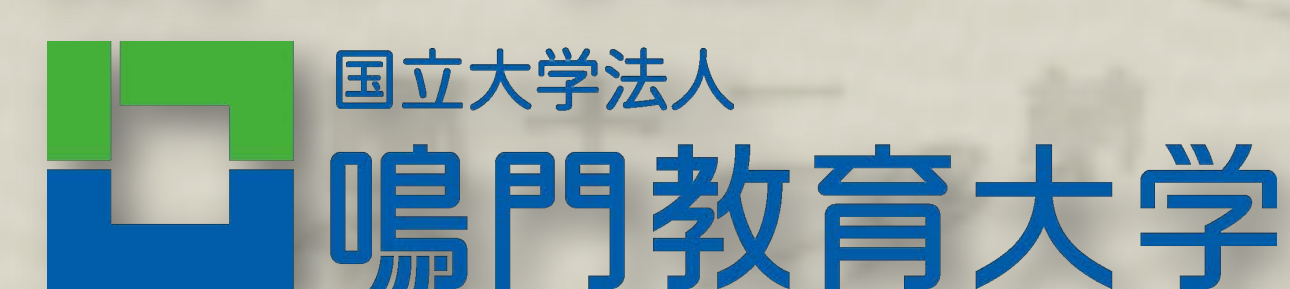


# The History and Problem of the Swimming Education in Japan

教育の一番札所



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## Historic process

From the ancient times, people in Japan have got into the water for the reasons of predation, hygiene, physical health, spiritual health, religion and enjoyment. The fishery people harvested fish, shellfish and seaweed in the sea and river.

At the Edo Shogunate period (1603-1867), swimming as a military art developed. Due to the conditions and situations of the rivers, seas, and lakes of the country, various schools of military arts developed their original style of swimming. At the middle of Edo period, swimming of warriors was systematized as a culture of samurai, and became one of the items of demonstration.

Figure 1 shows various diagrams of Japanese traditional swimming skill, they cover all general ability to live in the water, include drown proofing.

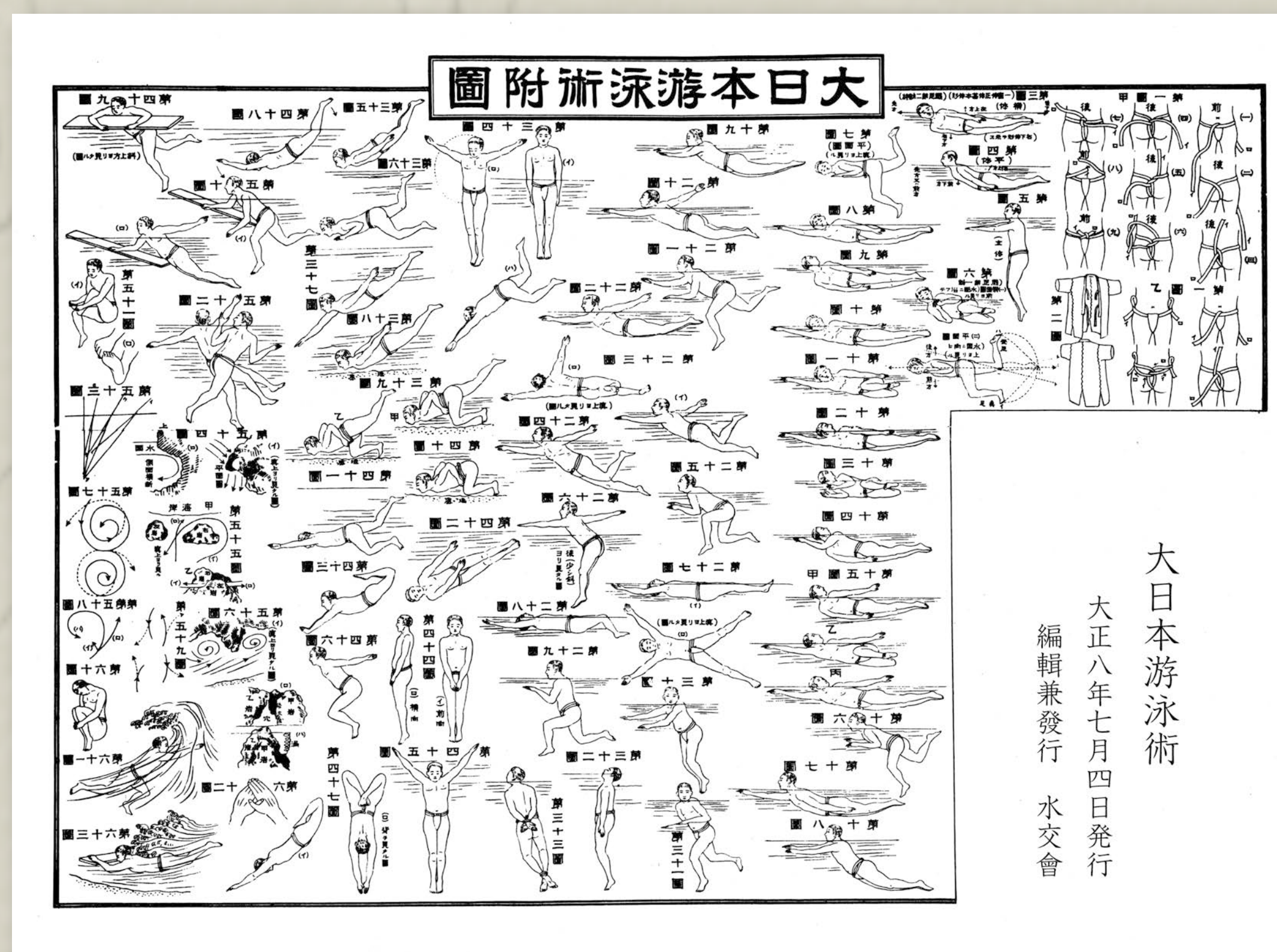
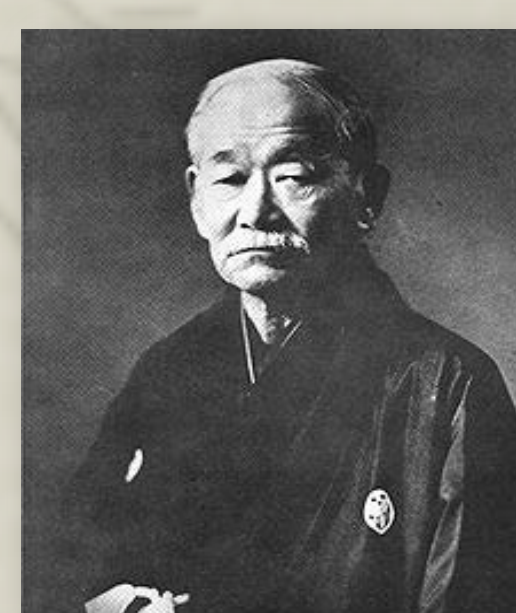


