

論文

Education or tool for social stratification?

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I. Introduction

I was born in 1970, the beginning of the second baby boom in Japan. When I was a junior high school student, many of my friends were studying at cram schools or what we call “juku (塾)” in Japanese. Juku is a private after-school institution that helps preparing for high school and university entrance exams. Attending cram schools wasn't normally children's choice; rather, it was the decision of their mother. In Japanese society, those mothers who coerce their children to study and place paramount importance on the academic performance of their children in schools are called “kyoiku mama (教育ママ).” It literally means “educational mother” in English. It arose in Japanese society, because mothers have such a critical responsibility in the raising of children in Japan, and because education plays such an important role in determining one's income, and in furthering the quality of one's life.

According to National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2012, Second section, para. 4) in Japan, the second baby boom ended in 1974. But the phenomenon of “kyoiku mama” didn't lose but rather gained the strength. In contemporary Japan, mothers began to prepare their children to enter well known private kindergartens which lead to the best elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools in their area, and finally to one of the prestigious universities. While the competition happened at a higher educational level during the second baby boom, now the competition begins at the age of four. If the Japanese educational system offered the opportunity to all, would these “kyoiku mama(s)” be necessary? It seem bizarre to still have the phenomenon of these educational mothers since the baby boom ended approximately 40 years ago and the competition rate should also be lower by now. Bowles and Gintis in *Schooling in capitalist America* (1976) discuss how the American educational system reflects, reinforces, and reproduces their socioeconomic structure

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called capitalism. In this essay, I am going to focus on the Japanese educational system being that Japanese socioeconomic structure is similar to the one in the United States after the Second World War. For this reason, I will try to address the question by applying their theory using mainly Japanese statistics and citations, and try to explain the concepts of success and failure which we see as a natural phenomenon, but in actually is imposed and sustained by schools. In addition, I will like to share how I view what our educational system should be in the future.

II. The development of Japan's contemporary educational system and its relationship with the socioeconomic structure

The history of Japan's contemporary educational system is rather short. It has only 145 years of history. The first educational system was established in 1872 during the Meiji period, but the educational attainment rate was only 39.88% in 1877 (Kaigo, 1971). The low attainment rate was due to the levied tuition that people had to pay. According to the document which was published by Japan's Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (1962/1972), people seemed to pay somewhere around 50 sen monthly for attending primary schools while people's average annual income was 21 yen at this time. Since 1 yen is count as 100 sen, you can see the tuition was rather expensive and was a burden for many people.

The attainment rate went up to 81.48% when the amendment of the educational system was issued and the tuition became free of charge in 1900 (Kaigo, 1971). What I would like to emphasize is not only the free educational charge but also its impact on educational policy. On October 30, 1890, Emperor Meiji of Japan signed what we called "Kyōiku Chokugo (教育勅語)" or the Imperial Rescript on Education (Japan's Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1972). It illustrated the national moral principles that each citizen is to follow; in particular, it stressed the reverence toward the emperor and patriotism. The Rescript was distributed to every school throughout Japan along with a portrait of the Emperor and Empress, and students were required to read aloud the text and eventually to memorize it. The number of years in schooling was also unified into six years for primary schools. It seemed the policy would be sustained but Japan entered wars.

After the defeat of Japan in World War II, the United States led the Allies in the occupation and rehabilitation of the Japanese state between 1945 and 1952 through widespread military, political, economic, and social reforms including the educational system. The first American Education Delegation arrived in Japan and issued its first reform report in 1946 suggesting that Japan incorporate six-year compulsory primary

education schooling both for boys and girls, and three-year compulsory junior high school education preferably for both boys and girls with free tuition (Sato, 1991). As a result, the new Japanese government reflects the suggestion and the Fundamental Law of Education was issued in 1947. Since then, our compulsory education schooling became 9 years for the age of 6 to 15 years: 6 years for primary schools and 3 years for junior high schools with free tuition at public schools. And the practice of Imperial Rescript on Education in schoolings was abolished by the Diet of Japan in 1948.

