

Concluding Report Section Meeting “Education” 2023

Organization:

Dr. **Vincent B. LESCH** (Heidelberg University)

The Section Meeting Education meeting is part of the annual conference organized by the German Association for Social Science Research on Japan (VSJF). It is a place for researchers, students, and anyone interested in Japanese education. The goal is to provide a platform for discussing education in Japan, its impact on society and politics, and to encourage conversations among people with diverse backgrounds. Here, both scholars and students can share their research, whether it is work-in-progress, a thesis, or a completed paper, and receive feedback from experienced scholars and an interested audience.

This year’s section meeting took place online and enjoyed a high number of participants and a consistently positive response. Due to the online format, it was possible to expand the reach of the section meeting and to establish a digital platform for the exchange of educational science topics in Japan research. The following report contains short summaries of the presentations given as well as information on the speakers. The speakers are also given the opportunity to share their impressions of the meeting.

There will also be the opportunity to present your own projects at the next section meeting in 2024. If you have any questions about the presentations or would like to contact one of the speakers, please do not hesitate to contact me (education@vsjf.net).

The Social Context of Collective / Collectivism Education in Japan in the Postwar Era

Shinichi AIZAWA (Sophia University)

Prof. Aizawa's presentation explored the shift in educational practices in Japanese primary and junior high schools during the postwar period of U.S. occupation. This period saw the introduction of "democracy" in classrooms and an emphasis on experiential learning. As Japan's economy rapidly expanded, demands for highly standardized, subject-based education with academic and vocational tracking came from business and political leaders. In response, teachers adopted a form of collective education, promoting democratic values and

equal learning opportunities through collective activities. This approach was influenced by the manufacturing industry's practices that were flourishing during this time. As a result, this collective educational practice became known as "postwar democracy" and played a significant role in Japanese education during the postwar era.

Thoughts after the section meeting:

"Thank you very much for organizing this session, Dr. Lesch. The session was well-structured, and the discussions were highly fruitful. My research theme, focusing on collectivity and collectivism in Japanese school education, presents considerable challenges. I am uncertain about my ability to present the information effectively. The contemporary Japanese school education system continues to reflect its historical legacy. I believe that examining this educational practice is crucial, especially in relation to the economic miracle and industrial revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Your comments during the session, as well as any feedback received via email afterwards, will be invaluable in advancing this research. In conclusion, I express my gratitude to all those who participated in this session."

Shinichi AIZAWA is a professor at the department of Education at Sophia University in Tokyo. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo in 2009. His research focuses on secondary education, social equality, and development from a comparative and historical sociological view. He edited "High School for all in East Asia" with Mei Kagawa, and Jeremy Rappleye. His major English publications include "*National vigor and international silence: The background and development of Japanese sociology of education*" and "*Universal participation in school education as a historical process in modern Japan*" published in the edited volume "Japanese Education in a Global Age: Sociological Reflections and Future Directions". He has held several important positions in the Japan Society of Educational Sociology, including vice secretary and chief treasurer, and is currently chair of the International Affairs Committee.

A collaborative approach with the community to ensure educational equity: Focusing on "displacement" from the existing order

Ayaka NAKANO (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science)

In her presentation, Dr. Nakano discussed educational equity can be achieved through collaboration with local communities. She touched on the historical relationship between schools and communities, which had been diminishing due to centralized education but began to shift in the 1970s and 1980s. The reduction in educational funding and focus on children's problem behaviors within schools prompted a need for cooperation with local communities. The presentation emphasized a transition from a "compensation" to a "participation" perspective in ensuring educational fairness, with the goal of providing quality education to all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background. It highlighted the concept of "shifting the existing body arrangement" as a means to empower children to transform their perceptions and the environment, drawing from Jacques Rancière's ideas. There was one specific focus in the presentation: classroom management for absentee children in collaboration with local communities. This case study explored how children's autonomy could impact their perceptions and their physical arrangement in society.

