

Social Justice and Equity in the Japanese Education System

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Japanese educational institutions realize social justice and enhance Japanese students' capacity for individual self-development in the education system, particularly in upper secondary education. This study involved historical investigation based on analyzing documents, field studies, and in-depth interviews. However, due to the particular social and cultural context of Japan, the preliminary analysis conducted in this study indicated that, despite equal opportunity in education often being emphasized and discussed, social justice is rarely involved in educational policy and research. I conducted in-depth interviews with Japanese scholars to confirm and clarify this issue. Therefore, in this paper, concepts related to social justice (including factors such as educational equity, equality, and fairness) in education are explored first in the Japanese social and cultural context. Second, this paper concentrates on the relationship between social justice (including factors such as educational equity, equality, and fairness) and the capacity for self-development, and comprehensively analyzes Japan's overall education system. Third, in the educational policies, Japanese ideas of realizing social justice and strategies for enhancing students' capacity for individual self-development are clarified. Finally, relevant recommendations are provided in the conclusion.

Keywords: Social Justice, Educational Equity, Educational Equality, Educational Policy, Japan, Capacity for Self-Development

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Japanese educational institutions realize social justice and enhance Japanese students' capacity for individual self-development in the education system, particularly in upper secondary education. Over the past half century, popular concern regarding justice has remained undiminished. John Rawls (1958), an American moral and political philosopher, described his concept of justice in "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical." He (Rawls 1993, pp. 5-6) argued that "each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties," and that "social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society." Since 2006, Akio Miyadera (2014), a Japanese educational philosopher, has applied Rawls's theory in education and has proposed his own theory of educational

justice. Miyadera argued that, to ensure justice in education, there must be a space for public debate on "equality and education," "publicness and education," and "integration and education" that guarantees participants a multiplicity of perspectives and standpoints (p. iii). In other words, his aim is to present a normative theory that contributes to the institutional design of education.

Over the past five years, research interest in social justice has increased considerably, and this "social justice research boom" is progressing. For example, in Europe, Schraad-Tischler, a political scientist, has conducted two international comparative studies, namely *Social Justice in the OECD – How Do the Member States Compare?* (2011) and *Social Justice in the EU* (2015), evaluating social justice developments in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)-member countries and EU countries (28 countries, including the United Kingdom). In these two index reports, he used Rawls's theory to define his concept of social justice. The educational dimension (defined in 2011 as the "access to education dimension" and in 2015 as the "equitable education dimension") is essential to the six dimensions of the social justice index. In the 2011 index report, Japan was ranked 22nd among 31 countries. The main reason for this is that the labor market inclusion dimension and health dimension have reached the

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same level as developed countries, but the other four dimensions, including the access to education dimension, are not over three-fifths of the levels of north European countries. In particular, Japan's intergenerational justice dimension is the penultimate country example (contrastingly, the lowest is Greece). The debt-to-GDP indicator (which reflects the financial burden that will be left to future generations) showed that Japan has accumulated a national debt equivalent to 213 percent of the GDP, which is the highest of all 31 countries (Schraad-Tischler 2011).

Social justice has been a common theme of international conferences in recent years and has received considerable attention. For example, in Bulgaria (ranked lower among EU countries for the development of social justice in the 2015 index report), the theme of the 2015 conference of the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society was "Quality, Social Justice, and Accountability in Education Worldwide." In north European countries (ranked among the top EU countries for the development of social justice in the 2015 index report), the theme of the 2016 congress of the Nordic Educational Research Association was "Social Justice, Equality, and Solidarity in Education?" These two conferences focused on social justice and developed active discussions. In addition, at International Sociological Association (ISA) conferences, although social justice has not been directly addressed since 2014, inequality and justice have been highlighted as important keywords. At the 18th ISA World Congress of Sociology in 2014, the number of papers related to social justice totaled 374.

In Taiwan, with the end of the Martial Law Period (1949-1987), citizens began to be interested in equal opportunities for education and social justice. In the 2000s, as the marketization of education progressed and the gap between rich and poor widened, together with the educational gap, issues regarding equality and social justice have received increased attention. A growing number of studies and theses discussing these topics have been published. According to the database of the National Central Library of Taiwan, there are approximately 19 books and treatises with titles related to social justice and education, which are concentrated in the 2007-2008 and 2012-2013 periods. This appears to be connected with 2009 being originally scheduled for implementing the *Twelve-Year Basic Education Policy (TYBEP)*, which was due for full implementation in 2014.

TYBEP can be regarded as one of Taiwan's most important educational policies of the last five years. After planning and designing *TYBEP* for 30 years, the Ministry of Education (MOE) officially announced in 2011 that the policy would be implemented in August 2014. *TYBEP* was originally named the *Twelve-Year Compulsory Education Policy*; however, it does not legislate for compulsory education. *TYBEP* is a unified term, including the existing nine-year compulsory education period and three years of upper secondary

education. In other words, *TYBEP* is a "quasi-compulsory" policy for upper secondary education (Liu 2014c). In addition, the content of *TYBEP* is excessively extensive and complex for the public to understand. One of *TYBEP*'s visions is "No Child Left Behind," and a notable concept the policy advances is enhancing students' capacity for individual self-development. Its objective of social justice is based on these visions and ideas. The main subpolicies concern upper secondary education, such as introducing the school district system, reforms to the full exemption from entrance examinations, and narrowing the gap in school fees between public and private high schools. This indicates that the MOE aims to not only equalize the quality of education but also ensure equal opportunity in upper secondary education.

In Japan and Taiwan, Chinese characters are used, and the orthography and meaning of "social justice" are nearly identical. However, social justice is less frequently mentioned in Japan. Moreover, Japan has no equivalent educational policy to *TYBEP* aimed at achieving social justice, even in the era of "High School Education For All" (Kagawa, Kodama, and Aizawa 2014). Although the problem of equality of educational opportunities is widely discussed, the term "social justice" rarely appears in educational policies. Moreover, in Japanese educational research, despite the fact that Japan was ranked in the bottom third in international comparative studies of social justice, this issue is not regarded as a cause for concern. According to the database of the National Diet Library in Japan, several texts and papers have discussed social justice through raising children's poverty issues; however, there are very few directly linked to education research. Since 2010, the well-known Justice course that is taught by Michael J. Sandel, an American political philosopher and a professor at Harvard University, has received considerable attention and discussion in Japan, but has not significantly affected Japanese education research. Scholars have criticized the Japanese government's recent educational policy reforms, which seem to be moving in the direction of injustice. For example, Miyadera (2014) criticized the Japanese government's "differential affirmative" tendency and its strengthening of the principle of competition in the reform of educational policies after 2006, including the abolition of school districts, introduction of entrance examinations that emphasize academic ability, and promotion of diversification policies (for example, the flexibility of the education system).

This study addressed the question of why the social justice research boom has not occurred in Japan, and prioritized clarifying the absence of the term *social justice* in Japanese educational research and policy. This study is part of a research project (1 August 2015 to 31 July 2017) financed by the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) of Taiwan entitled "Social Justice and Capacity for Self-Development in the Educational System in Japan with a

View to Improving Upper Secondary Education in Taiwan,” which is part of an integrated research initiative (1 August 2015 to 31 July 2018) also financed by MOST, entitled “Comparative Studies on Social Justice and the Capacity for Self-Development in Educational Systems.” Accordingly, this study (the first year of the research project) concentrated on the relationship between social justice and the capacity for self-development in the Japanese education system, particularly regarding the following 10 themes: early childhood education, elementary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education, technical and vocational education, higher education, teacher education, disadvantaged schooling, education for new immigrants, and lifelong learning. This study provides an overview of the Japanese education system and focuses on upper secondary education.

Overall, the purpose of this study was to investigate how Japanese educational institutions realize social justice and enhance Japanese students’ capacity for individual self-development in the education system, particularly in upper secondary education. This study involved a historical investigation based on analyzing documents, field studies, and in-depth interviews. However, due to the particular social and cultural context of Japan, the preliminary analysis conducted in this study indicated that, despite equal opportunity in education often being emphasized and discussed, social justice is rarely involved in educational policy and research. I conducted in-depth interviews with Japanese scholars to confirm and clarify this issue. Therefore, in this paper, concepts related to social justice (including factors such as educational equity, equality, and fairness) in education are explored in the Japanese social and cultural context. Second, this paper concentrates on the relationship between social justice (including factors such as educational equity, equality, and fairness) and the capacity for self-development, and comprehensively analyzes Japan’s overall education system (including the aforementioned 10 themes). Third, as a basis for comparative studies (the second year of the research project), Japanese ideas of realizing social justice and strategies for enhancing students’ capacity for individual self-development are clarified. Finally, relevant recommendations are provided in the conclusion.

Methods

This study employed a literature review and stakeholder interviews on social justice and educational equity in the Japanese education system. To gain a clearer understanding of the differences in meaning and the application of concepts such as social justice, educational equity, equality, and fairness, the study not only analyzed the Japanese education system and educational policies from a macroscopic perspective but also collected and explored the opinions

and ideas of Japanese education researchers in related fields (including educational administration, educational sociology, and educational philosophy) from a microscopic personal perspective. In particular, identifying the reasons for the absence of the concept of social justice in Japan was a priority for this study; hence, in-depth field interviews were indispensable. Therefore, this study involved conducting long-term interviews face-to-face or via phone, Skype, email, and/or Facebook (from December 2014 to September 2016) with Japanese researchers, including professors at universities and staff from research agencies. Researchers were interviewed in three fields: administration field, educational sociology field, and educational philosophy field.

Researchers in the educational administration field (Interviewees A and B): (1) A staff member (Interviewee A) of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER), Japan’s main official education research organization, was interviewed on 11 September 2015 and 15 September 2016. Interviewee A had approximately eight years of work experience at the NIER. In addition, because she had studied in both Japan (until the third year of the doctoral program) and the United Kingdom (doctoral program), she was aware of how educational policies concerning the relevant concepts (e.g., social justice, educational equity, equality, and fairness) are implemented in Japan and the United Kingdom. She was also able to distinguish and explain the difference between English and Japanese regarding the meaning and use of these concepts. Her major research interests are in the fields of educational administration and educational sociology, particularly child poverty and learning situations. (2) A professor (Interviewee B) at a national university in eastern Japan was interviewed on 12 September 2016. He is an executive member of Japanese professional educational societies, Japan’s main nongovernmental education research organizations, such as the Japanese Educational Research Association (JERA), the Japan Educational Administration Society, and the Japan Academic Society for Educational Policy. Interviewee B is also a Member (連携会員) of the Science Council of Japan (SCJ), the representative organization of the Japanese scientific community for all fields of sciences including humanities, social sciences, life sciences, natural sciences, and engineering; members are elected as representatives of the approximately 840,000 scientists nationwide. Hence, he has often been involved in policy discussions in government administration and is aware of how educational policies concerning concepts such as social justice, educational equity, equality, and fairness are implemented in Japan.

