

# Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects

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Volume 46

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Editors

# Japanese Education in a Global Age

Sociological Reflections and Future  
Directions

 Springer

*Editors*

Akiyoshi Yonezawa  
International Strategy Office  
Tohoku University  
Sendai, Miyagi, Japan

Yuto Kitamura  
Graduate School of Education  
The University of Tokyo  
Tokyo, Japan

Beverley Yamamoto  
Graduate School of Human Sciences  
Osaka University  
Suita, Osaka, Japan

Tomoko Tokunaga  
Faculty of International Communication  
Gunma Prefectural Women's University  
Tamamura, Gunma, Japan

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## Foreword: The Development of Research on Japanese Education in a Global Age

In 1989, Edward R. Beauchamp and Richard Rubinger, two doyens of the field, published *Education in Japan: A Source Book* (Garland Publishing, New York and London) which they described as a ‘comprehensive’ annotated bibliography of the most important works published in English on the topic of Japanese education. In those pre-Internet days, their source book immediately became something of a bible, particularly for those interested in understanding Japanese education and its relationship with the development of Japanese society which, by the late 1980s, was confidently predicted to be the number one economy in the world by the end of the millennium. Indeed, it was the increased interest in this relationship between Japanese education and economy which the authors believed had led to ‘an explosion of scholarly interest in Japanese education (which) multiplied the number of articles and books on the subject far beyond what they were in 1970s’.

In total Beauchamp and Rubinger’s book had 989 entries. It is interesting to look back at exactly what those less than 1000 entries included since it demonstrates just how the study of Japanese education has developed since. The entries, for example, included nonacademic primary sources – such as translations of the eleventh century like *The Tale of Genji* and *The Pillow Book* of Sei Shōnagon and the novels of Tōson Shimazaki written in the early twentieth century about the late Tokugawa and Meiji periods – which the editors believed were helpful for understanding the development of Japanese educational thought. The book also included many government reports, general surveys and personal diaries going back to the 1870s as well as unpublished doctoral dissertations and articles printed in university department bulletins (*kiyō*). As a result, the number of entries in the bibliography that could be described as both academic and primarily focussed on Japanese education was probably no more than a hundred: 30 to 40 monographs, 10 to 15 edited volumes with chapters on aspects of Japanese society, 30 to 40 articles published in journals (some of which no longer exist) which specialised on either Japan alone or Asia more generally and around 10 articles in mainstream English language journals such as *Comparative Education*, *Comparative Education Review*, *Harvard Educational Review*, *History of Education Quarterly* and *International Review of Education*. The number of academics working on Japanese education was, of

course, even smaller. The major contributors working inside Japan on the list were Amano Ikuo, Kitamura Kazuyuki, Kobayashi Tetsuya, Nagai Michio and Shimahara Nobuo, while the leading authors who based outside Japan were Edward Beauchamp, William Cummings, Ronald Dore, Benjamin Duke, Herbert Passin, Thomas Rohlen and Hiroshi Wagatsuma. Between them, these 12 (all men) were responsible for the vast majority of the scholarly works in Beauchamp and Rubinger's list.

It would, of course, be impossible to publish a comprehensive annotated bibliography of works on Japanese education today, even if it was focussed only on those in scholarly journals and from academic presses. As we can see from the Chap. 14 by Okitsu, Yagi and Kitamura in this volume, there has not only been a very considerable growth in the publication of works by non-Japanese scholars on Japanese education over the past 20 years but also in the publication of work in English and in mainstream journals by Japanese scholars of Japanese education in the same period. The reasons for this growth in publication in two communities have some important overlapping features.

