

Sociology of Education in Japan; Perspective from the Past

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Abstract

This article aims to reexamine knowledge from the perspective of sociology of education. The Japan Society for Educational Sociology (JSSES) was established in 1948, after World War II, with the reflections in defeat war and the influence of American occupation policy. Since then, sociology of education in Japan had made dramatic changes, especially in its ideology, subjects of studies, and research methodology. These changes are influenced by three main factors: Western trends in sociology of education, the relationship between sociology and educational studies, and the transformation of Japanese society. These three factors are closely related to each other. Globalization and neo-liberal policies have widened disparities in societies. Many researchers in Japan focus on the issues of disparity, poverty and inequality, including the relationships between education and society.

1. 70 years since the Founding of The Japan Society of Educational Sociology

Educational research fully started after WWII as the society of educational sociology was institutionalized. With Japan's surrender, The United States occupied the country and education reforms based on the American education system were introduced. During that time, the importance of Sociology of Education was emphasized which led to it being added to the teacher's training curriculum. Democracy became the most important value in post-war Japan; it was believed that education needed to be emphasized as a means for realizing it and the knowledge of Sociology of Education was indispensable for the

quality and ability of the teachers who shouldered the responsibility of education.

The forces that mainly drove the development of Sociology of Education in Japan was the establishment of educational sociology "courses" in influential universities such as University of Tokyo or Kyoto University. These courses became a unit of academic research and a system for training researchers. With the establishment of the Sociology of Education, researchers in that field were systematically trained, and Sociology of Education was able to be taught mainly by them in education-related faculties and departments throughout the entire country. Thus, the spread and expansion of Sociology of Education began. In Japan, instead of the advancement of knowledge making an academic system develop, the opposite took place.

The Japan Society of Educational Sociology (JSSES) was established in 1948. They held their first conference in 1950 at University of Tokyo.

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Since then, they have been held every year. Furthermore, their journal, "the Journal of Educational Sociology", started being published on May 1951 and has reached 104 volumes as of today. JSES consistently continued to expand and have currently reached 1,500 members. That number might be surprising for those abroad. This does stem from new educational problems that continuously appear and that research has been dedicated to finding solutions for them, but it is also influenced by the fact that Sociology of Education lies at the center of sociology-related research for education. The members of JSES comprise not only of pure sociology researchers, but also of people who come from various fields such as Economics of Education or Politics of Education. In that sense, we should say that Sociology of Education in Japan possess the characteristic of being a generic term for sociological researches for education.

As of 2018, JSES marked their 70th anniversary and published a collection of research papers based on the second Japanese volume of "Frontier of Sociology of Education I & II (Iwanami Shoten) and English papers titled "Akiyoshi Yonezawa, Yuto Kitamura, Beverley Yamamoto, Tomoko Tokunaga eds., Japanese Education in a Global Age - Sociological Reflections and Future Directions, Springer, 2018, "20 Academics in Sociology of Education: The Oral History of Educational Sociologists in Japan" (Toyokan) through interviewing the leading figures in developing Sociology of Education in Japan".

As Sociology of Education is a subject that started after the war, it was in a marginal position at the beginning of its development from the perspective of Sociology or Education. However, Sociology of Education has currently dominated the core in educational research; this has contributed to increasing the number of members. I wish to go through how the Sociology of Education in Japan progressed in the following

sections.

2. Social Change and Sociology of Education

After WW II, Japanese education rejected militarism from pre-WW II and started out as a hope for embodying democracy. Education had regarded as embodying the social values such as "democratizing" and "modernization", and also as a way to secure an individual's happiness.

Notwithstanding the fact that Japan was hit by poverty after the war, the rapid economic growth from the 1960s increased family incomes. The Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and the Osaka World Expo in 1970 were events that symbolized the country's recovery from the war and were a way to appeal the economic development to the world. The economic development led to a growing school admission rate for high schools or universities, which meant that competition for entering schools intensified. School education selects people and allocates them to various positions in society. Therefore, school (academic) background is linked to one's occupation or income.

Due to that, the term "Gakureki Shakai" (academic background-orientated society) appeared in the 1960s and became commonly used from the 1970s. Education has a strong relation to people's selection and the allocation of positions, but this question is a test for democracy: are the positions distributed by a meritocratic way or an ascriptive one?