Researchers in the educational sociology field (Interviewees C, D, E, F, G, and H): One professor (Interviewee C) and two assistant professors (Interviewees G and H) at national universities, two pro-

fessors (Interviewees D and E) at private universities in eastern Japan, and one associate professor (Interviewee F) at a private university in western Japan were interviewed. All hold several memberships to Japanese professional educational societies, such as the Japan Society for Educational Sociology. Specifically, Interviewee C is a Council Member (会員) of SCJ; Council Members are selected and recommended from among scientists with excellent accomplishments in their research or achievements and are appointed by the prime minister. Interviewee D is also a Member of SCJ. Hence, Interviewees C and D have often been involved in discussions in government administration to provide policy recommendations and are aware of how educational policies concerning the studied concepts (e.g., social justice, educational equity, equality, and fairness) are implemented in Japan. Moreover, Interviewees C-H specialize in social justice and educational equity. Specifically, Interviewees C and G specialize in vocational education, Interviewee E in high school dropout, Interviewee F in child poverty, and Interviewee H in special education. Interviewees C and E were interviewed on 18 September 2016. Interviewee D was interviewed on 14 September 2016. Interviewee F was interviewed on 13 December 2014, 21-27 January 2015, 21-28 April 2015, 22-24 July 2015, 8-9 September 2015, and 15 June 2016. Interviewee G was interviewed on 9-12 August 2015, 9 September 2015, and 11 September 2016. Interviewee H was interviewed on 11 September 2015.

Researchers in the educational philosophy field: One emeritus professor (Interviewee I) at a national university in eastern Japan was interviewed on 13 September 2016. He is an executive member of Japanese professional educational societies such as JERA, the Philosophy of Education Society of Japan, and the History of Educational Thought Society. Interviewee I has not only published many books and articles on educational justice and equality but is also a Member of SCJ and has often been involved in policy discussions in government administration. Hence, he was able to distinguish and explain the difference in meaning and use between concepts such as social justice, educational equity, equality, and fairness and is aware of how educational policies concerning these concepts are implemented in Japan.

Social Justice and Educational Equity in the Japanese Education System

This section analyzes the concepts related to social justice (e.g., educational equity, equality, and fairness) in education within Japanese social and cultural contexts. This paper is focused on the relationship between social justice and the capacity for self-development, and comprehensively analyzes Japan's overall education system.

Concepts of Social Justice and Educational Equity in Japanese Education

There is widespread awareness in Japan that social justice in education is crucial, and the preliminary analysis of this study showed that equal opportunity in education is often emphasized and discussed. However, social justice rarely features in Japanese educational policy and research. Interviewees A, B, C, G, H, and D agreed that this is probably because the social and cultural background of Japan has led people to think that achieving the highest values and ideals of social justice is challenging; thus, there is a tendency to avoid controversies related to social justice. In addition, Interviewee B pointed out that "Justice is a kind of value, and values change from person to person;" hence, whether in educational policy or research, conclusions regarding social justice are difficult to obtain. Even if the concept of social justice is formulated as a policy, the assessment of this policy may also be quite difficult for the government, because it is related to the question of values.

Yozo Watanabe (1979, p. 10), a Japanese law scholar and an emeritus professor of the University of Tokyo, analyzed the question of what justice is as follows:

The question of what justice is is not that simple in nature. It is a troublesome problem that cannot be tidied up by ordinary methods. Because justice (spirit) involves movement in the mind or head of a person, this is a matter of value judgment.... In short, the scale of what is right is "a scale in the head," so there is always more than one answer. If you do not understand that there are lots of measures, you do not know the law.

In other words, in the analysis presented by Watanabe (1979), the question "What is justice?" is very difficult to resolve. The issue of the plurality of measures of justice has also been raised. Miyadera (2014, p. 21) mentioned the "pluralism of justice" in his book *Justice in Education*. Regarding the relationship between justice and society, family, and the individual, he argued that the reasons for the existence of pluralism of justice are as follows:

When we expand the scope of application of the principle of justice from the public system as the foundation structure of society to the family as the private domain and further deepen it to the people's "living experience," the entity of "justice" becomes increasingly thin, and only its functionality will be utilized. Along with that, justice is distanced from the image of the judge as the only exceptional person, but approaches the image of a jury that collectively modifies differences in position and viewpoint. Pluralism is inevitable for justice as well. (Miyadera 2014, p. 21)

Miyadera also cited Rawls's theory of justice, which recognizes this view of the pluralism of justice:

Although Rawls advocates “the priority of right over the good,” he was forced to admit that “right” was also a “fact of pluralism” in the latter period of [his research career]; that is, after the latter half of the 1980s. [He came to] assign justice only the status of the leader of a place of speech that continues to ask for “overlapping agreements” between different doctrines, without any longer assigning an objective judicial status. This is widely recognized to be one of the issues surrounding the consistency of Rawls's theory of justice. Justice is being *procedurized from entity to process* as a political regulatory principle that maintains a space for speech [emphasis added].” (Miyadera 2014, p. 22)

The preceding discussions elucidate why Japanese scholars rarely use the concept of social justice to analyze educational poli-

cies or systems (i.e., our question as to why the social justice research boom has not occurred in Japan) and why social justice rarely appears in government educational policy documents. However, as Miyadera (2014) stated, in Japanese educational policy, although the term “justice” is avoided because of its plural definitions, as a regulatory principle that maintains a space for speech, it gradually becomes realized in procedures and methods in the process of formulating educational policy. Thus, the interview survey indicates that approximately 89 percent of Japanese scholars agree with the hypothesis of this research that the concept of equality that can be realized in educational policies is a means and method to achieve the goal of social justice.

Although social justice itself is used infrequently, concepts related to social justice, such as educational equality and equity, are often used in Japanese educational policies or educational research. The interview results indicate that these concepts are interrelated as follows:

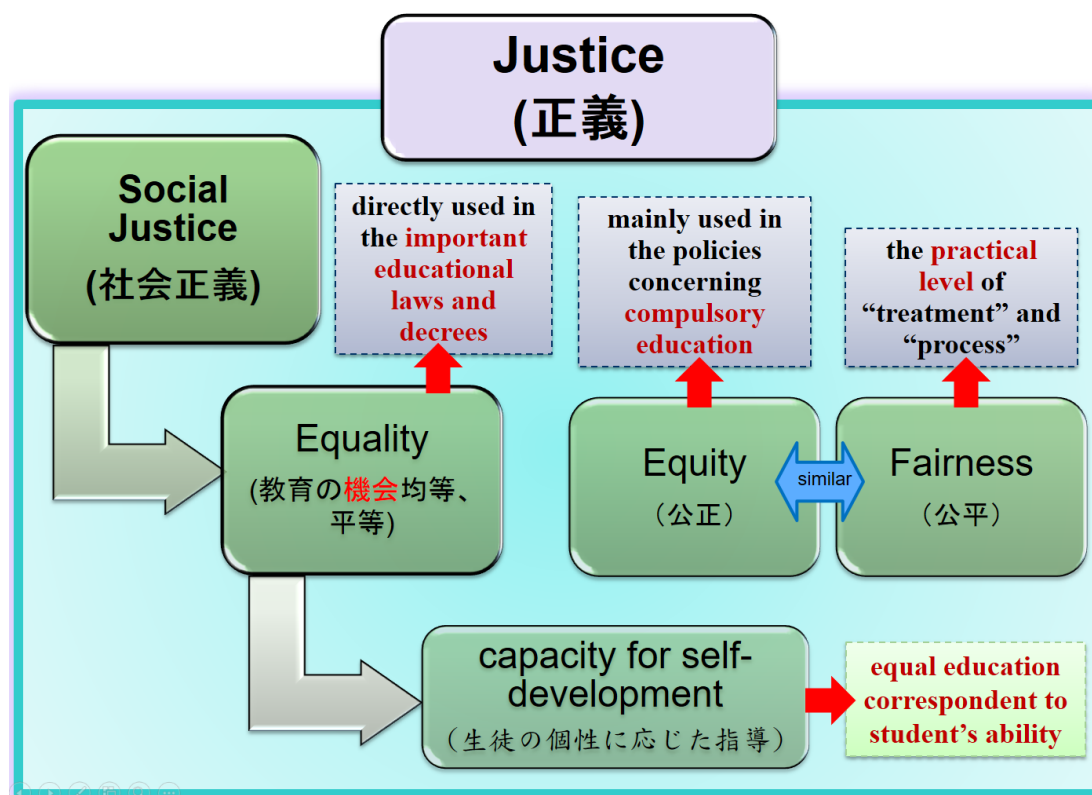


Figure 1. Interrelationships between concepts related to social justice in Japanese educational academia

Source: Created by the author.

In Figure 1, the most widely emphasized concept in Japan is equality (教育の機会均等・平等). This is because this word is usually directly used in important laws and decrees relating to education. For example, Article 26 of the Constitution of Japan sets

forth the basic national educational policy as follows: “All people shall have the right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided by law” (Ministry of Justice 2009). The

Basic Act on Education, which in Japan is also known as “The Education Constitution,” is clearer in Article 4, “Equal Opportunity in Education,” which states that, “The people must be given equal opportunities to receive an education suited to their abilities...” (Ministry of Justice 2011). Thus, in the spirit of these two basic educational laws, the concept of capacity for self-development in the Japanese education system (particularly in upper secondary education and higher education) is emphasized primarily through “track differentiation according to competency.”

In addition, SCJ published the general report, “Prospects of Japan: Proposals from Academics, 2010” in April 2010. This is a long-term study that provides an outlook for Japanese academics, as well as proposing promotional policies for 10-to-20 years. (The report is 75,155 words in length. The word “equality” appears seven times, but “justice” does not appear.) Thirty-one reports related to this 2010 general report have been published; specifically, the Committee on Psychology/Education convened the top scholars and experts in the education field and issued a policy recommendation report, “Prospects in the field of education: A comprehensive study of education that guarantees ‘quality’ and ‘equality.’” In this report (which is 29,542 words in length and includes the word “equality” 19 times), “social justice” appears only once. It is one of the principles that are presented to illustrate the concept of “new equality” in the section “The realization of learning rights and the guarantee of learning opportunities.”