In part, it reflects the growth of the number of scholars who are comfortable working in both the Japanese and English language. Foreigners who could work comfortably in Japanese in the 1980s were still considered an exotic rarity, and Japanese who were completely bilingual at that time sometimes said that they did not feel fully incorporated into Japanese institutions where overseas qualifications still had less status than local ones. That language gap, however, has shrunk hugely in recent years for a number of reasons: the growth in teaching of Japanese at high schools across the globe, the Japan English Teaching Scheme (JETS) which has brought tens of thousands of young graduates to work in Japanese educational institutions over the past 30 years, and the huge growth, particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s, of Japanese students going overseas to study, particularly at graduate level. The personal biographies of many of the authors of the chapters in this volume reflect these factors.

Another part of the explanation for the development of scholarly work on Japanese education lies in the increasing sophistication in the study of comparative education itself. Until the late 1980s, comparative education was often a 'Cook's Tour' of different education systems. While this often presented detailed accounts of the economic, political and social forces which had led to the development of each education system in its own right, it was very rare for systems to be systematically compared with each other. Comparative education as a field very largely lacked the methodological and theoretical tools to do this. This explains in part the huge interest in those works which did try to be explicitly and rigorously comparative, such as Ronald Dore's *The Diploma Disease* published in the mid-1970s. As the chapters in this volume show, those working on Japanese education have become in recent years much more theoretically and methodologically sophisticated. Almost every chapter in this volume draws significantly for their arguments on important theoretical works which were not designed originally for the study of Japanese education.

A third part of the explanation for the growing significance of work on Japanese education lies in its policy orientation. While most academics inside and outside

Japan in the 1980s did not feel it necessary to see a link between their work and policy, preferring to stick to what they saw as blue skies rather than commissioned research, scholars of education these days feel much more comfortable including a policy dimension in their work. Some of the authors of papers in this volume such as Takehiko Kariya and Akiyoshi Yonezawa have worked closely with the Japanese Ministry of Education in various roles over the years. It could indeed be argued that all of the papers in this volume have policy implications. These include the impact of low public expenditure on educational inequality, the early development of universal education in Japan, how the education system interacts with pupils' gender identities, how the school-to-work system of the pre-1980s was upset by the economic problems of the 1990s and subsequent decades, policies for absenteeism, the need to internationalise Japanese higher education, the experience of immigrant children, the role of the government in teacher education and the role of education in developing entrepreneurship. Behind all of these questions lies another much more simple set of questions which drives all social, economic and political policy in Japan these days: how to increase productivity in a population which both is rapidly ageing and declining in size and where human beings, more specifically children, are the only natural resource and education the only tool that government has completely in its own hands, particularly as the world moves away from the path of globalisation which has served Japan, with its export economy, almost better than any other country for the past 50 years. As Nakamura points out on his paper in this volume, the fact that these questions are not articulated clearly in many of the papers in this volume is only because they are so taken for granted by all those who work on Japan.

The editors of *Japanese Education in a Global Age* set out to 'promote international discussion concerning sociological studies in education among researchers, educators and policy decision makers by adding cases from Japan that have hitherto tended to be invisible to the world'. I would argue that they succeed not only in doing this but actually have also put down a marker of what the sociology of Japanese education can offer to broader theoretical and policy insights. It may be – for the simplistic reason that the Japanese economy is not doing as well as it was then – that the general English language readership is not quite as interested in Japanese education per se as it was in the 1980s when Beauchamp and Rubinger published their source book. The papers in this volume suggest, however, that an academic audience of students and scholars should be much more interested than it was previously in the sociology of Japanese education and what insights from Japan can contribute to broader sociological analysis and practice. I believe therefore that this volume will become a new source book for the third decade of the twenty-first century just as Beauchamp and Rubinger's book became a bible for those of us who were working on Japanese education in the last decade of the last century.

University of Oxford  
Oxford, UK  
22 December 2017

Roger Goodman

## Series Editors Introduction

This volume by Akiyoshi Yonezawa, Yuto Kitamura, Beverley Yamamoto and Tomoko Tokunaga on *Japanese Education in a Global Age: Sociological Reflections and Future Directions* is the latest book to be published in the long-standing Springer book series *Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects*. The first volume in this Springer series was published in 2002, with this book by Yonezawa et al. being the 46th volume to be published to date.