Thoughts after the section meeting:

"In this section of the report, I focused on the support for absentee students to attend separate rooms within the schools, which are implemented through collaborative activities between the school and the community, and examined the issue of educational equity. As participants of this section commented after the presentation, I reaffirmed the necessity of considering whether or not attendance at a classroom run by volunteers is considered as school attendance, as well as the importance of ensuring horizontal linkages with educational support centers, welfare bureaus, etc. In this section, there were presentations on various aspects of Japanese education, and it made me recognized that the current school culture, textbooks, and practices of teachers in Japanese schools are influenced by historical contexts and are constantly changing in response to current social tendencies, the wishes of parents, and the needs of the children. Participating as a presenter this time gave me a valuable opportunity to look at education in Japan from a birds-eye view."

Ayaka NAKANO received her Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo in 2023. She is currently a research fellow of the Japan Society for Promotion of Science. Before, she stayed in London and Beijing to conduct some research. Her research currently focuses on educational alternatives in sustainable and inclusive public education. She is interested in how to ensure educational equity for children through collaborative activities between schools and communities.

Watashitachi no dōtoku: Official morality in Japanese schools

Lucas BARTEL (Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf)

The presentation discussed the history of moral education in Japan, highlighting its role as a tool for state control and social stabilization, particularly during times of upheaval and change. It began during the Meiji period, aimed at instilling a uniform national morality. The system was further manipulated by the ultra-nationalist and militarist regime to support the expansion of the Japanese empire. After World War II, the U.S. occupation removed moral education from the curriculum, aiming for democratic and tolerant personality development in schools. However, political and historical factors led to the resurgence of moral education. Sovereignty was returned to Japan, conservative elites opposed liberal approaches, and the rise of nationalism influenced the reinstatement of traditional values. The Kishi administration rehabilitated moral education, and subsequent conservative governments periodically promoted 'patriotic education' for national interests. Lucas Bartel presented results from his MA thesis and his analysis of Textbooks like "Jinjō Shōgaku Shūshinsho" and "Watashitachi no dōtoku" and traces the evolution of moral education in Japan from the Meiji period to the present. Despite differences in style and methodology, both historical and contemporary textbooks share the objective of promoting state-dominated, uniform public morality. This 'official morality' competes with individual, socially negotiated moral concepts, potentially undermining their autonomy.

Thoughts after the section meeting:

"The section meeting education at the VSJF conference was a well-organized platform for presentations and meeting interested people. The format of 20 minutes or less per

presentation and 10 minutes time for discussion appeared to be a balanced timeframe. Because the audience showed their interest in every presentation by asking curious questions, the three hours event went by very smoothly.

From my personal experience, since I freshly finished my M.A. thesis shortly before the event was held, the section meeting was a rare opportunity for me to practice having a presentation in front of a peer group outside of my former institution. Students should engage themselves more vividly in events like this and perceive the chance of taking part as a seldom opportunity to foster their researching skill as well as corresponding in discussions with peers. The feedback motivated positively to pursue my goals in scientific research.”

Lucas BARTEL received his MA degree from the University of Duesseldorf in 2023. During his studies he became interested in Japanese neo-nationalism. He delved into researching the nationalist advocacy group Nippon Kaigi and various political reform movements that sought to instill nationalism within Japanese society. Along this path, he started researching the topic of moral studies (*dōtoku kyōka*) which nationalists have been emphasizing in education since WWII. Also, while being a student, he was engaged in the study group ‘critical historical research’ which organized a public symposium in 2023.

Granted self-determination and being with others – a pedagogical search for a more relational image of human being between Germany and Japan

Sandra TÖPPER (Berlin)

The main goal of German pedagogy is traditionally to nurture individual independence and correct individuality. However, the Sandra Töpfer questioned whether this traditional image of human beings remains relevant in the face of current ecological and social crises that highlight the importance of harmonious relationships with the world and others. Without considering these relationships, humans may struggle to cope with these challenges and their own vulnerability.

To address this, there is a growing movement within German pedagogy to adopt a more relational image of human beings. In her presentation, which is based on her doctoral thesis, Sandra Töpfer aims to explain why German pedagogical traditions find it challenging to move away from their anthropocentric view of humans. She suggests a common ground for

reflection between Germany and Japan, drawing on the works of Tetsurō Watsuji, Takeo Doi, and Bin Kimura, who advocate for understanding humans as inherently situated in relationships, both among themselves and with their environment.