In the context of the complex society and politics of the twenty-first century, the concept of “equality” must be developed into “equality open to diversity” that exceeds uniformity. This involves searching for a concept of “equality” that responds to the conditions and needs of learners and *leads to flexible diversity penetrated by social justice* [emphasis added]. This is also one of the research subjects that requires innovation in education research. (SCJ 2010, p. 15)

In other words, in Japanese educational academia, the pursuit of the ideal of social justice is manifested in the focus on the concept of “equality.”

The concept of equity (公正) is mainly used in policies concerning compulsory education (including primary education and lower secondary education). Kokichi Shimizu, a Japanese educational sociologist, has studied the academic achievement of students and several achievement tests in both Japan and abroad since 2008. In his research project “A Comparative Sociological Study on Educational Policies Concerning Academic Achievements: Equity and Excellence” (2008-2010), two key concepts “equity” and “excellence,” which are commonly applied in Europe and the United States to evaluate the performance of the education system, were

used to analyze academic achievement policies. Shimizu’s (2012, p. 26) research team defined these two concepts in their book *Comparative sociology in academic achievement policies [domestic]: What has the National Assessment of Academic Achievement brought to prefectures?* and stated

We think “equity” is a concept related to equality of education, that is, “whether adequate educational opportunities are offered to all children and [their] appropriate educational achievement is guaranteed,” and “excellence” is a concept related to the quality of education, that is, “whether the potential of all children is optimally realized” [emphasis added]. As is clear from the above definition, “equity” can be thought of as both the “entrance” aspect of aligning educational opportunities and the “exit” aspect of ensuring educational achievement. (p. 26)

Shimizu noted that “The former [aligning educational opportunities] is close to the idea called ‘equality of opportunity,’ and the latter [aligning educational achievement] is close to that which is said to be ‘equality of outcome’ [emphasis added]” (p. 26). In other words, the concept of equity in academic achievement policies is to “support students with low learning achievement” and “narrow the gap between students’ academic achievement.” Thus, Interviewee D, who is also an educational sociologist, compared the concepts of equality and equity, arguing that equality emphasizes opportunity and equity emphasizes outcome. Hence, in Japan, the concept of equity is mainly used in policies aimed at ensuring students’ learning outcomes after the completion of compulsory education.

Regarding the concept of fairness, Interviewee I, who is an educational philosopher, stated that “fairness” means “to treat without being biased against anyone (that is, behaving impartially).” He noted that the Japanese “公正” corresponds to the English “fairness” and “equity”; although their etymologies are different, these terms have the same meaning in modern English. However, Interviewee D believes that “fairness” concerns the practical level of “treatment” and “process,” referring to fair play, fair competition, and other equal treatment during daily or school life. In other words, “fairness” is more equal to “substantive equality” than “institutional equality,” and is also included in the concept of justice. In brief, there is a tendency in Japanese educational academia to use the concept of “fairness” interchangeably with the concept of “equity,” and this usage differs depending on the scholar. Thus, some scholars (e.g., Interviewee B, an educational administration scientist) translate “fairness” as “公正” and “equity” as “公平.”

In Japan, with the prevailing emphasis on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the promotion of the domestic National Assessment of Academic Achievement (NAAA;

全国学力・学習状況調査; a test of all the highest grades of Japanese primary and secondary schools; sixth grade in elementary school and third grade in lower secondary school), Shimizu's research team's long-term academic achievement policy research and the idea of "equity" gradually gained attention. Furthermore, in Japanese educational policies and academia, the concept of "equity" (公正) also has begun to be emphasized. For example, in the subcommittee Restructuring of Public Education System Focused on the Equity Principle (公正原理を重視する公教育システムの再構築; 23 October 2014 to 30 September 2017) established by the SCJ's Committee on Psychology/Education, the keyword "公正原理" is translated into English as "equity principle" (SCJ 2017). Therefore, as shown in Figure 1, this study followed the SCJ's public statement and the opinions of the majority of scholars in the interview, translating "equity" as "公正" and "fairness" as "公平."

Development of Social Justice and Educational Equity in Japanese Education

Because of the unique social and cultural background of Japan, this section focuses on whether the design of education systems and implementation of policies in Japan are in line with the process of formulating socially just educational policy.

The analysis presented in the previous section indicates that the Japanese government and scholars rarely discuss social justice in educational policy, but attach importance to the concept of equality. Consequently, Japan's education system has always placed more emphasis on the provision of equal access to education at the "entrances" (e.g., entrance system, school selection system) of educational stages, as well as the arrangements of the transfer between the different courses in the "processes" (e.g., curriculum and teaching, course selection and transfer, and, in particular, the track differentiation system of upper secondary education) of all educational stages. Thus, the equality of the "exits" of all educational stages, such as learning outcomes and courses on advancement and careers, are easily overlooked. Toshiyuki Omomo (2016), an educational administration scientist, argued that, although the Japanese government has made institutional improvements to the equality of entrances (e.g., mandating school enrolment, exemption from tuition fees) and processes (e.g., establishing curriculum standards, examining textbooks, setting criteria for teachers' qualifications), there is no system of accountability for educational outcomes at the exits. Consequently, the substantive responsibility for learning outcomes falls on individual children and their families in a one-track selection system involving "equal opportunities to receive an education suited to their abilities." This argument has produced the next stage in Japan's educational reforms.

In Japanese educational policies for upper secondary and higher education stages, the equality of the entrance (educational opportunity) receives greater emphasis than the equity of the exit (educational outcomes) as a result of the two basic educational laws. In the educational policies of these two stages, the concept of capacity for self-development tends to place stress on track differentiation according to competency. Thus, under Japan's "diversification policy" (including factors such as the content of educational curriculums and school types), which has been implemented twice since the Second World War (in the 1960s and 1990s), reforms, such as the emphasis on educational diversity of school types and the abolition or increased flexibility of the school district system, have in fact brought about the expansion and diversification of educational opportunities. However, they have been criticized for creating numerous inequality issues. Nevertheless, since the outset of the twenty-first century, emphasizing diversity has been one of the priorities of educational reform policy. For example, the Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the twenty-first century (a private advisory body of Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, established in 1999) supported "equality of opportunity" and "emphasis and expansion of diversity." The importance of these two points is clearly stated in its final report, "Japan's Frontier is in Japan: A New Century to Build with Independence and Cooperation," which states

We should say goodbye to "equality of results" and introduce "new equity." It is a philosophy that should be called "fair disparity," which evaluates performance and potential on the premise that there are differences and gaps in individual abilities and talents. (Cabinet Office of Government of Japan 2000, pp. 18-19)

In other words, this statement affirms the difference between individual and differential treatment. Furthermore, regarding the need for diversity,

In the past, Japan has developed social mechanisms on the premise of homogeneity. However, in the era of diversification, a social mechanism in which people mutually recognize their differences and actively incorporate them is indispensable. In other words, it is [necessary] to expand the range of choice. Various choices are prepared for society, and various opportunities for selection are guaranteed to diverse citizens. (Cabinet Office of Government of Japan 2000, p. 21)

These issues of inequality and "injustice" resulting from the development of the diversification policy have become one of the key topics studied by scholars such as Takehiko Kariya (an educational

sociologist), Shigeo Kodama (an educational philosopher and educational political scientist), Isao Kurosaki (an educational administration scientist), Hidenori Fujita (an educational sociologist), Akio Miyadera (an educational philosopher), and Teruyuki Hirota (an educational sociologist).

Kariya (2001) criticized this overemphasis on “equality of opportunity” (i.e., whether everyone is on the “same starting line”), arguing that it in fact increased the disparities between social classes in students’ willingness to study. The root of this problem lies in the erroneous understanding and interpretation by the government (such as Prime Minister’s Commission on Japan’s Goals in the twenty-first Century) of the “equality of results” and “equality of opportunity.” This has led to the exacerbation of “inequality of opportunity and results.” Furthermore, Kariya strongly opposed the Japanese government’s “self-responsible society construction” reform policy. Kariya argued that the government ignores the inequality between classes and has only promoted educational reform policies that emphasize “zest for living” (生きる力, i.e., the ability to learn and think independently, since 1996) and “personality respect” (since 1987), as well as attributing individuals’ actions to their self-responsibility. This criticism is centered on the argument that, even if these policies, which overlook the expansion of “inequality of opportunity and results” but over-emphasize competition among individuals, can cause high-achieving students to be more willing to study, the overall effect may be for student willingness to study to become lower, thereby exacerbating social stratification.

On the basis of Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, Miyadera (2014) argued that education should be informed by justice and listed three main educational agendas: equality, publicness, and integration. He criticized the Japanese government’s policy directions in terms of “educational justice” and directly stated that after 2006 (the first Abe cabinet was in 2006), the government not only has tended to ignore social justice (i.e., the “differential affirmation” tendency) but has also widened the gap between the rich and poor. Although some policies have been implemented regarding exemption from school fees and awarding scholarships, the Japanese government’s market-oriented and competition-based policies (such as abolition of the school district system) and its reforms of educational diversity indicate that class divisions and disparities between urban and rural areas are being neglected. These reforms have resulted in greater diversity in secondary education and may have produced further unfairness and inequality in the education system. In particular, the “school selection system” involved in compulsory education (i.e., the abolition of the school district system in 1997) appeared to give parents the right to select educational institutions, but in fact forced them to bear the responsibility for the results of their choice.

In other words, it is ostensibly a “free” choice system, but fundamentally involves restricted choice because parents’ choice of school is subject to social factors such as their class and region. He pointed out that “the problem is that one’s self-responsibility is unilaterally imposed on cases where environmental factors and selective factors overlap” (Miyadera 2014, pp. 38-39). Parents who make favorable choices and those who could not do so are asked to assume the same responsibility. Miyadera (2014, p. 39) stated that “Although it is equal, it is not fair.” Hence, he stressed that the purpose of egalitarian education is to support the disadvantaged and that these policies may lead to backward development of egalitarian education.

