practices integrate cultural values with educational objectives. Unlike individual-centered educational models, Japanese pre-schools demonstrate a relational understanding of individuality, where personal development occurs in harmony with collective life. The findings underscore the role of pre-school education as a site of cultural reproduction, where social norms, moral values, and group-oriented behavior are transmitted across generations. In conclusion, Japanese pre-school education exemplifies a culturally grounded approach in which socialization, group life, and moral development are intricately intertwined. By balancing individuality with collective responsibility, these educational practices prepare children not only for formal schooling but also for participation in broader social life, ensuring the continuity of cultural values while adapting to contemporary societal changes.

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