In another words, children can't go through without attending the nine-year compulsory schools in Japan since the Fundamental Law of Education was issued after the World War II; except the case of students with special needs. Although students with disabilities now had a right to study, Vocational Education or Special Education wouldn't be established until 1979, 32 years later than those who were non disability students (Kuraishi, 2102). The Japanese government has complete control over the material that students acquire in compulsory education schoolings. The government does not stress the reverence of the emperor, but schools became the place to initiate the selected materials and information which the government chose. Students were now required to memorize all the information in their texts. The ability of memorizing school materials is considered as academic ability, and it is called "gakuryoku (学力)" in Japanese. It literary translated as "ability to learn."

The ability of memorizing or one's academic achievements would be determined by tests in schools. High schools use the entrance exam test scores as criteria for admissions. The students who acquired the most knowledge can score better and can enter the better or more prestigious high school. There is intense competition within students. This Japanese educational system; therefore, is not designed to help all succeed, nor does it have this objective in mind. George and Louise Spindler (1989) in "There are no dropouts among the Arunta and Hutterites" point out that school dropouts are a cultural creation by providing ethnographical data on the traditional Arunta of the Australian central desert. There is no competition and no one is better than anyone else in Arunta culture. Everyone successfully graduates from their initiation ceremonies which is equivalent to Western formal education.

McDermott (1989) also observes that the American institutional role of schools is to provide candidates for failure and success. Japanese social and economic structure which reenacts the American model became capitalistic after the Wars and it created competition in the society. In a capitalist market economy, the people with ability provide economic strength for companies. The competitions and testing help sort out students in the educational system: failures and successes. And once students get

tracked into a lower level in schooling, they usually remain at the same level. When their track has been determined, it is hard to change from one track to another. Low-ability students who are labeled as “slow learners” or with having learning “disabilities” develop a negative self-image leading to low self-esteem, and eventually dropout from schools (Donelan, 1994). As a result, people began to pursue getting on the “right truck,” to better education, and in that way education became a business. Many cram schools were opened up to sell secure seats for the “right truck.” This socioeconomic structure is the source of “kyoiku mama.” Many advocates of capitalism emphasize that this socioeconomic system would give consumers greater selection of institutions and better education. However, we can’t ignore the fact that there are people who don’t pick better education or there are people who can’t pick better education due to their economic situation (Ushioji, 1975), or there are ethnic groups like the permanent Korean or Chinese residents of Japan¹ who decided to send their children to their ethnic schools where they can teach their ethnic culture and language (Kuraishi, 2012), they will be trucked in a non-stream line.

According to his research on public primary schools and public junior high schools in Osaka on 1989 and 2001, Koukichi Shimizu (2005) observes that there is a clear relationship with students’ socioeconomic background and their academic performance. Those students who are categorized as successful are economically well beings and they have a stable family life. And those who are categorized as unsuccessful are most likely those people who are indigent and have an unstable family life. Moreover, he claims that the recent criticism of Japanese lower achievement on international assessments, especially on PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is due to bipolarization of students: successful and unsuccessful. And the number of unsuccessfuls or low ability students is growing remarkably in each assessment.

The argument that I bring to the discussion of education in Japan is that the successes, failures, and conditions in Japanese education cannot be understood without an analysis that includes the social order in which we occur. The inequalities and conditions of the society at large are mirrored and reproduced by the educational system. It is not too obvious in Japan compared to the case of the United States where there is a clear inequality based on skin color (race) and or their historical background as slave and slave owners or conquered and conquerors. However, actual research suggests that the Japanese educational system is not providing a better education as pro capitalists insist.

The Japanese government projects an image of compulsory public education as

equal. However, it has been focused on the indoctrination of acquired information which was assessed by examinations, and academic achievements were measured only by test scores. Thus, it creates inequality rather than equality. Fortunately or unfortunately, my mother wasn't obsessed with sending me to cram schools. I, therefore, spent most of my time outside of my house instead of staring at books. In primary school, I was more interested in competing on how far I could jump off from a swing, finding out how many red swamp crawfish I could catch a day, or creating a trap to catch wild animals. My importance on school academics was low. As a result, I scored highly only subjects that I was interested in; physical education, music, and natural science. The other subjects on which people normally place more importance such as mathematics and English² I scored poorly. At this point, I couldn't find the need for mastering square root. I simply thought that I could live normally if I could sum, subtract, multiple and divide. Same in English, I was struggling to conquer Kanji, adopted logographic Chinese character that we use in our Japanese writing. Why should I learn the foreign language? I wondered. At the junior high school, our grade was placed in the order of academic performance. As you might guess, my grade was low. I was a "failure" according to the Japanese educational system. Who would have guessed that I could study and would finish a Master's degree from one of the prestigious universities? I don't think any of my junior high school teachers or my classmates even considered a modicum of possibility since it is almost impossible to move from a low-ability to high-ability truck. I think my case could raise the question of Japanese educational policy whether tests are the best measure of academic achievement.