Hidenori Fujita is another scholar who opposed the policies of personality respect, self-responsibility, and a school selection system in compulsory education. Fujita (2014) criticized the fourth report, of the Ad Hoc Council on Education (臨時教育審議会), which was published in 1987 and was established in 1984 by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. Fujita argued that, although it is said to be a policy of personality respect, in fact, it does not emphasize pluralistic and diverse individuality but promotes differentiation of educational opportunities based on unified meritocracy and self-determination or self-responsibility theory (e.g., the introduction of the six-year secondary schools described in Section VI). This reform policy has continued for nearly 30 years. In addition, Fujita compared the educational reforms of the Abe regime after 2012 (the second Abe cabinet) to “Five Arrows,” as opposed to its economic and fiscal policy, the “Three Arrows” of “Abenomics” (アベノミクス, namely “monetary easing,” “fiscal stimulus,” and “structural reforms for economic growth strategies to encourage private investment”). The Five Arrows are as follows: “thought control: textbook reform policy,” “personality control: moral subject policies,” “institutional and market control: school education system restructuring policy,” “educational control: performance-based policies such as publishing schools’ NAAA results,” and “administrative control: administrative policy on school sites and their faculties and staff.” His opinion on the Three Arrows is not negative, but he does criticize the Five Arrows. He stressed the difference between the two, mainly referring to the following three points. First, compared with the short-term and specific impact of economic and fiscal policies, the impact of educational policies is medium to long term and complex. Hence, the success or failure of an educational policy and its causal relationships are unclear, and modification of the policy orbit is rare. Second, in recent years, the evaluation of educational policies based on the criteria used for economic and financial policy, namely rationality, appropriateness, and effectiveness, has tended to be neglected. Third, compared with the Three Arrows of economic and fiscal policies, the Five Arrows of educational policies

(especially the first, second, and third arrows) are phenomena that elicit approval or disapproval and judgment on the basis of values, education, and social views. Hence, the development and evaluation of educational policies with far-reaching impacts is markedly more complex than those of economic and fiscal policies, and must be conducted cautiously.

In particular, Fujita (2014) criticized the third arrow, “institutional and market control: school education system restructuring policy,” which is the most relevant for this study, arguing that this entailed “institutional differentiation of educational opportunities.” The third arrow is derived from *On the Nature of Future School Systems (Fifth Proposal)*, a 2014 report of the Education Reproduction Execution Conference (教育再生実行会議), which was established in 2013 by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. This suggested that the existing 6-3-3-4 school system should undergo reforms, such as the promotion of “syo-cyu-ikan schools” (i.e., “compulsory education schools,” which are comprised of six years of elementary school and three years of lower secondary school) and a reemphasis on “cyu-kou-ikan schools” (i.e., secondary schools, which comprise three years of lower secondary school and three years of upper secondary school) and the school selection system. Fujita noted that such schools tend to be converted to elite examination schools, promoting disparities between schools. Hence, introducing and increasing these two schools is likely to not only spur the expansion of the school selection system from the compulsory education stage but also lead to a lower age of examination competition. Hence, reforming the existing 6-3-3-4 school system to schemes such as the 9-3-4 system of compulsory education schools, the 6-6-4 system of secondary schools, the 5-4-3-4 system, the 5-3-4-4 system, or the 4-4-4-4 system, would only complicate the school system, leading to numerous problems. For example, it may increase disadvantages and difficulties for students in transferring schools when relocating (i.e., impose constraints on freedom of movement). In addition, for students and parents, what type of school they attend has become an important concern. Hence, children’s educational opportunities are influenced by their family’s cultural capital and the ability of parents to gather information. Consequently, there is a high possibility of children’s educational opportunities being differentiated. In addition, as long as the school selection system contains a mechanism for “prioritizing the rights of the socially strong (such as students born into a family with high cultural capital) and restricting the rights of the socially weak,” it not only violates Rawls’s liberty principle but also contravenes the provision of equal opportunity in education of the Constitution of Japan and the *Basic Act on Education* (Fujita 2014). In other words, unlike countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, Japan has an educational culture with a strong tendency for school rankings and intense examination competition. Therefore, the introduction and expansion

of the school selection system and the establishment and addition of elite compulsory education schools and secondary schools are not appropriate policies.

Hirota (2011) analyzed the issue of equality of educational opportunities from the perspective of course differentiation and the ability selection system, which is closely related to the school selection system. The Constitution of Japan sets forth the basic national educational policy thus: “All people shall have the right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability” (Article 26). However, Hirota (2011) argued that the “ambiguity and arbitrariness” of selective examinations based on students’ ability may result in inequality of educational opportunity. That is because an individual’s ability may not be measured correctly, and “selection by ability is not a technical or neutral process, but a process in which the arbitrary micro power of market actors is working” (p. 268) In other words, the concept of capacity for self-development in Japanese educational policies tends to emphasize track differentiation according to competency in the entrance examination system. Hence, to account for the equality of educational opportunities, Hirota noted three points: First, rather than depending upon evaluation and selection based on competence, which is subject to the power of the market, appropriate regulation should be established, such as a selection mechanism that can minimize disparities and exclusion. Second, education systems that prematurely differentiate individuals must be avoided. Third, the “discoverability of all potential ability” should be emphasized universally, so that people who have missed selection are qualified to ask for extensions to demonstrate their capabilities under another mechanism of selection and judgment (pp. 268-269).

To summarize the preceding analysis and critique from scholars in several research fields of education, after the Second World War, Japan’s education system began to focus on equality of educational opportunities. As a result, the admission system has become more diverse, students’ selectivity regarding schools has increased, and the diverse developmental needs of students have been accounted for. However, these developments have also led to inequality at the household level (e.g., self-responsibility for selection) because of excessive emphasis on the provision and expansion of educational opportunities at the entrances of all educational stages, particularly early school choice in compulsory education. Moreover, in the past five years, the market-oriented and competition-based reform policies regarding the flexibility of the existing 6-3-3-4 school system (i.e., diversification of school types and school stages) have also tended to produce inequality or unreasonable problems in the processes (e.g., transfer of course or school) and exits (e.g., student’s learning outcomes) of all educational stages. In other words, these reforms may ensure equality, but they violate equity and fairness. The content and implementation of those policies regarding this

structural issue are discussed in detail in the next section with respect to stages and policies.

In summary, after examining the relationship between related social justice concepts (e.g., educational equity, equality, and fairness) and capacity for self-development in the Japanese education system, I found that people in Japan tend to be concerned with “relative” concepts (i.e., those that are more concrete and easy to compare, such as educational equity, equality, and fairness) that emphasize the interplay or interactivity, as opposed to “absolute” concepts (such as social justice) that involve values of individuality and pluralism. This is because relative concepts are comparatively easy to implement and evaluate in educational policy, for example in school selection systems and entrance examination systems. Thus, the avoidance of the concept of justice makes the equality of the majority easier to address, but the equality of the minority (the individual justice of the minority) easy to overlook. In other words, in Japan, where ethnic differences are minimal, it has been easy to ignore compensatory justice for disadvantaged groups in past policies—for example, in aboriginal education (for Ainu people) and foreign children’s education. Therefore, although the Japanese government, like the Taiwan government, is eager to resolve issues such as the disparity between public and private high schools (e.g., school fees), the evasion of social justice and the relationship between educational diversity reforms and class divisions, as well as the gap between urban and rural areas, must be taken seriously and resolved immediately.

Recent Reform Trends and Challenges in the Japanese Education System

Based on the analysis and critique of scholars in Section III, this section involves analyzing the Japanese government’s efforts toward realizing equal opportunity education and ensuring students’ capacity for individual self-development, including ideas for implementing related social justice concepts (e.g., educational equity, equality, and fairness) and strategies for enhancing students’ capacity for individual self-development. Recent relevant reform policies are divided into three phases (entrance, process, and exit) for separate illustration and analysis. This provides an overview of the Japanese education system (including the 10 themes mentioned in Section I) and focuses on upper secondary education.

4-1 Phase 1: Reforms to the Entrance for All Educational Stages

4-1-1 Reform Trend (1): Reforms of the School System

Over the past five years, particularly in 2014, the Japanese government (e.g., at the Education Reproduction Execution Conference) has attempted to reform the school system (i.e., through the “the third arrow” of the Abe regime’s educational reforms analyzed by Fujita). According to *On the Nature of Future School Systems (Fifth Proposal)* from the Education Reproduction Execution Conference (Cabinet Office of Government of Japan 2014), two prominent points are highlighted in these policies. The first point concerns positively reviewing the existing 6-3-3-4 school system and attempting to implement some pilot systems, such as the 5-4-3-4, 5-3-4-4, and 4-4-4-4 systems.

Roughly 70 years after World War II, the human resources supporting Japan have been cultivated under the 6-3-3-4 system. However, the situation regarding children and society has changed drastically. [Children’s] development is faster than at the time when the original form of the current school system was introduced, and issues such as low self-affirmation, the “elementary school first grader problem,” and “the junior high school first grader gap” are faced. (Cabinet Office of Government of Japan 2014, p. 1)

Hence, this proposal argued that it is necessary to build a suitable school system for a new era, enhancing education according to children’s development and creating flexible school systems that can address various challenges. The second point concerns emphasizing the connections among the stages of the school system in order to solve the aforementioned issues, such as the “elementary school first grader problem” and “junior high school first grader gap.” The elementary school first grader problem (which has existed since 1998) refers to the problem of poorly functioning first-grade classrooms in elementary schools, involving concerns such as students not concentrating on learning or not listening to the teacher’s instructions, preventing class from continuing. According to an analysis by Liu (2014b, pp. 123-124), the junior high school first grader gap refers to situations “when elementary school sixth grade students are promoted to the first grade of junior high school, they are not able to easily adapt to the differences in the new class culture, the formation of interpersonal relationships between grades, comprehending difficult curriculum content, and so on, which may cause them to experience psychological shock and pain and lead to truancy, social withdrawal, or suicide because of bullying.” Since 2010, new terms such as “senior high school first grader gap” and “senior high school first grader crisis” have been applied. The main

causes of the senior high school first grader crisis are also likely to occur in higher education entrance-exam-oriented schools and cram courses, in addition to an increase in school distance or the inability to adapt to the independent and self-disciplined learning models of senior high school. For example, after entering senior high school, students who exhibited excellent academic performance in junior high school may cease to study well or lose confidence because the number of competitors increase, leading to their abandoning learning or refusing to attend school (Liu 2014b). Thus, the proposal suggests promoting collaboration between kindergartens and primary schools (especially during first grade; see Reform Trend (4)), the 9-3-4 system of compulsory education schools, and the 6-6-4 system of secondary schools.

The proposal also states that, in conjunction with the reform of the school system—and from the perspective of promoting cooperation between schools and implementing integrated, flexible, and effective education—it is necessary to reform the teacher license system so that teachers can provide guidance according to their expertise in subjects across school types. For example, licenses can be created for each subject that can be taught at multiple school types such as elementary and junior high school, and junior high school and senior high school; or the acquisition of license certificates for multiple school types can be promoted. In addition, local governments should promote the recruitment of holders of licenses for multiple school types and encourage current teachers to obtain license certificates for other types of schools (Cabinet Office of Government of Japan 2014).