Figure 1: Diagram of Japanese swimming method (Suikokai 1919)



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## Key person and accident for swimming education



KANO Jigoro  
(1860-1938)

Jigoro Kano (1860-1938) is well known as the founder of Judo. He served as director of primary education for the Ministry of Education, and also as president of Tokyo Higher Normal School. He told that teachers must able to swim, in order to secure their children with their professional responsibility (Sanada, Tsubakimoto & Takagi, 2007). He insisted on importance of the swimming education and made it with a compulsory subject in a teacher-training curriculum.

The Shiun-maru disaster (Figure 2) was a ship collision accident occurred in 1955, killing 168 people. The ferry ship named Shiun-maru had sunk completely after colliding with another ferry, the Uko-maru, in thick fog. The victims included 100 students of elementary and junior high schools during school trips. This accident could be a trigger to start swimming education as a national policy.



Figure 2: Photo Shiun-Maru sank (Yomiuri Press, 1955)

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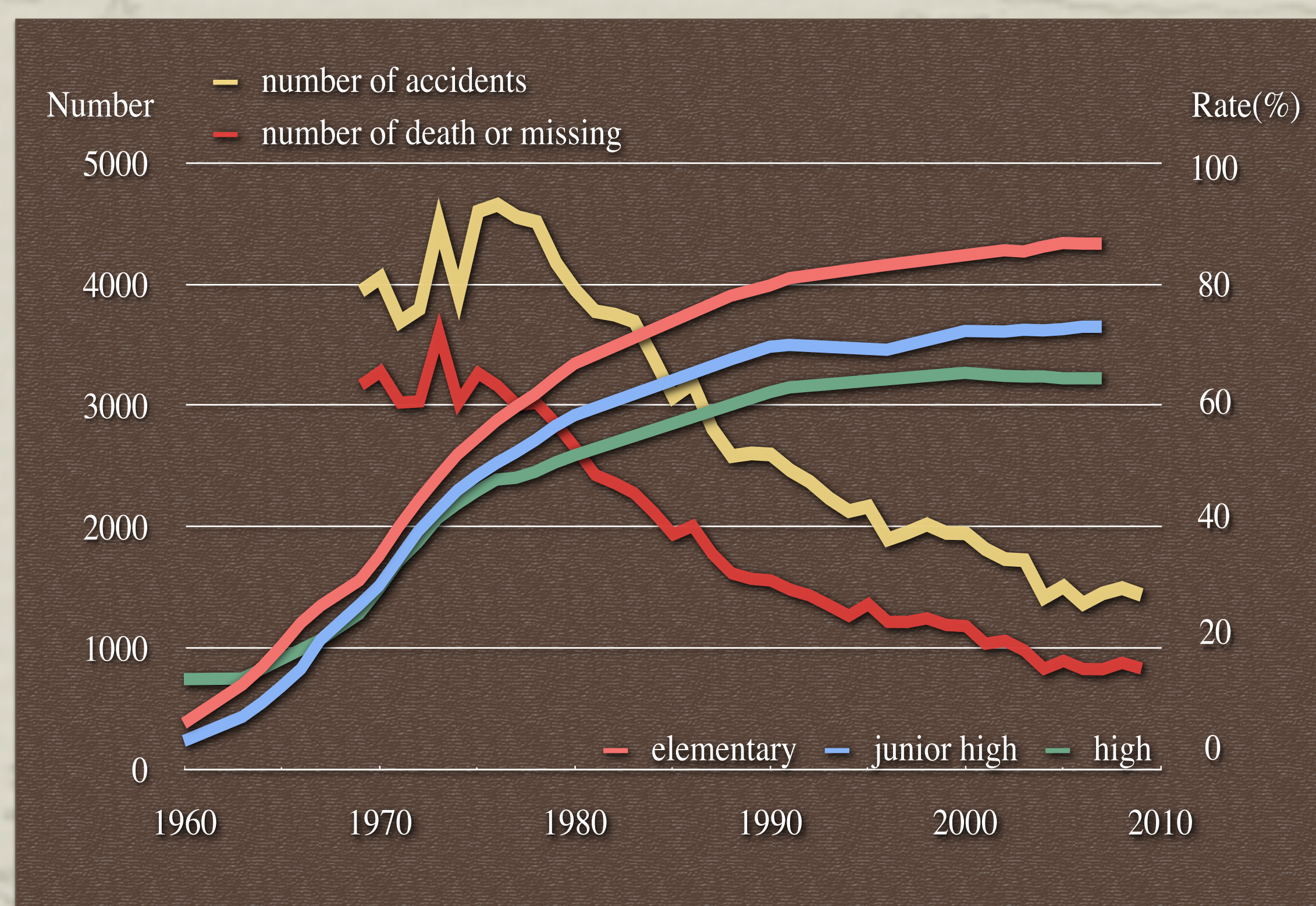


Figure 3: Swimming pool diffusion rate in school and drowning accidents in Japan (Matsui, 2009)

that Japan has succeeded in decreasing drowning by constructing swimming pools in school all over the country. Although Japan still have the highest rates of drowning in OECD countries at 2004 shown as Figure 4 (Matsui, 2011).

## Problem to be solved in the swimming education

The biggest problem of Japanese swimming education is that most people would have no experience to swim or even stay in the water at the place impossible to stand up. Beside the limitation of skills developed in shallow pool, there are several problems to be solved. Expecting further development of the future swimming education, we showed those problems in Figure 5.

### Problem of school swimming in Japan

- ✓ Average swimming pool in school has shallow depth. (approximately 0.8-1.2m at elementary school):
  - + horizontal move
  - vertical move
  - + can stand up
  - easy to give up
- ✓ Outdoor pools / June-July rainy season / 8 times of class.
- ✓ Learn stroke styles of swimming race, not for water safety.
- ✓ No achievement standard to complete a swimming class.
