

Shadow Education and Social Inequalities in Japan

Steve R. Entrich

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Evolving Patterns and Conceptual
Implications

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Steve R. Entrich
Department for Education,
Social Science Educational Research
University of Potsdam
Potsdam, Germany

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*This work is dedicated to Miyuki.
May the AME be forever in your favor.*

Preface

Since I entered the “shadow” of the Japanese education system some 6 years ago, I received a lot of strange looks when trying to explain the main topic of my current research. Apart from comparative educationalists, only few seem to value the merits of studying foreign systems of education. But even in comparative education research, outside-of-school realities are still rarely focused on. So besides a few foreign researchers, most research on the topic is likely to be carried out in Japan itself – or so I thought. Even in Japan, many looked rather puzzled when I told them that I would dedicate a whole book to Japanese “shadow education.” It was always a struggle to explain why anyone from Germany would be interested to learn more about the Japanese shadow system, the “*juku*-industry.” Whereas all Japanese seem to somehow know what *juku* are, only few researchers have analyzed this second schooling system. This, of course, does not help to understand why shadow education in Japan exists in the way it does, why it remains very successful, and what the existence of such a system means for the state of education in general and, in particular, for equality of educational opportunities in Japan. What is it that makes the Japanese *juku*-industry a topic not only interesting but highly relevant for Japanese and non-Japanese researchers alike?

The answer to this question is simple: Shadow education is a highly relevant topic because of its general implications. Shadow education exists worldwide. In some countries, such as my home country Germany, shadow education has been traditionally low in scale. In others, such as Japan, only few students manage to not enter *juku* or use other types of paid tutoring services. If we look at countries like Germany, we should not make the mistake of assuming that because our education system is very different from the Japanese one in several regards, private tutoring would not exist. In fact, these services have existed in Germany for as long as there exists schooling. And even though private tutoring has been low in scale traditionally, recently an increasing number of students enroll in these lessons resulting in a continuous expansion of the market. Similar expansions of private supplementary education sectors are evident in many other Western nations as well, including the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. If we take a look at our neighbor Poland or other Eastern European countries, or if we look further south, to Greece

or Turkey, we cannot avoid being surprised to find massive shadow education systems with enrolment rates of 80 or 90% of an age cohort right at our doorstep.

The problem is we are surprised. We are surprised because we do not know much about the causes for the emergence of these parallel education systems, the factors responsible for increased enrolment worldwide. We can also only assume what implications such an increased participation in shadow education will have for education in general. This is why international research on the matter becomes increasingly important. This is also why research on advanced systems such as the Japanese *juku*-industry should be on top of the list of educationalists concerned with the outcomes of globalization, educational expansion, inequality formation, student performance, demographic change, educational reformation, and so on. Advanced in this sense means that the Japanese *juku*-market has undergone several transformations since its establishment in the 1960s and 1970s and achieved a role in Japanese education that is exemplary to other nations in terms of scale and functional diversity. By evaluating and analyzing what factors led to the emergence of the *juku*-industry and its transformations during the twentieth century based on historical developments, clear merits of an analysis of the Japanese *juku*-system for our understanding of the relationship between regular school and shadow education can be achieved. Such research might enable non-Japanese researchers to identify the factors leading to increased demand for shadow education in their home settings. It is also essential to estimate the possible implications of shadow education for education as an institution or the persistence of social inequalities. In sum, we would be in a position to assess what an increased participation in tutoring services means for students, families, teachers, and schools and how officials should deal with the emergence of such education businesses.

Of course, the emergence, development, scale, and functional diversity of any shadow education sector depend on the specifics of the mainstream education system of a country based on cultural and societal characteristics. And I would like to add that the way these nation-specific factors are articulated through actions of corporate (state, organizations) and primary actors (families, teachers, students) shapes education as a whole. Whereas the state primarily shapes formal education, private actors particularly shape the informal parts of education. The question is whether we are bystanders to this development or whether we try to influence this change in education. Because change is happening – whether we want to see it or not. Thus, the aim of this book can only be to shed light on a long dismissed subject in educational and social sciences and its most pressing implications focusing on an exemplary case study: shadow education and social inequality in Japan.

The results of this work not only clarify the (often mystical) role of shadow education in Japan but allow drawing conclusions about the implications of shadow education in other national settings as well. This is due to the fact that in Japan, shadow education already occupies a position that might become trendsetting for other nations. In fact, the continuous expansion of shadow education systems across the globe and the increasing similarities between these systems imply a convergence towards a world model of shadow education, resembling the Japanese model. This book now provides a deep insight into the Japanese model of shadow education

urging practitioners, researchers, families, and politicians to take notice of the possible implications of shadow education inside and outside of Japan. It is also a call for similar works in other national contexts, particularly Western societies without traditional large-scale shadow education markets. This work further shows the importance and urgency to deal with the modern excesses of educational expansion and education as an institution. As written down in this book on the Japanese example, shadow education inherits the potential to become indispensable for a national system of education. It seems only natural that we know what this means for education in general, before figuring out (new) ways to deal with this matter. I hope that the reader enjoys this piece of work and that the ideas and findings brought forth inspire future research in the area of study.

Potsdam, Germany
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Steve R. Enrich

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