A view has begun to develop in Japan that the 6-3-3-4 single school system is outdated and unable to meet the needs of all students, and that a diverse school system is necessary to provide broader educational choices and achieve equal opportunity in education and a capacity for individual self-development for each student. Thus, the bifurcate characteristic of Japanese upper secondary education (Liu 2013) and the several reforms focusing on the diversity of the school system have, in fact, led to the Japanese one-track system being increasingly developed, which is entirely different from the school system of the United States. Numerous problems and adverse effects can arise from policy proposals for reorganizing school systems. In particular, with the increase in the choice of school types at each educational stage, gaps, and inequalities may arise. As Fujita (2014) argued, this school system reform may lead to the following issues:

1. The school system becomes too complex and is detrimental to the choice of students and parents, especially those disadvantaged in cultural or economic capital.
2. The inconsistency of the school systems is not conducive to the transfer of students, because it may lead to difficulties in

matching the grade levels and course content between school systems.

3. The 9-3-4 system of compulsory education schools and 6-6-4 system of secondary schools may lead to the establishment and addition of elite schools that are not conducive to disadvantaged students (because those schools may set up entrance exams to screen for admission).
4. The problem of “immobilization of interpersonal relationships” may emerge long term with nine years of compulsory education school or six years of secondary school.
5. Compulsory education hinders guaranteeing the principles of equity and fairness.

Numerous issues concerning factors such as enrollment, curriculum design, teacher qualification, and transfer measures should be resolved in the reform and development of a double-track or multi-track school system for compulsory education.

4-1-2 Reform Trend (2): Reforms of School Type

In the second Abe cabinet, unlike the past regime, the Education Reproduction Execution Conference was a forum for discussing and developing reform principles to progress to the stage of policy design. However, the Central Council for Education (CCE; 中央教育審議会), led by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, was intended for discussing concrete implementation methods and institution designs according to the principles indicated by the conference. “Reforms of school type” was one of the first recommendations in the fifth report to be implemented as a specific policy. This is because it was easier to implement combinations of existing educational stages (such as the 9-3-4 system and 6-6-4 system) than to irregularly cut existing educational stages, as in the 5-4-3-4, 5-3-4-4, and 4-4-4-4 systems. Another reason is that, as early as 1998, secondary schools began to be established. In 2005, the CCE began to review the existing compulsory education system and to explore the possibility of integration between elementary and junior high schools. In the report *On the Creation of a Flexible and Effective Educational System Based on Children’s Development and Learners’ Motivation and Ability*, which was issued by the CCE in 2014, the institutionalization of “elementary and junior high school integrated education” was proposed (CCE 2014a). Accordingly, the *School Education Act* was amended in July 2015, and “compulsory education schools” were established in April 2016. As of December 22, 2016, there were 52 secondary schools, with 32,428 students, and 22 public compulsory education schools in 13 prefectures, with 12,702 students (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT] 2016a).

Despite the pressure of achieving promotion having been removed from students in junior high school and senior high school integrated schools (including secondary school), in what is commonly called “escalator type education” or “elevator type education” (a school in which students can progress to advanced schools without examination), the aforementioned problems of Reform Trend (1) (such as the establishment and addition of elite schools) are not yet fully resolved. Moreover, integrated schools are likely to have an additional drawback: they may increase secondary school entrance examinations so that students must begin to prepare for them at elementary school. Similarly, compulsory education schools may have the additional drawback of increasing the number of elementary school entrance examinations (such as interviews for children and parents) so that children must begin to prepare for them at the kindergarten stage. Thus, these situations may not only allow the pressure of entrance examinations to gradually spread to lower age groups but also be more detrimental to disadvantaged families, thereby causing education to contribute to the development of social stratification. Furthermore, according to NIER’s (2015) survey report of precedents for elementary and junior high school integrated education, it is not always possible to add classrooms and facilities to existing school buildings. Hence, not only is it impossible to secure sufficient classrooms according to curriculum development needs such as small class teaching, but there is also a shortage of space for teaching materials. Moreover, when using an existing pool (i.e., only one pool in a primary school or junior high school after the integration of the two schools), the heights of the water surface required for primary school and junior high school students are different; therefore, adjustment of the water volume is difficult (NIER 2015).

These problems once again demonstrate that despite reforms of school type potentially realizing the diversity of education, increasing students’ choice, and taking into account equality, they may overlook equity and fairness. Moreover, they may be unable to fully account for the individual differences of all students and promote students’ capacity for individual self-development.

4-1-3 Reform Trend (3): Promoting Narrowing the School Fee Gap Between Public and Private High Schools

Since 2010, to further protect students’ educational opportunities from the influences of familial socioeconomic factors (i.e., economic capital), the Japanese government has implemented some policies regarding the exemption of public high school fees and, in 2014, stressed the need to further promote school subsidies for low-income groups. Moreover, local governments, such as Osaka Prefecture, began implementing private high school fee exemption in

2010. However, the 2010 high school free tuition policy (the original terms were “Fee-waiving systems apply for public high school curriculums and tuition support funding systems apply to private high schools”) was controversial and was opposed at the beginning of deliberations in Congress. The bill passed was applicable only to public schools and did not include private schools (private school students received subsidies for only part of their tuition). In addition, the policy entailed “unconditional payment” for all high school students; therefore, it did not set income restrictions.

Masahito Ogawa (2010, p. 4), an educational administration scientist, analyzed the 2010 high school tuition fee policy of the Democratic Party administration, and noted that in Japan, “the postwar educational policy focused primarily on securing the equality of compulsory education and aimed at constructing an administrative and fiscal system that addresses the disparities in regional and interschool education.” Because of the expansion and popularization of upper secondary education, the MEXT (formerly the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture) considers that the free tuition system should also be implemented in high schools, but lacks sufficient financial resources to achieve this. The 1999 report by the CCE, *Improving the Connection Between Primary and Secondary Education and Higher Education* suggested that “contemporary high school education can be described as equivalent to ‘ordinary education,’ which is a provision of Article 26 of the Constitution of Japan, so it should also be exempt from tuition fees in accordance with legislation on compulsory education” (Ogawa 2010, p. 8). Hence, the high school free tuition policy was to be achieved forcedly under the special context of regime change, despite concerns and debates about its financing. Moreover, the subsequent Abe administration, which began in 2012, changed the previous stance of opposition held by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan and continued to support this policy.

The implementation of this policy benefited all high school students, not only improving the high school enrollment rate but also reducing the number of students who dropped out of school for economic reasons. This can be said to guarantee the equality (educational opportunity) of entrance to the upper secondary education stage. However, Ogawa (2010), SCJ (2010), and other scholars criticized it for the following reasons:

1. Expenses other than tuition fees are not supported: In addition to tuition fees, high school education entails numerous other costs. Many families may be distressed by the fact that these extra expenses are not subsidized.
2. The policy may expand the gap between rich and poor families: It does not allow poor families in severe need of subsi-

dies to obtain more subsidies, but rather enables more affluent families to pay for extra learning costs such as cram school fees.

3. The gap between public and private schools is still very large: The policy fails to account for students who require subsidies for private school education. Many students from poor families attend private high schools rather than public high schools. There are students who have chosen to enter private education due to their low cultural and economic capital, or students who have had to drop out due to the high tuition fees of private schools.

The problem with this policy is that the practice of “unconditional payment to all high school students” (i.e., no income restrictions) has clearly produced “flat equality” (面の平等), as Kariya (2009, p. 243) noted. His criticism is that Japan’s educational reform policies have always been characterized by “flat equality,” meaning “producing homogeneous times and spaces, aiming for equal quantity and homogeneity in education and learning that can be maintained as such.” The drawback of policies based on “flat equality” is that they readily lead to the problem that students’ individual differences cannot be highlighted and cannot be treated as “differential treatment” (p. 249). Hence, “it is necessary to establish methods, rules, and mechanisms for new resource allocation appropriate for “individual equality” (個の平等) that encompasses each child’s ability and growth or learning environment” (Ogawa 2010, p. 13). Since the mid-2000s, poverty problems such as child poverty have attracted social attention, and, since 2009, the Japanese government has published survey results concerning the rate of child poverty. The relative poverty rate for children (which was 16.3 percent in 2012) has generally risen from the mid-1990s, and the relative poverty rate of one-parent families (54.6 percent in 2012) (Cabinet Office of Government of Japan 2015) is still high. The government implemented policies to address this problem in 2013. The request for revision of the 2010 high school free tuition policy is considered to have been motivated by this problem.

The concepts of “flat equality” and “individual equality” proposed by Kariya (2009) and the aforementioned observations by Ogawa (2010) are related to the “universalism” and “selectivism” of Japan’s welfare sociology. Universalism refers to the system covering all people uniformly, whereas selectivism refers to setting income standards and implementing means tests (asset surveys) as a condition of use (Shiragawa 2014). According to social welfare scholar Akihiro Sugino (2004), welfare policies in postwar Japan were implemented on the basis of the restrictive selection benefits of “welfare protection” (i.e., selectivism). By contrast, for educational policy, the preceding analysis indicates that, in a democratic

society, it is easier to focus on universalism than on selectivism, particularly with respect to popularized education such as compulsory and upper secondary education. However, in the context of limited financial resources and significant social strata differences, the level of discussion of educational policy cannot be restricted to the universalization of educational opportunities (i.e., offering educational opportunities to all the students). Social welfare issues such as child poverty and education subsidies are also involved and should be included. Moreover, targeted educational opportunities and selection of funding subsidies to focus on disadvantaged groups (i.e., offering educational opportunities to disadvantaged students) should be implemented. In other words, social welfare educational policies such as tuition exemption and subsidies should avoid alternating between universalism and selectivism, and instead pursue a complementary policy. Hence, while maintaining the strengths of educational administration and fiscal systems that emphasize “flat equality,” future educational policy should protect “individual equality,” which is closely related to the principle of social justice.

In the context of critical academic and public opinion, the 2010 free high school tuition policy was substantially revised in November 2013 and renamed the High School Tuition Support Fund. Since 2014, subsidies in the new system set an income limit (approximately ¥9,100,000 per year) for student families, irrespective of whether the students attend public or private schools. In addition, in the case of students attending private high school, the subsidy level for low-income households has increased, as the payment of additional tuition support funds varies depending on the economic situation of the household. Moreover, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government began the Private High School Tuition Reduction Grant Aid Project in 2017. To reduce the economic burden on parents who live in Tokyo whose children attend private high schools, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, in addition to the state’s High School Tuition Support Fund, also provides subsidies to families with an annual income of less than approximately ¥7,600,000. The maximum subsidy is ¥442,000, equivalent to the average tuition fee for private high schools in Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Private University Foundation, n.d.). In summary, although the issue of evading social justice still exists in Japan, the reforms of high school tuition subsidies, which have begun to focus on “individual equality,” will help to achieve social justice in upper secondary education.