Thus, academic background research became the center of Sociology of Education thanks to many educational sociologists who accumulated research around topics such as "Educational Opportunity", "Social Hierarchy and Education", "Examinations", "Academic Background", "Employment", "Higher Education". Although traditional educational researches mainly focused on elementary and secondary education, Sociology

of Education expanded its subject to higher education. Contemporary society is said to be a knowledge-based society, and developing higher education is critical to nation's competitiveness on the global stage. Sociology of Education has had this opinion since before.

As the 1970's came, various issues began to appear in the Japanese educational system. Until then there had been issues such as meritocracy, political conflicts between educational administration and teachers unions, juvenile deviant behavior and but school itself had not been the targets of criticism. However, in the late 1970s, school violence (violence from teachers towards students or violence from students towards teachers), bullying, school absentees, remedial students, dropping out of high school, administrative education system and so on led to a serious social issue forming: the deterioration of education. Society began to doubt the legitimacy of school education itself.

We can say that, in terms of the background, Japan came out of poverty and became a developed country. Most children and parents believed that education was linked to improving one's social and economic status and thus trusted the education system to grant this dream. However, as society began to value consuming more than production and the industrial society went on to become a post-industrial society, people took off their rose-colored glasses about school education and more and more children couldn't find any meaning in what they were learning at school. Thus, social change profoundly affected schools and children, which put the educational system in a difficult position. At the same time, there were scholars that considered children's rebellion against school education to stem from the suppression in the educational system. One scholar that represents this is the Austrian I. Illich. Deschooling literature, in which Illich's works were representative, continuously being

translated into Japanese. And lifelong education, which was advocated by UNESCO, was introduced to Japan and began to have much research being done on it.

Among these circumstances, educational sociologists' viewpoint on school education changed and research criticizing the education system as a whole grew. In addition, research regarding issues such as bullying and school absenteeism accumulated; the research field educational pathology was advocated.

3. Neoliberal policies and Sociology of Education

The 1973 and 1979 oil crises became the trigger for marking the end of the rapid economic growth in developed nations, on the other hand, the bloated welfare budget was not able to be cut, and the financial deficit was becoming chronically worse. That's when it became necessary to make a "big government" into a "small government". Through deregulating, private sectors were entrusted to do what they could handle on their own, and thus the idea that society will revitalize through competition on the supply side predominated. This is the so-called neoliberalism policy. It was introduced into the world of school education; the education that was unilaterally developed by schools and teachers was gradually changing to respect the voices of parents, children, or private companies. As a result, competition in the world of education and terms such as "market mechanism", "deregulation", "self-responsibility" started to be used. This policy was introduced in Japan when Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone was appointed in 1982. It has been continuing for 40 years.

Most educational sociologists criticized these policies for introducing new gaps in society and for widening social inequality. That prediction came true; people being hired for irregular

employment and the economic gap increased. Moreover, employment for young workers became considerably difficult, which brought upon the spread of words such as “Freeters” (young people who lack full-time employment) and “NEET” (not in education, employment, or training). As a result, words such as “Unequal Society” and “poverty” became commonly used.” Unequal Society” does not just mean simply that there is an economic gap, but also means that children’s futures get determined through their parent’s social stratification as the gap gets passed down through the generations.

Sociology of Education has accumulated much research about how such an economic gap affects children’s academic achievement, ability to continue through education, and ability to secure employment. At the same time, this reality has also increased the presence of school education, which has had a tendency to fluctuate. This is due to the fact that the failures in school education are connected to the existence of school absentees, NEETs, and Freeters. The role and the importance of school education has become strongly recognized to avoid falling into such circumstances. The discussion surrounding the decline in academic performance has directly addressed this. Deschooling became frowned upon with the idea that declining academic achievement will lead to a social crisis.