This 17-chapter book, which contains chapters from some of Japan's most eminent scholars, is an important, up-to-date contribution to the available research literature on education in Japan and provides a sociology of Japanese education.

It provides information, from a mainly sociology of education perspective, on key aspects of education and schooling in Japan; topics covered include educational inequality, school-to-work transitions for Japanese youth, the academic profession and universities in Japan, rethinking the educational research agenda in Japan for a global age, the educational experience of immigrant students, new pathways to economic participation through education and schooling and the radical reform of teacher education.

This book will be of particular interest to those interested in understanding Japanese education, and its interrelationship with the development of Japanese society. Part of the explanation for the growing significance of research being undertaken on Japanese education occurs as a result of its strong and well-focused policy orientation.

In terms of the Springer book series in which this volume is published, the various topics dealt with in the series are wide ranging and varied in coverage, with an emphasis on cutting-edge developments, best practices and education innovations for development. Topics examined in the series include environmental education and education for sustainable development; the interaction between technology and education; the reform of primary, secondary and teacher education; innovative

approaches to education assessment; alternative education; most effective ways to achieve quality and highly relevant education for all; active ageing through active learning; case studies of education and schooling systems in various countries in the region; cross-country and cross-cultural studies of education and schooling; and the sociology of teachers as an occupational group, to mention just a few. More information about this book series is available at <http://www.springer.com/series/6969>.

All volumes in this series aim to meet the interests and priorities of a diverse education audience including researchers, policymakers and practitioners, tertiary students, teachers at all levels within education systems and members of the public who are interested in better understanding cutting-edge developments in education and schooling in Asia-Pacific region.

The reason why this book series has been devoted exclusively to examining various aspects of education and schooling in the Asia-Pacific region is that this is a particularly challenging region which is renowned for its size, diversity and complexity, whether it be geographical, socio-economic, cultural, political or developmental. Education and schooling in countries throughout the region impact on every aspect of people's lives, including employment, labour force considerations, education and training, cultural orientation, and attitudes and values. Asia and the Pacific are home to some 63% of the world's population of 7 billion. Countries with the largest populations (China, 1.4 billion; India, 1.3 billion) and the most rapidly growing megacities are to be found in the region, as are countries with relatively small populations (Bhutan, 755,000; the island of Niue, 1,600).

Levels of economic and socio-political development vary widely, with some of the richest countries (such as Japan) and some of the poorest countries on the earth (such as Bangladesh). Asia contains the largest number of poor of any region in the world, the incidence of those living below the poverty line remaining as high as 40% in some countries in Asia. At the same time, many countries in Asia are experiencing a period of great economic growth and social development. However, inclusive growth remains elusive, as does growth that is sustainable and does not destroy the quality of the environment. The growing prominence of Asian economies and corporations, together with globalisation and technological innovation, is leading to long-term changes in trade, business and labour markets, to the sociology of populations within (and between) countries. There is a rebalancing of power, centred on Asia-Pacific region, with the Asian Development Bank in Manila declaring that the twenty-first century will be 'the Century of Asia-Pacific'.

We believe this book series makes a useful contribution to knowledge sharing about education and schooling in Asia-Pacific region. Any readers of this or other volumes in the series who have an idea for writing their own book (or editing a book) on any aspect of education and/or schooling, that is relevant to the region, are

enthusiastically encouraged to approach the series editors either direct or through Springer to publish their own volume in the series, since we are always willing to assist perspective authors shape their manuscripts in ways that make them suitable for publication in this series.

Office of Applied Research and Innovation  
College of the North Atlantic – Qatar  
Doha, Qatar

Rupert Maclean

College of Education  
Zhejiang University  
Hangzhou Shi, China  
March 2018

Lorraine Symaco

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