4-1-4 Reform Trend (4): Promoting Tuition Subsidy Systems and Free Tuition Systems in Early Childhood Education

Since 2005, the Japanese government has begun to focus on the issue of equal opportunities for early childhood education. *The Future of Early Childhood Education Based on Changes in the Chil-*

dren's Environments, a 2005 report by the CCE, proposed “providing opportunities for early childhood education for all infants” and “strengthening and improving the cooperation and connection with elementary school education” (MEXT 2005). The report emphasized that up to 80 percent of kindergarten pupils attend private schools; hence, it is necessary to promote cooperation between public and private kindergartens. Based on this report, the Early Childhood Education Promotion Action Program (2006-2010) highlighted “the provision of adequate early childhood educational opportunities for all infants (aged 3-to-5 years) who are willing to enroll.” In particular, to alleviate the economic burden on all parents and to correct the disparity between parents using public and private kindergartens, the “kindergarten attendance promotion project” should be enriched and preferential measures should be taken for families with more than two children to reduce their economic burden. In addition, the report emphasized promoting enhancing subsidies for recurrent expenses for private kindergartens and indicated the need to review the feasibility of the free tuition system for early childhood education.

In the 2014 report *On the Nature of Future School Systems (Fifth Proposal)* of the Education Reproduction Execution Conference, the promotion of equal opportunities for early childhood education (aged 3-to-5 years) and the promotion of the free tuition system were emphasized, again from the perspective of international development trends. In view of the increasing severity of the elementary school first grader problem, the connection between early childhood education and primary education has become relatively important; thus, the institutionalization of compulsory education for early childhood education was also included in the discussion. In addition, Japan’s public burden ratio for early childhood education is only 45.4 percent (2011), which is considerably lower than the average of OECD member countries, at 81.6 percent (MEXT 2014). Hence, a free tuition system for early childhood education (aged 3-to-5 years) was phased in from 2015, including the implementation of the aforementioned policy recommendations of a “kindergarten attendance promotion project” and preferential measures for families with multiple children. However, due to financial constraints, this policy has adopted income restrictions; in other words, subsidies are limited to low-income families (multi-child families [three or more children] with an annual income less than approximately ¥3,600,000 and parents of one-person parent households with an annual income of less than approximately ¥2,700,000) (MEXT 2016b), rather than full free tuition being provided.

In September 2015, the Abe administration proposed the New Three Arrows of Abenomics (the so-called second stage of Abenomics), including “strong economies that create hope,” “child-rearing support creating dreams,” and “social security that leads to

peace of mind.” The specific measures of the second arrow concerning early childhood education include decreasing the number of waiting children who cannot enter nursery schools and expanding the promotion of the free tuition system for early childhood education (focused support for multi-child families) (Cabinet Office of Government of Japan, n.d.). Furthermore, in May 2017, the Abe administration reintroduced the early implementation policy and reviewed its financial resources for the comprehensive free tuition system for early childhood education. In other words, the possibility arose of providing preschool education for 5-year-old children in compulsory education. Evidently, the Abe administration prioritizes early childhood education in a society with declining birthrates.

Because of the financial problems of the Japanese government, the implementation of comprehensive free tuition and compulsory education for early childhood education requires improvement. However, prioritizing subsidizing low-income families is an effective means of providing social justice.

4-2 Phase 2: Reforms to the Process at All Educational Stages

4-2-1 Reform Trend (1): Promoting Career Education

In Japan, the government and educational institutes have continually emphasized the importance of vocational and career education since the 1990s. The reforms of upper secondary education are particularly significant, for example, creating integrated courses (1994), changing the name of specialized high schools (専門高校; previously vocational high schools; 1995), implementing internships (就業体験教育; 2003), and promoting featured high schools. The term “career education” appeared in CCE reports concerning educational administration for the first time in *Improving the Connection Between Primary/Secondary Education and Higher Education*, which was published in 1999. The basic theme of this report is not only the connection between school types but also the improvement of the “connection between school education and occupational life” (Liu 2009). To improve these connections in school education, this report suggested that it is necessary to implement “career education” based on the stage of development from primary school onward. Career education was defined as education to develop ability, attitude, and self-awareness, as well as the capacity to select courses independently. In addition, it involves acquiring a desired occupational attitude and the knowledge and skills required for an occupation (MEXT 1999). According to this report, to develop “a desired occupational attitude and a work attitude” (望ましい職業観・勤労観), Japanese schools for all educational stages launched a series

of practical activities focused on career education in the 2000s, such as the aforementioned internships.

Career education policy was responsive and complementary to the reforms of the featured high school policy and the concept of “zest for living” (1996). This series of developments and measures concerning featured high schools (e.g., “super-specialized schools” [2003-2011] and the “Japanese dual system” [2004-2007]), which was combined with career education, not only allowed teachers and students in the featured high schools to be free from the limitations of the existing curriculum and carry out research and development of creative materials but also provided a variety of senior high school choice opportunities for junior high school students. Thus, it is more conducive to cooperation between local industries and schools, as well as to balanced development between urban and rural areas (Liu 2014a).

The promotion of vocational and career education still has the following major issues. First, career education is ambiguous. Although policies and practices regarding career education have been implemented for many years, because its meaning is abstract and ambiguous (such as the concept of “a desired occupational attitude and a work attitude”), not only has it often been mixed with vocational education but it also has not been fully realized at school sites in practice. Second, the implementation of career education did not adequately improve the relationship between vocational education and social justice. In upper secondary education, the implementation of career education not only increased the diversification of school selection opportunities in the entrance phase but also increased the diversification of course selection opportunities in the process phase. However, it did not provide a variety of future course selection opportunities (such as advancing to higher education) in the exit phase. Specifically, although the implementation of career education helped the internal improvement of specialized courses (its predecessor was vocational courses; the proportion of the number of students is 19.4 percent of the total in 2011), it was often merely a formality in general courses (the proportion of the number of students is 72.3 percent in 2011) due to diplomaism (i.e., bias toward degrees and educational backgrounds, which means that people’s educational background is regarded as very important and may determine their perceived value and social status, especially in employment). Hence, not only were course selection opportunities in the process phase limited (because the difference between course curriculums was large and specialized course students have difficulties in selecting general course subjects), but future course selection opportunities in the exit phase have not been improved (because higher education institutions emphasizing general education remain relatively more numerous). In other words, reforms regarding career education may account for equality, but are contrary to equity and fairness.

In the 2011 CCE report *On Future Career Education and Vocational Education in Schools*, promotion of career education for approximately 10 years was reviewed. The following two prominent points were highlighted.

First, clearly redefining vocational education and career education: Career education is education that encourages career development through nurturing the necessary skills and attitudes toward the social and vocational independence of each person. By contrast, vocational education is education that fosters the necessary knowledge, skills, ability, and attitudes to engage in a certain or specific occupation (MEXT 2011). In other words, the concept of career education involves not only cultivating “a desired occupational attitude and a work attitude” but also cultivating the necessary capacities for “social and vocational independence” (社会的・職業的自立). In practice, this is achieved not only through internship but through all educational activities. The necessary capacities for social and vocational independence include (1) basic knowledge and skills; (2) basic and versatile competence; (3) logical thinking and imagination, (4) motivation, attitude, and values; and (5) professional knowledge and skills. The capacity that provides the most important foundation for career education is basic and versatile competence. Specifically, it is considered the ability to form social relationships, exhibit self-understanding and self-management, respond to challenges, and plan a career. When considering vocational education, it is necessary to think about the course of education from the perspective of lifelong learning.

Second, delineating the future development direction of career education at all educational stages, particularly upper secondary and higher education: This report suggested that systematic career education from early childhood education to higher education should be promoted. The following five suggestions were given in the report:

1. Infancy: promote spontaneous and subjective activities.
2. Elementary school: cultivate qualities such as sociality, autonomy, interest, and motivation.
3. Junior high school: encourage students to consider their roles in society and how to live and work in the future and foster attitudes to plan and achieve goals, leading to course selection and decisions.
4. Upper secondary education: nurture necessary skills and attitudes for diverse career development over a lifetime, developing values such as occupational and work attitudes independently.
5. Higher education: based on the career education provided until the completion of upper secondary education, career education should be enhanced throughout higher education

through learning and activities inside and outside the curriculum, with a view to transitioning from school to careers.

Upper secondary education (especially general courses) and higher education were discussed in depth, and specific implementation policies to enhance career education and vocational education were listed. Examples are securing opportunities to take vocational subjects in general courses, conducting practical educational activities in specialized courses through experiential learning and long-term practical training at the workplace with a view to cooperating with local companies, clarifying human resources images and abilities in higher education (university and junior college), and further developing practical education such as in internships and task-oriented learning. In addition, career formation support from the perspective of lifelong learning was emphasized—for example, promoting the acceptance of social workers at higher education institutions and supporting students who have dropped out at each educational stage.

In their 2014 report, *On the Nature of Future School Systems (Fifth Proposal)*, the Education Reproduction Execution Conference emphasized the importance of career education development at all educational stages, particularly upper secondary education and higher education. This proposal noted that upper secondary education, as a “run-up period to society,” should guarantee educational opportunities regardless of the economic situation of families (Cabinet Office of Government of Japan 2014). In addition, as stated in the 2011 report of the CCE, this proposal asserted the necessity of implementing practical vocational education, in particular, establishing higher education institutions that provide practical vocational education and ensuring the flexibility for changing courses between higher education institutions (such as expanding opportunities for transfer from junior colleges and vocational schools to universities). This is because Japanese universities and junior colleges primarily emphasize academic research and do not specialize in practical vocational education in collaboration with enterprises (Cabinet Office of Government of Japan 2014). Changing courses between higher education institutions was also challenging. Therefore, in 2017, these suggestions concerning establishing higher education institutions that provide practical vocational education were incorporated into educational policy (the *School Education Act* was also amended). From 2019, “professional universities” (専門職大学) and “professional junior colleges” (専門職短期大学) will be established as new higher education institutions conducting practical vocational education. These institutions will focus on practical vocational education in existing universities and junior colleges without new schools being established and are intended to strengthen the training of professional human resources through

close collaboration with industry (MEXT 2017a). In addition, new choices for those who wish to continue to university will be provided.