In this shared reflection between German and Japanese perspectives, the presenter explores whether allowing individuals self-determination within the context of their relationships with others and the world might present a more harmonious image of human beings than solely focusing on individuality and independence.

Thoughts after the section meeting:

“The section meeting was very well and excellently prepared and structured. And the communication was always very appreciative and therefore inclusive.

For me, many research contributions revolved around the classical-pedagogical tension between educating people to be socially capable and also to do justice to the individual's striving for self-development. For this purpose, various sub-studies were used to theoretically examine, for example, which educational goals the Japanese state has disseminated through selected writings. And practically, how teachers deal with textbooks and the moral concepts presented there. Furthermore, the challenges that exist in implementing compulsory schooling even under difficult conditions were examined. Looking at and discussing these different aspects in the meeting was just as exciting as following the nature of the discussions themselves.”

Sandra TÖPPER defended her doctoral thesis this summer and will get her Ph.D. from the University of Jena in 2024. She is currently teaching at a technical school for social education. Before she also taught at the University of Jena and the University of Hildesheim. Both times at the department for education. Her research currently focuses on questions of general pedagogy and pedagogical anthropology in Germany as well as on questions of intercultural education with a particular interest in Japan. In her doctorate, she dedicated herself to thinking about images of human beings in German pedagogical anthropology and in selected Japanese social science traditions of thought from the 20th century.

Teaching controversial history in Japanese classroom: examinations of teachers' perspectives on their approaches

Yumi DUNBAR (University of Manchester)

Dr. Dunbar focused in her presentation on history education and the crucial role it plays in shaping national identity and influencing domestic and international relations in the global context. This is particularly evident in Japanese history education, which focuses on the Fifteen Years' War (1931-1945) influencing the understanding of Japanese national identity and citizenship, but also holds significant importance for neighboring countries that experienced Japanese aggression. The way this history is taught matters both morally and in terms of maintaining narratives that legitimize nation states in the region. However, Japanese teaching about imperialism and the war has sparked debates and conflicts, largely due to the absence of a dominant or shared narrative of the war in Japan and East Asia. It is commonly believed that Japanese students have a superficial understanding of the controversial events during the war, primarily due to a focus on textbook contents and curricula. The prevailing perception is that these contents are merely transmitted to students verbatim. To gain a deeper understanding of this issue, the research explored how teachers handle this sensitive period of history in Japanese junior high schools. It emphasized teachers' perspectives on what and how they teach about sensitive topics, as well as the factors influencing their teaching decisions. The study employed the action space landscape theoretical framework, shedding light on the complex interconnected factors that influence teachers when addressing sensitive historical topics. In her presentation Dr. Dunbar aims to facilitate the understanding of Japanese history education about the war and highlight the significance of teachers' role as a mediator between the curriculum/textbooks and students.

Thoughts after the section meeting:

First of all, thank you for all the effort organising and delivering a high-quality section meeting. The meeting created a very good platform to share experience and knowledge among participants and also provided a very good opportunity to strengthen relationships among researchers who have interests in Japanese education across the world. I found the event inspiring and informative especially because topics presented were still diverse within the said field. I also very much appreciated the opportunity to speak in the meeting. The questions and discussions were particularly useful and helped me acknowledge how I could expand the scope

of discussion on my study such as examining junior high school modern history education in relation to the changes made for high school history education. Discussions also reaffirmed the benefit of presenting further analysis of the impact of regional differences in how the history of imperialism and war is taught in Japanese junior high schools, and also the impact of study associations on this subject.

Yumi DUNBAR received her PhD from the University of Manchester in 2022. She will start working as an associate lecturer in Japanese at the University College London in mid-November. Her research interests include how compulsory education impacts collective memory and national identity in Japan, the role that teachers play in society (e.g. how teachers exercise their agency to influence students), and how teachers develop teaching practices and grow in their profession. Her PhD research was fully funded by the Economic and Social Research Council which is the UK's largest funder of economic, social, behavioral, and human data science.