1. I have attended both an American, non-standardized educational system that takes a holistic approach to evaluating and selecting individual students, and a standardized Japanese system where students are evaluated through examinations based on objective indicators of performance.  
    In the American system, the criteria for appraising students is unclear and often subjective, making students more vulnerable to the whims of their evaluators. The admission process strongly emphasizes the importance of personality in their prospective students; personality which is observed in a multitude of extracurricular activities, teacher evaluations, etc. Since standardized testing is often limited in scope and less valued, students rely on alternative methods to differentiate themselves and appeal to institutions with the hope of increasing their chances of admission into a reputable school. Such a system grants the culturally and financially wealthy an unfair advantage in admissions and lacks the capacity to realize and impartially evaluate the potential of students who do not have the cultural and financial capital to decorate their resume. Those with a middle to upper-class background can afford impressive activities outside of the classroom; notably family vacations abroad, engagement in the arts, sports and other physically exhaustive activities, volunteer work, and more. A personal example of this would be the overwhelming majority of my wealthy classmates from middle school who played an instrument and were a part of an orchestra or band. Children from financially struggling households cannot afford such extravagances. The range of activities they must choose from to appeal their worth to admissions offices is decidedly narrower. Furthermore, fluency in the accepted form of language and the ability to eloquently present oneself and communicate with adults, key factors in determining the success of admission essays, personal statements and interviews, are skills that are specific to the middle-class. Middle to upper-class children grow up with self-confidence due to the prevalent style of parenting of their class, whereas lower-class children often lack the confidence and eloquence to express their thoughts and engage in original, critical thinking. It is characteristic of the American, non-standardized admissions system that the merits sought out and evaluated in students are merits that are often out of reach of the lower-class.   
    The Japanese system is much more standardized and relies on testing to provide objective results of student ability. Tracking in the Japanese system takes the form of difference in levels between schools. Different schools provide different levels in the quality of education and varying degrees of success in graduates’ admission into high-ranking institutions in higher levels of education. Students accumulate educational merit in the form of academic literacy and ascend the hierarchy of schools, seeking to improve the likeliness of ultimate success in university admissions. The middle and upper classes are still at an advantage for they are more likely to be able to afford shadow education and other educational resources that contribute to accumulating merit. Furthermore, possessing a large amount of social capital could affect one’s educational trajectory and benefit one through channels such as teacher expectations, peer expectations, etc. However, the effects of social background on school admissions are not as directly felt as that in the non-standardized, American system.
2. The three parental strategies that most influenced my educational trajectory and contributed to my admission into Waseda University are reading, school involvement and the inculcation of study habits.   
   The effects of the first two on my selection are indirect, yet significant. From a very young age I was exposed to a plethora of books and introduced to various works of literature by my mother. She would read me stories every night before bed, many of them simplified versions of highly regarded classics. Once I developed the skill to read on my own, she would take me to the library every Sunday to borrow books to read throughout the week. This parenting strategy was pivotal in maintaining my bilingualism and also familiarized me with more formal forms of language that I was not exposed to in everyday life. My wide vocabulary and resulting relative eloquence earned me great respect from my peers and gave my teachers reason to take me seriously. The high regard that I was able to gain from teachers translated into high teacher expectations and strong support for my studies, greatly profiting my academic performance. Added to this was the effect of my mother’s active involvement in school activities. My mother visited my high school frequently to participate in PTA gatherings, and when she was there, she would talk to my teachers. She was well known around the school and loved by the faculty for her good humor and gregariousness. The faculty’s collective respect for her undoubtedly influenced their perception of me and most likely contributed to the immense support that they provided me during my university admissions process.   
   While reading and parental involvement only played indirect roles in my selection into Waseda, the study habits that my mother instilled in me directly affected my university admission. I found success in admissions through the highly standardized path of testing and exams. My success in this field would not have been possible had it not been for the way I was disciplined in my formative years by my mother. Before I even started school, my mother would wake me up every morning at six and have me study different subjects for an hour. This practice continued until my middle school years, when finally she eased off and allowed for more flexibility in my study schedule. However, this practice improved my concentration and acquainted me to long hours of intensive study. Furthermore, it alleviated the pain of studying to the point where I didn’t particularly enjoy the deed, but I was not averse to it. This habit of studying served incredibly useful in studying for tests in later years and made possible my admission to Waseda and a number of other selective universities through exams.
3. The absence of standardized examinations in the American university admission system presented major hurdles for me in applying to universities. Initially, I considered applying to American universities and completing my university education in the US. However, although I got close to full score on the SAT examinations, I had no extracurricular activities or outstanding nonacademic feats that would help me in admissions. I was forced to give up the option of pursuing higher education in the US because I spent so much of my time in high school preparing for exams and not on building my resume, ultimately leaving me at a disadvantage in the American system. On the contrary, I did benefit from the standardized setting of Japanese university admissions, for I was able to apply to virtually any institution just by taking an exam.
4. If I were in a non-standardized, highly tracked system of education such as the American model, it can be predicted that I still would have done fairly well and been in an advantageous position in university admissions. As I mentioned above, I was in no means lacking in social capital, which is often focused on and valued in non-standardized settings. I was well-read with a good understanding and appreciation of culture and the English I spoke was low-context, clean, and formal. I also had a good relationship with my teachers and am confident that had I been in a system where teacher evaluation is a key factor of admissions, this would have worked to my advantage. Further, I had the financial security to engage in extracurricular activities if I desired. The combination of resources I had access to and the various forms of capital that I possessed would have made me a strong candidate in a non-standardized and heavily individual and subjective selection system as well.   
   My parents’ educational strategies likely would have differed to accommodate the different style of selection. Instead of encouraging me to devote my time to admission examinations, they would have promoted and provided funds for extracurriculars to reinforce my resume. They probably also would have involved themselves more in school and committed to gathering information concerning university admissions in a varying and obscure admission system.   
   My example is a testament to the advantaged position of high SES students in both selection styles. Whether in a high-standardized or low-standardized setting, the combination of cultural and financial capital provides a great advantage to individuals of a wealthy background and secures success in school admissions which, inevitably, leads to success in adult life. The style of admissions is consequential in determining the lifelong success of students by arbitrarily affecting their educational trajectory. It is an unfortunate reality that across different styles of admissions, wealthy individuals remain in a position better equipped to aim for success than their counterparts of a lower SES. (1450 words)