Since 2011, the Japanese government has focused on examining the issue of the connections between the various stages of the education system concerning career education and vocational education. Although this reform trend does not directly concern the issue of social justice, it clearly emphasizes the importance of students’ capacity for individual self-development and their future courses in vocational education. The reforms have focused on building a vocational education system in higher education that can meet the diverse needs of high school students. In other words, the equity and fairness of the process and exit phases have gradually begun to be addressed thoroughly. However, concerns remain, such as whether the expansion of the concept of career education contributes to the individual self-development of students or renders it more abstract and difficult to implement. In addition, although the creation of professional universities and professional junior colleges has increased students’ choice and may contribute to their individual self-development and the realization of social justice, it is important to examine what types of students such schools are conducive to the enrollment of. In other words, whether they are beneficial to specialized course students (disadvantaged students who are not suited to higher education) or only general course students must be determined.

4-2-2 Reform Trend (2): Promoting Early University Entrance Systems

In Japan, age-based legal provisions prohibit grade skipping (飛び級) at the educational stages below high school. Since the 1990s, the CCE has focused on the necessity of introducing skipping-related systems in view of the international trend in countries such as the United States and France, which have recognized grade skipping and early entrance systems. However, although the introduction of grade skipping has been considered, “introduction was postponed because it was not compatible with common social ideas” (Shogakukan 2003, p. 103). This is primarily due to the view that “students must be treated equally.” A 1997 report by the CCE stated that grade skipping could raise a variety of problems, for example, because it could be utilized to nurture so-called examination elites; consequently, there is a great risk of inviting unnecessary impatience among parents and intensifying examination competition (MEXT 1997). The CCE argued that it is difficult to obtain social consensus and that not implementing grade skipping at the compulsory education stage and high school would be appropriate. Nevertheless, an early entrance (飛び入学) system for high school and above is relatively compatible with common social ideas because it

is equivalent to early graduation and is regarded as an “educational exception measure” for “students with outstanding abilities in specific fields.” As a result, due to a partial revision of the *Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act* in 1997, an early entrance system for university (大学への早期入学) was established for mathematics and physics. Subsequently, in 2001, a partial revision of the *School Education Act* enabled universities to implement early entrance systems based on their judgment regardless of the target field.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the university early entrance system has not been expanded (as of 2006, only six universities have implemented it), and thus policy recommendations for institutional improvement continue to be made. First, the MEXT’s Council on Early Entrance System to University and Improvement of High School–University Connections (2006–2007) has made the following observations on the development of this system:

1. On the concept of equality: “In education, there is a strong factor of formal equality, for example, ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’ based on age” (MEXT 2007); consequently, the early entrance system for university is not acceptable.
2. On common social ideas: Japanese society (e.g., friends and parents of students) are “not used to the culture of advancing to higher education earlier than the prescribed age” (MEXT 2007).
3. On the definition of “students with outstanding abilities”: It is difficult to determine “particularly excellent qualities,” especially in the field of social science.
4. On the implementation of the system: There is no need for universities to implement the early entrance system to achieve their educational goals and thus no need to assume the increased work burden involved. Moreover, “it is impossible to ensure accountability to other students, especially at private schools, while maintaining a special educational environment for early entrance students paying the same tuition as regular students” (MEXT 2007).
5. Regarding the early entrance students themselves: Because they leave high school early, they are not treated as high school graduates and there is a risk that their admission qualifications are not accepted if they transfer to another university due to unavoidable circumstances.

These obstacles have hindered implementing the early entrance system in Japan. However, numerous related reports have suggested improving and promoting this policy. For example, the *Education*

Rebuilding by “Society as a Whole” (Third Report) of the Education Rebuilding Council (教育再生会議; 2007), which was established in 2006 by the first Abe cabinet, suggested that it was advisable to “reexamine age-based education (education based on classes taken) and consider grade skipping” (Education Rebuilding Council 2007, p. 2). Moreover, the 2012 final report of the Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development stressed that in order to develop global human resources, not only should the number of individuals who have studied or worked for a year or more overseas by age 18 be increased to 30,000 but also steps will be taken to “promote varying and flexible scholastic and career paths by allowing early admissions and early graduation” (Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development 2012, p. 13). Furthermore, regarding the connection between high school and university, both the CCE (*On the Second Phase Education Promotion Basic Plan*, 2013) and the Education Reproduction Execution Conference (*On the Nature of Future School Systems [Fifth Proposal]*, 2014) emphasized that the early entrance system should be used, active agendas at universities should be encouraged, and early graduation at the high school level should be permitted.

For the past decade, the Japanese government has aimed to promote the early entrance system to foster human resources, thereby excelling internationally. However, to expand the early entrance system, individuals should not be discouraged from taking risks to develop their special talents and abilities, and there must be a societal consensus that allows them to live as they choose. Only seven universities (FY 2018) have implemented the system, together with a few famous schools; consequently, opportunities and incentives for excellent students are limited. In short, the expansion of the early entrance system is not simply a matter of institutionalization, but it also involves issues of overall social reform concerning social attitudes and attachment to age-based education with formal equality. Thus, through the promotion of the early entrance system, students’ opportunities to select career paths regardless of the school year at the process phases of upper secondary education and higher education have been improved, but the guarantee measures, such as the identification of high school graduation certification, at the exit phase of upper secondary education stage remain insufficient. Opportunities to enter higher education at the entrance phase of higher education stage are also insufficient (not all universities have this system). In fact, the benefits of this system are very limited for gifted students, both in terms of social justice and students’ capacity for individual self-development.

4-3 Phase 3: Reforms to the Exit at All Educational Stages

4-3-1 Reform Trend (1): Promoting Narrowing the Gap of Academic Achievement in Compulsory Education

Since the outset of the twenty-first century, the Japanese government has attached great importance to the results of international assessments of students' achievement, such as PISA, because of the controversy regarding the low academic ability caused by policies of "relaxed education" (ゆとり教育). Since 2007, to ensure equal opportunity of compulsory education and enhance students' academic abilities, the government has conducted the domestic NAAA for sixth grade elementary students and third grade junior high students every year (Liu 2016). In other words, the Japanese government is focused on "exit management of educational results" at the exit phase of compulsory education. The concept of exit management of educational results was proposed by the Japan Business Federation in 2000 and involves implementing attainment evaluation at the national level at each graduation stage of elementary school, junior high school, high school, and university. Moreover, the Japan Business Federation insisted that it should entail implementing admission and recruitment emphasizing these evaluation results. The Japan Business Federation (2000) suggested that it is necessary to correct entrance management that emphasizes the entrance examination and to perform exit management to enable students to thoroughly acquire basic academic ability (that is, transition from entrance management to exit management).

The results of NAAA 2016 indicate that the scores of the last three prefectures in the national ranking have approached the average over the past four years. The results of NAAA 2017 also showed that, overall, the trend of narrowing the gap of academic achievement among prefectures is continuing. The MEXT argued that this is because "efforts such as the lower ranking prefectures referring to the advanced teaching methods of the upper ranking prefectures are fruitful" (Mainichi Newspapers 2017a). This demonstrates that policies of remedial education for improving students' achievement and narrowing the gap among prefectures in academic achievement in compulsory education have been somewhat effective. Since 2013, in view of the effectiveness of implementing the NAAA at the stage of compulsory education, the CCE proposed introducing the national High School Basic Academic Achievement Test (高等学校基礎学力テスト[仮称]; HSBAAT; tentative name).

This assessment system has also produced considerable controversy. The main issues related to social justice and students' capacity for individual self-development are as follows. First, excessive examination preparation may not be conducive to the cultivation of

students' capacity for individual self-development. Teachers and students in both well and poorly performing prefectures reported that, over the past 10 years of the NAAA, they have experienced heavy pressure and negative effects caused by examination preparation. For example, in Akita Prefecture, which performed highest in the NAAA for many years, teachers have expressed that "children are tired" and "I do not have time to work closely with children" (Akita Teacher's Union, n.d.). This demonstrates that the burden on schools continues to increase annually and is a major factor causing teachers and staff to be overworked. Hence, the teachers have begun to request that the practice of "competitive education," which resulted from the policies of improving students' academic achievement, be changed. In Okinawa Prefecture, which has ranked lowest in the NAAA for many years, despite students' performance having gradually improved since 2014, the MEXT has identified the use of past exam questions as an "excessive" problem. In April 2016, a formal notice was issued to each prefecture asking not to adopt measures aimed at increasing scores (*Okinawa Times* 2016). Hence, with the publication of the results of the NAAA 2016, the MEXT began to release the average correct answer rate with integer values, rounding off the number after the decimal point (NIER 2016), as part of efforts to curb excessive competition among local bodies. However, the MEXT also began announcing the average accurate answer rate for each of the 20 major cities (*Mainichi Newspapers* 2017b). Excessive examination preparation, as indicated by a complete survey of all students (sixth grade in elementary school and third grade in lower secondary school) and prefecture rankings, may not only hinder students' understanding and concept of learning but also increase their stress levels, thereby impeding their physical and mental development.

Second, family socioeconomic factors may strongly influence students' academic achievement and thereby violate the principle of social justice. Hiroaki Mimizuka, a Japanese educational sociologist, extensively surveyed and analyzed the relationships between factors such as family income, educational expenses, and academic ability. According to his research project, "Study on analysis of factors influencing academic ability by utilizing the results of the National Assessment of Academic Achievement (detailed survey) in 2013," which was commissioned by the MEXT, the higher a family's socioeconomic status (SES; household income, father's educational background, mother's educational background), the higher the academic ability of the children is (Ochanomizu University 2014). Moreover, if a child's age is lower (in comparisons of elementary school and junior high school), the influence of parents' SES is stronger. In families with high out-of-school education expenditure, such as cram schools and lessons, children have higher academic ability. As household incomes increases, there is a tendency for out-of-school education expenditures to increase.

These findings were confirmed by the results of NAAA 2017. For example, the Fukuoka City Board of Education suggested that a reason why the province's ranking has greatly improved may be the increase in educational institutions such as cram schools in metropolitan areas. Japanese educational experts, such as Mimizuka, have also pointed out that in urban areas where families with high incomes gather, the number of families who enroll their children in cram schools has increased, which may have boosted the correct answer rate in NAAA 2017 (Mainichi Newspapers 2017a). In other words, the situation of families determines the academic ability of children. The fact that academic inequality is due to family's SES may violate the principles of educational equity and social justice.