- ✓ Many of school teachers are not good at swimming.
- ✓ Less opportunity to improve/retrain how to teach swimming .
- ✓ Recent adults do not recognize value and importance of swimming and the water safety.

Figure 5: Problem of school swimming in Japan

## National promotion of school swimming

In 1961, the Japanese Government established the law of sports promotion. Then they carried a five-year plan for construction of sports facilities. First Olympic games in Asia were held in Tokyo (1964), and competitive sport became much popular. In school education, swimming had upgraded in 1968, as a major and compulsory physical exercise in school, by the revision of curriculum guideline by the ministry of education.

Before 1960s, most schools did not have their own swimming pool. But after the Shiun-maru disaster, by the spread of swimming education at school by administrative power, rate of public school pool establishment have increased rapidly as shown in Figure 3. Most elementary and junior high schools now have their own swimming pool. Rates in 2008 are 86.7% at elementary school, 73.0% at junior high school, and 64.5% at high school. (Matsui, 2009)

At the same time, Figure 3 shows the decrease of drowning accidents reported by the National Police Agency for the same period. It is considered



Figure 4: Death rate by drowning in OECD countries in 2004 (Matsui, 2011)

## Abstract

Swimming in Japan had developed as military arts of warriors, and became as the culture of the samurais. Swimming is recognized as a matter of education and developed at school. The Japanese government has promoted swimming with an educational intention for these 60 years. The outdoor swimming pools spread in almost every school, but people do not acquire enough ability to secure water safety by the factor of pool facilities and course of study. It is necessary to reexamine a swimming skill standard and assessment for human education, and to rebuild the appropriate swimming curriculum to fit the purpose of the water safety. In swimming education in Japan, people can develop only some parts of swimming abilities in whole area of swimming which provide us water safety and joy of aquatic activities. It is necessary to verify a swimming skill standard, and to rebuild the appropriate swimming curriculum.