In his "Mieru gakuryoku, Mienai gakuryoku (見える学力 見えない学力)," Hiroshi Kishimoto (1996), an ex-primary school teacher, states that academic abilities are like an iceberg which consists of two portions: above water (easily recognized abilities) and under water (blind/ unseen abilities). The Japanese education has been mainly focused on the portion above surface of an iceberg. It is the acquired knowledge in schools by memorizing information and one's academic abilities are judged easily by test score. However, the surface is typically only one-eighth of the real volume and a huge underwater portion hasn't seen or counted. Unseen abilities, for example, account for one's family environments, grownup environments, childhood experiences, existences of influential teachers and/or friends. This under water portion is the base for the surface and Kishimoto insists that we need to pay more attention to this under water portion. His experiences as a teacher and working with students in his real life lead his "iceberg" theory on one's ability and his pedagogy, and I find this more convincing.

Has education always been a tool for stratifying people? The origin of the word “education” comes from the verb, “educate.” According to the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology (1966), “educate” came from past participle stem of Latin, *ēducāre*, which means “to rear” in English. “Educate” related to *ēducere*. In English, *ē* means “out” and *ducere* means “lead.” Together it means “to lead out.” However, this became obsolete; thus, it has come to mean “to develop from a latent condition,” and recently it means “to provide schooling or tuition for” (p. 301). Interestingly, the Latin word, *ēducāre* (childrearing), has almost the same meaning with “iku (育),” which is the latter part of the word education, “kyouiku (教育)” in Japanese. Each Kanji character is considered to have its own meaning. According to an etymologist, Yoshimitsu Kanou (2014), the origin of “iku (育)”³ expresses a baby is passing a parturient canal. If you look carefully, the baby draws his/her head down just like when a baby is born in a real life. Therefore, it has come to mean “growing” with regards to a neonate and it means “rearing” with regard to parents (p. 29). The former part of adopted logographic Chinese character in education is “kyou (教).” The interpretation of this original character split into two. The character has an image of a child also, but he/she is no longer appears to be a head down.⁴ In this character, he/she is standing. The right side of the child symbolizes a doyen or a master. And above the child, there are two cross marks. The different interpretations of these crosses are the fork in the road.

Groups like Shizuka Shirakawa (2012), state that the crosses symbolize a building, which in this case is a school building. Therefore, Shirakawa asserts that “kyou” indicates a doyen urging a pupil in a school building, and is signified by “teaching” (p. 140). Kanou (2014) also indicates that “kyou” means “teaching” but his translation of crosses is different. As a result, the connotation of “teaching” differs significantly from Shirakawa. Kanou claims the cross shows an interaction between a master and a pupil, so his case of teaching is not one way like Shirakawa but rather contains “teaching and learning” definition (p. 278). I am not going to argue about whose interpretation is more accurate, but I would like to note even in the case of Latin origin or Chinese origin, “education” signifies at one point to lead a child in the process of becoming a member of society. At this point there were neither failures nor successes. But since the socioeconomic structure has been changed, “education” implies structured teaching like the case of Shirakawa, and it has come to mean to provide schooling, and stratification followed. This process suggests that education is a part of society and that the conditions under which education function are determined by society. So, how is education impacted by the socioeconomic structure within which it functions? The first law of capitalism is “to make a profit off the labor of others or go out of business”

(Parenti, 1989, p. 7). As Michael Parenti points out, in the case of the United States, almost 86% of American wealth is owned by the top 10% of American population. A capitalistic society can best be described as a pyramid. A small number of people at the tip of the pyramid have economic control while the majority is at the bottom with the low paying jobs. Schools produce failures not because of individual deficiencies, but rather because they serve as screening devices or filters for the labor market by providing candidates for future cheap labor in a quest for profit, under a mantle of legitimacy. If educational institutions were there to help everyone to succeed like the traditional Arunta of the Australia, who would want to work as hard cheap labors, especially if the labor isn't compensated adequately?