4. Sociology of Education and Pedagogy/ Sociology

Sociology of Education is a part of Pedagogy (Educational research) and Sociology. However, Sociology of Education in Japan has formed a relatively independent community while attempting to differentiate itself from Pedagogy or Sociology. Since Sociology of Education as an academic field is often placed in the faculty of education or department of education, the

specialists have a close affinity for researcher in Education from the perspective of the human relations. However, during the Cold War, many Japanese pedagogists were close to the Eastern bloc and it was not always possible to completely draw out the reality of education due the constraints of rigid ideologies. On the other hand, Sociology of Education became close with the Western bloc and emphasized researching facts regarding education in an empirical method. This realistic approach further increased expectations for Sociology of Education. Once the Cold War ended, the intercommunion between Sociology of Education and Pedagogy increased, and the wall between both fields started to go down.

You may be wondering: how is this related to sociology? Sociology began to appear in the mid 60s’ with the overshadowing of functionalism that boasted an overwhelming advantage for society. In the mid 60s, Functionalism began to lose its superiority in Sociology. Many educational sociologists cherished the literature of authors such as Parsons. T and Merton. R.K. when functionalism flourished. However, although functionalism insisted on value-free objectivity and tried to be ideologically neutral, it came to be criticized for serving in maintaining the present social system. Moreover, the fact that it wasn’t able to explain social changes lowered its status more than anything. Hence, functionalism became only one school of sociology, and new trends such as symbolic interaction theory, ethnomethodology, phenomenological sociology emerged. These emphasized the subjective interpretation of activities from human individuals. Therefore, these trends are called interpretive approaches or “sociology of meaning”. The trend of sociology also affected Sociology of Education, many quantitative studies based on functionalism were conducted, and qualitative research based on interpretive approaches gained momentum in the 1980s.

It was the “new” Sociology of Education that

emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1970s that had a major impact on the diffusion of interpretive approaches in Japan. Due to wondering why education policies such as expansion of educational opportunities and curriculum reform have failed, the 'new' Sociology of Education headed to a studying the internal processes of schools, which had been a black box so far. Here is an example of the kind of research that was conducted: clarifying how classroom order is created through seeing the processes in education as an interpretive interaction process, and how the curriculum is structured in schools, which is a place where knowledge is distributed.

Karabel, J and Halsey, A. H. eds, *Power and Ideology in Education*, Oxford University Press, 1977, translated into Japanese in 1980, received many readers. As a result, the "new" Sociology of Education, introduced as a one of the streams of Sociology of Education, was incorporated into Sociology of Education in Japan and the researcher's layer also became thick. Research results that were received through an interpretative approach increased, at the same time, it is important that the interpretative approach affected the recognition process of the researchers and the way of asking questions. Since the 1980's, problems at schools and with children became topics that the mass media talked about day and night. The interpretative approach contributed to the development of Sociology of Education in the sense that it provided a perspective that captures those problems in multiple ways.

5. The characteristics of thinking in Sociology of Education

Research trends and problems that are talked about in Europe and the United States have much in common with Japan's current situation. That in itself is a consequence of globalization, and at the

same time it is the result of Sociology of Education in Japan paying attention to research trends in Europe and the United States and importing their works. In that sense, it can be said that their theories were applied and original empirical research tailored to the reality of Japan has been accumulated. Let's organize the thinking style that is characteristic of Sociology of Education in Japan into four points.

(1) Methodical Positivism

Research requires theories and methods. In general, in natural science, research methods such as "experimentation", "observation" and "measurement" are used. In contrast, in Sociology of Education the emphasis is on "surveying" as a method with validity from the character of the study that objectively clarifies the facts of education. Surveys can be roughly divided into quantitative surveys and qualitative surveys. The targets of the survey include macro-level analysis to examine the education system of each country and the world trend, and micro level analysis such as study of interaction in classrooms. Depending on the level of analysis, appropriate research methods may be used, but refining the methods of research and analysis may be essential for improving the quality of Society of Education. In the past few years, evidence-based education policies have been required, and under such circumstances Sociology of Education has taken on the social role of accumulating various empirical data based on academic expertise. In particular, there are now expectations for the provision of evidence conducive to education policy planning, such as analysis of academic achievement tests.

(2) Sociological theory and anomalies

Sociology of Education is a study on the basis of sociological theories, but it is not unrelated to social sciences such as Economics and Psychology.