If our government would provide equal opportunity for all, the educational system would be tuition-free until graduation as is the case in Cuba and Finland. Our media focuses much on the Finnish educational system because Finland scored first place on PISA for numerous years. On the other hand, Cuba is a socialist country which is the opposite of most capitalist countries, especially in the case of the United States; the media will not spotlight Cuba. And also this socialist country hasn't participated in PISA because the assessments were held by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that is originated as the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) which was provided by American financial aid after World War II. However, documents provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Gasperini (2000) show Cuba's prominent academic achievements and educational system.

After the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the Castro administration restructured its educational policy, with improvement of the literacy rate throughout Cuba as a top priority. The government operates its educational institutions, and its educational policy, with education provided free and equally for all children both rural and urban, both male and female even impoverished areas (Gasperini, 2000). Cuba recorded extremely outstanding achievements on the results of both the First Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (PERCE) during the 1995-1997 period and the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE) during the 2005-2006 period in Latin America and the Caribbean countries which were led by UNESCO. According to "Executive Summary" of SERCE (Valdes, 2008), sixteen countries⁵ and the State of Nuevo Leon in Mexico took a part in the study while the PERCE were participated only thirteen countries⁶. Here, I use results of SERCE since there were more participants and more subjects were involved. At SERCE, third and sixth grades of primary students were evaluated in Mathematics, Reading and Science. In all three sections, Cuba

exhibited the highest performance. For example, Cuba ranked the highest average in sixth grade Mathematics, 637 points out of 850 points, which is 50 points above the second highest (Valdes, 2008, pp. 31-32). It is more remarkable in the case of sixth grade Science. Cuba won first place in the test. Its average score is a little bit over 650 points while Uruguay, the second highest, barely reached 550 points. The difference in these countries is over 100 points (Valdes, p.41). What makes Cuba's educational system perform so outstandingly even while under the severe economic restrictions imposed by the United States?

Gasperini (2000) observes and notes several points, but I would like to focus on two points. Firstly, Cuba's high commitment to education as government policy. Gasperini notes that "Cuba devotes about 10 percent to 11 percent of its GDP to education, a very high percentage compared with the rest of the region or with the 6 percent recommended as adequate by UNESCO" (p. 7). In order to compare Cuba with Japan, I examined a database of UNESCO (2016), "Education: Expenditure on education as % of GDP (from government sources)." Somehow, Cuba cited only 6.76% on education spending in 1999, the closest year compared with Gasperini's figures⁷. Still, Cuba's expenditure on education (6.76%) was slightly higher than 4.85% of the United States, and double compared with 3.54% of Japan. From the same resource, if we look at the data in 2005, it shows that Cuba spent 10.56% of GDP while the United States spent 5.07% and Japan only spent 3.48%. Secondly, Gasperini mentions that students do not compete with classmates in Cuba:

A form of competition permeates all classrooms as well as the school atmosphere and is promoted among groups in the same class, different classes, and the school and other schools. However, competition in Cuba is called "emulation" because it is not considered an end in itself, but a method for self-improvement, developed through solidarity and collaboration among peers.
(p. 12)

The idea of "emulation not competition" reminds me of Shimizu's remarks on how students in a classroom resemble woods in a forest. "Woods in a forest grow up in an assemblage. They are stronger than wood growing alone, especially when they face natural disaster like a typhoon or inundation" (Shimizu, 2005, p. 43). Shimizu believes that it is natural for children to be raised in a group, like woods in a forest, and so are academic abilities. Providing an environment that encourages equity with companions in a classroom will augment their academic abilities substantially. This is the necessary

condition for fostering children's academic abilities. I would state, therefore, that countries like Cuba and Finland that have high education expenditures that make possible a tuition-free higher education that includes all school expenditures, offer an example of the ideal conditions that promote a school environment of emulation instead of competition.