Unlike the era of structural-functionalism in the 1960s, now is a time when theoretical mini-paradigms are crowded, multiple theories coexist, and various perspectives on humans and society are used. It can be said that it reflects the characteristics of a certain society in a certain period. Sociology of Education has often become critical to the normative nature of social concepts and educational policies and sought intellectual adventures that go beyond the commonsense. Because education is a social phenomenon that everyone experiences, one can become a critic of education through their personal experience. For that exists a magic words that breaks down ones thinking due to conventional ideas in education. Sociology of Education has put doubts on the world of commonsense and has emphasized multiple thinking. The sociological theory supports that. Sociology giants such as Durkheim, É and Weber, M, Simmel, G can find ideas that are outside the box and paradoxical, but rich in creativity. Sociology of Education is also positioned in the way of thinking of such sociology, and it is characterized by the point that it deepens thinking without being tied to the common sense and established theories on education.

(3) Equality in value - Giving hope to the socially disadvantaged

Until around 1980, Japan underwent redistribution of wealth due to high economic growth and began to be considered as a relatively equal society that was low in inequality. In the 1980s, as "New liberalism" and "Marketism" policies became dominant, the problems of a widening gap and inequality began to emerge. The symbol of this gap is the existence of children from poor families, children who don't attend school, who are excluded from the labor market, who were born from foreign nationals (newcomers), etc. This led to much research being done on such children. Studies such as

gender and handicapped children can also be placed in genealogy. The methodological supports for such research are ethnography, action research and researches that reveal the life history of children with difficulties. Many researchers began to enter research that explored the meaning of education and schools by focusing on the social position of children and the quality of their experience in daily life.

(4) Contribution to education practices

Like the medical or welfare field, "education" covers a wide range. It especially uses school education and studies it as the subject of research. In addition to being a contribution to science, it has to be "useful" in practice. As the pressure from the government for social contribution to the university increases, the independence of universities becoming weaker. First is to contribute to the government with policy making. Half a century ago from now, Shimizu Yoshihiro stated in the Proceedings of the 20th Anniversary of the Sociology of Education in Japan that "The most important thing today is a series of policy technology systems consisting of an analysis of the current situation of education and predictions." Sociology of Education as a policy science was in the limelight during the economic growth of the 1960s and 1970s, but it lost that in the post-industrial era. Today, it attracts many researchers, especially in the field of higher education. Secondly, it can be useful for teacher training and for the field of education (school education). Educational issues began to emerge in schools and the development of teacher's practical leadership skills became strongly demanded in the post-industrial world. Therefore, the clinic knowledge that can contribute to various problems in schools have become sought after and the "educational clinic sociology" that aims to solve problems began to attract attention.

6. Conclusion

From its starting point, Sociology of Education in Japan was described as educational sociology that has to do with organizing schools or making policy recommendations. In contrast, it is expressed as Sociology of Education as the study of facts. In general, there is a global trend where educational sociology is changing to Sociology of Education. Sociology of Education in Japan has developed in that way too. However, as the name of the society JSES stood for “The Japan Society of Educational Sociology”, it has the character of educational sociology. Although the difference between these two academic stances is subtle, it is not always contradictory, and it is possible to contribute to educational practice as well as to reveal educational facts. Sociology of Education in Japan has been the study of facts that also have a normative side. It has walked a delicate balance. This sense of balance brings a variety of perspectives to research and can be said to have given it vitality.

The most important thing for industrial capitalism in what the nation does is to develop human resources that are disciplined, hardworking and have the ability to adapt quickly to new jobs. From these contexts, the role of education as a part of the rise and fall of the state has again attracted people’s attention. Sociology of Education is expected to have a multi-layered knowledge that can contribute to both educational policy and educational practice.

How is the theory and subject of Sociology of Education in Japan changing in the modern society where globalization of education and marketization progress? It is difficult to predict, but it is believed that as global standards are demanded from the international academic research such as PISA, the motions for “quality assurance” and “accountability” accelerate while showing the evidence of education through

accurate measurement and evaluation, and that “fairness” will shift to “equity” in education. In the process, there will be strong demand for educational support and reform in line with the diversity of people in diverse positions in terms of gender, ethnicity, minorities, and so on. In addition, the transition from education to labor must be more de-standardized as the extension of the post-adolescent period also diversifies the life course and advances in the use of ICT and AI (artificial intelligence). There will be new challenges and perspectives in Sociology of Education, including the world’s leading and aging societies with declining birth rates.

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