Certainly, the academic environment is vital, but at the same time, it becomes apparent that designing and implementing an educational system whose success is measured by its capacity to serve the needs of the problems posed by the difference in the interests and priorities of the social classes involved, but, perhaps more significantly the imbalance in our socioeconomic system. Education originally meant to lead a child to become a productive member of society. Children were considered as a potential social resource. When I was working as a member of "Secretaría de Educación Pública" (SEP or Secretariat of Public Education in English) in Mexico, I encountered what noted as a Chinese proverb that beautifully illustrated the point. The translation in English would be: "If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate children."⁸

III. Conclusion

The capitalistic socioeconomic system derives great benefits from inequality. It is an essential lubricant for the socioeconomic system. And unfortunately, the educational system mirrors and reproduces inequality. Economic dependency is at the center of the problems created by education under the capitalist system. The monopolistic and despotic control of economic life by ruling class is what engenders the economic dependence that compromises the sovereignty of all social institutions including schools, which participate in its reproduction. In Japanese society, the image that we have equal opportunity and free tuition under our compulsory educational system is widely held. However, if we look behind the illusion, "free" education is from primary until junior high school. People have to pay after junior high schools. Yet, higher education is what determines the major factor in the earning capacity of an individual. The ruling class has easy access to higher education, but common people struggle greatly in pursuing higher education since it involves cost. The successes and failures which we consider as natural and a result of individual deficiencies are actually created by schools, or more accurately they are imposed and sustained by Japan's educational system.

The Japanese educational system has mainly been promoting what Kishimoto (1996) calls "mieru gakuryoku," easily recognized acquired knowledge. Kishimoto uses

the iceberg as a metaphor to explain that there are two different types in education. The above water portion of the iceberg is the knowledge which is acquired in schools and easily recognized by test score. “Mienai gakuryoku,” the underwater portion of the iceberg is as significant as above water portion, yet it is unseen or not recognized. Childhood experiences such as playing in nature probably can help to develop ability such as creativity and observation skill which most likely cannot be acquired by sending children to a cram school. Children in cram schools are perhaps capable of explaining characteristics of crayfish. However, are they capable of drawing them? People normally aren't required to draw crayfish, but what I would like to reveal is that inquisitiveness is key to apprenticeship. These unrecognized abilities are hard to acquire in the neither current educational system nor cram schools. Besides, just accumulating the information is no substitute for critical inquiry, but it apparently will be replaced by computers and robots in the future.

“Mieru Gakuryoku” is a significant factor in the earning capacity of the individual. Therefore, “kyoiku mama” places paramount importance on the academic performance of their children in schools, and as a result, they send children into cram schools to better their positions. If we plan to put more weight in “mienai gakuryoku,” any meaningful educational reform would require a restructuring of society under a different set of principles and values oriented more toward people than money. Bowles and Gintis have very strong and clearly delineated ideas on social reform and state how it will eliminate the inequality in the educational system and overall society. But I believe what will bring a new social order is the emergence of a sufficient number of people demanding change. The demand for equity in education will eventually require establishing a new social order. Not vice versa. Children are our most important social resources. Education not be a tool for stratification.

Notes

1. They are referred to “Zainichi (在日)” in Japanese. Zainichi means a foreign citizen "staying in Japan" normally, but in this case, they are the long-term Korean or Chinese residents of Japan who trace their roots to Korea or China under Japanese rule.
2. English was obligatory subjects only at junior high schools in 1970s. However it became obligatory for 5th and 6th grads of Japanese public primary schools in 2011.

3.



加納 喜光 (2014). 漢字語源語義辞典 東京堂出版 p.30 (Kanou, Yoshimitsu.)

4.



加納 喜光 (2014). *漢字語源語義辭典* 東京堂出版 p.278 (Kanou, Yoshimitsu.)

5. (an Alphabetical order) Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.
6. (an Alphabetical order) Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic and Venezuela.
7. Gasperini's study was published in 2000, but she uses the First Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (PERCE) in Latin America and the Caribbean countries during the 1995-1997 period.
8. According to Tetsuo Endo (遠藤 哲夫) in his book, *新釈漢文大系 42 官子 上*, which was published by Meiji Shoin (明治書院) in 1989, the saying was in the Guanzi. And it says "educate people" instead of "educate children" in Chinese (pp. 49-50). The Guanzi is the ancient Chinese philosophical text that was written by Guan Zhong who was a chancellor of the State of Qi during early Spring and Autumn Period which is approximately the 7th century BCE.

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