Remedial education is not sufficient to perform exit management for students and ensure that they thoroughly acquire basic academic ability. Active cooperation of parents regarding children (such as disciplined lifestyle habits, training of reading habits) is extremely important. For that purpose, strengthening family and parent education through policies that mitigate economic disparity is more important than school educational policies. Public opinion suggests that the NAAA should be changed from a complete survey (each complete survey costs approximately 5 billion yen) to a sampling survey, which can not only reduce the pressure and burden on teachers and students but also save survey costs (Mainichi Newspapers 2017b). The cost savings could be used to subsidize students from disadvantaged families and strengthen parental education, which is in line with the principle of social justice.

4-3-2 Reform Trend (2): Promoting Narrowing the Gap of Academic Achievement in Upper Secondary Education

In 2013, the CCE proposed introducing the national HSBAAT, intending to enhance the learning motivation and learning initiative of high school students and ensure their academic achievement and the quality of high school education, thereby strengthening to the connection between high school education and university education. A 2014 report by the CCE, *On the Integrated Reform of High School Education, University Education, and University Entrance Selection for Realization of a High School–University Connection Suitable for a New Era*, noted the need for consistency of academic achievement development at various educational stages (from primary to higher education):

In high school education and university education, it is necessary to reliably connect the outcomes of the compulsory education stage (such as the NAAA, which has questions on “knowledge” [知識] and “utilization” [活用], and has had a huge impact on the improvement of teaching), ensure that “zest for living” and “solid academic ability” are fostered at each school level, and

further develop and improve the capabilities nurtured by each individual through a consistent structure from primary and secondary education to higher education. (emphasis added) (CCE 2014b, pp. 2-3)

In this report, zest for living included “rich humanity,” “health and physical fitness,” and “solid academic ability” (確かな学力). Solid academic ability comprised the so-called three elements of academic achievement, namely “basic knowledge and skills”; “the abilities necessary to solve problems by making use of knowledge and skills, such as thinking ability, judgment ability, and ability of expression”; and “an attitude of tackling learning subjectively.” At the high school stage, solid academic ability was more specifically defined as (1) cultivating attitudes toward learning in cooperation with diverse people with subjectivity (i.e., subjectivity, diversity, cooperativeness); (2) nurturing the ability necessary to discover tasks independently, explore solutions, and express outcomes by making use of knowledge and skills as foundations—for example, thinking ability, judgment ability, and ability expression; and (3) acquiring knowledge and skills as a foundation. Based on the recommendations of this report, the High School–University Connection Reform Execution Plan was formulated in January 2015, and the HSBAAT will be introduced from FY 2019. In addition, the next curriculum guidelines (学習指導要領) for high schools were announced in 2017 and will be implemented annually from 2020.

According to an announcement made in May 2017 in the MEXT's “On the Progress of High School–University Connection Reform” (MEXT 2017b), the details and methods of the implementation of the HSBAAT are still under consideration, but the following ideal policies from the 2014 CCE report are being studied:

1. Regarding the name: It is a basic diagnosis of learning rather than a test of academic ability. In particular, students' self-assessment is emphasized.
2. Regarding the method of implementation: Because taking exams repeatedly to confirm the growth of students' academic achievement is one of the HSBAAT's basic elements, the utilization of computer-based testing or item response theory has also been considered. In addition, because nurturing four skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) for English is regarded as important, the question of how to develop test questions and answer questions, such as descriptive expression problems and the English oral tests, is being studied.
3. Regarding the mode of implementation: This test is of a “volunteer participation type” (希望参加型) for high school students' individual units or school units, but measures are be-

ing considered to enable as many students as possible to participate.

The HSBAAT's technological difficulty appears to be high, which may hinder its being introduced from 2019 as planned. Moreover, its expected impact is also a concern. Regarding the question of the HSBAAT's nature: Apart from volunteer participation, the HSBAAT is almost the same as the NAAA. Hence, despite the intention to rename the HSBAAT to "basic diagnosis of learning," it remains questionable whether the HSBAAT can avoid placing pressures and burdens on teachers and students similar to those of the NAAA (such as provincial or school rankings) from the perspective of examination (Interviewee D).

Regarding the difficulty of accounting for diversification of upper secondary education: The CCE raised objections to the implementation of national examinations in upper secondary education in its 2009 report *On the Improvement of Connections Between Primary and Secondary Education and Higher Education*. The main reasons are as follows:

In the case of high schools, diverse education according to the student's ability, aptitude, interest, and concern is required based on the student's developmental stage and an approximately 97% advancement rate, so the evaluation, which is a part of education, becomes diverse. Therefore, it is not appropriate to certify graduation by conducting a common test such as a national level test that includes those who do not wish to go on to university. (MEXT 1999)

In other words, because it is difficult to cope with the diversification of upper secondary education, national exit management of education results was rejected at the time. Although the 2014 report mentioned that the HSBAAT should be adopted in upper secondary education to achieve the goal of "ensuring commonality" ("developing qualities and abilities that all students should acquire"), it also referred to difficulties in dealing with diversification: "The diversity of the courses of high school students, the diversity of curriculums and contents of teaching, and the fact that the academic ability commonly acquired for students through high school education is not secured are also major problems" (CCE 2014b, p. 5). Therefore, the report noted that it is necessary to focus on "responding to diversification" to account for the balance between diversification and "ensuring commonality" (the implementation of the HSBAAT). Responding to diversification involves positively accepting diverse students and creating diverse learning environments, for example, enhancing support and consultation systems for students who have difficulty entering school, and creating an early

entrance system to support students with excellent talent and individual characteristics.

However, under the diversification policy that has been implemented twice in Japan since the Second World War, related reforms have resulted in the expansion and diversification of educational opportunities and created many inequality issues. Among them, the reforms of the featured high school policy have rendered upper secondary education more diverse and complex. Moreover, the early entrance system to university has not been expanded as expected. Hence, accounting for both the implementation of the HSBAAT and responding to diversification remains highly challenging. Furthermore, a concern is whether specialized courses or schools will also be developed toward academic education because the HSBAAT focuses on knowledge and skills in basic subjects.

In the context of international competition and Japan's declining birthrate, in the 2010s, the Japanese government has continued educational reform policies emphasizing national academic achievement tests. The recommendations of the Japan Business Federation in 2000 on the national exit management of education results at each graduation stage were implemented. However, although the HSBAAT, the NAAA, and other educational reforms regarding the consistent content of academic achievement development at the various educational stages may be conducive to the cultivation of students' capacity for individual self-development, the HSBAAT may also conflict with social justice by replicating the problems of the NAAA. It is worth further observing and discussing whether the extension of exit management to the next educational stage will lead to the academic development of upper secondary education and what impact it will have on specialized courses.

Conclusion

Social justice or equality of opportunity in education is one of the most important research topics in educational sociology. The gradual abandonment of social justice in Japanese education and academia is a problem that must urgently be addressed. Hence, the clarification of concepts related to social justice (including educational equity, equality, and fairness) was a priority for this study. To address the unique social and cultural background of Japan, Japanese scholars' research and opinions both in the educational administration and educational philosophy fields, in addition to educational sociology, were collected through in-depth interviews and field research. Concepts related to social justice in the Japanese education system and policy were then analyzed. I found that people in Japan tend to be concerned with relative concepts (i.e., concepts that are more concrete and easy to compare, such as educational equity, equality, and fairness) that emphasize reciprocal interplay or

interactivity, as opposed to absolute concepts (such as social justice) that involve values of individuality and pluralism. Hence, Japanese scholars rarely use the concept of social justice to analyze educational policies or systems (answering our question as to why the social justice research boom has not occurred in Japan), and social justice rarely appears in government educational policy documents. In addition, after summarizing the insights and criticisms of Japanese scholars, I found that despite the scholars from different fields having analyzed from different perspectives and some differences in their focuses, they all noted the issue of overemphasis on equality and diversification of educational opportunities at the entrances of all educational stages, and its implications.

To clarify recent reform trends and challenges regarding realizing the concepts related to social justice and students' capacity for individual self-development in the Japanese education system, I analyzed the recent relevant reform policies through three phases (entrance, process, and exit). I found that, although the Japanese government has still focused its attention on educational reforms of the entrance phase in recent years, it has gradually begun to focus on the improvement of education in the process and exit phases. In particular, promoting narrowing the gap of academic achievement in the exit phase can be described as the mainstream of 2010s reform. In addition, I found that policies aiming to reform the overemphasis of equality or diversification of educational opportunities at the entrance phase are often subject to the criticism that their implementation may not be conducive to disadvantaged persons and may violate the principle of social justice, as in the case of reforms of the school system and school type.

As Kariya (2009) noted, due to evasion of social justice, Japan's educational reforms, such as the free high school tuition policy, have readily become characterized by "flat equality" and ignored "individual equality," which is closely related to the principle of social justice. "Flat equality" refers to a false state of equality without recognition of individual differences. "Individual equality" involves considering equality in individuals (Kariya 2009, p. 224). In Japan, "flat equality" has been effective in providing equality of educational opportunities. For example, the idea of equality emphasized in the national academic achievement examination systems is "Flat Equality." In both 1950s and 1960s exams (全国中学校一斉学力調査; from 1956 to 1966) and the NAAA in the 2000s, familial SES was one of main factors resulting in academic inequality among students. Hence, ignoring "individual equality" has been one of the main criticisms of the NAAA in recent years.

Using research conducted by Kariya (2009) on the development of "flat equality" in Japanese education, I explain why the principle of equality of opportunity in Japanese educational policy was taken

seriously after the Second World War and has continued to be emphasized even in educational reform policies of recent years. This is because the goal of the postwar standardization policy (e.g., unified school facilities and equipment, textbooks and curriculum guidelines, teaching materials and teachers) is to achieve equality of opportunity. However, the trend of "flat equality" has been conducive to equal quantity and homogeneity in education, ignoring individual differences and avoiding differential treatment (i.e., ignoring "individual equality"). Consequently, from a developmental perspective, Japan's education has evolved into uniform education, which has led the government to mistakenly attribute the failure of educational policy to equality of results. Hence, in recent educational reform policies, the Japanese government has placed increasing emphasis on school selection systems, educational market functions, and equality of opportunity (i.e., equality of educational opportunities at the entrance phase) in order to reform previously uniform education. However, although Kariya (2009) noted that Japan's postwar education placed excessive emphasis on "flat equality," he also stressed that "flat equality" should not be completely rejected, complete rejection would lead to the loss of "commonization" (共通化) at the compulsory education stage. In other words, he opposed the dichotomy of Japanese educational policies and argued that educational policy should account for both "individual equality" and "flat equality," which he referred to as the concept of "ambivalence." Ambivalence refers to "conflicting feelings and attitudes such as love and hate simultaneously existing with regard to the same subject" (Kariya 2009, pp. 11-12), that is, the commonization and differentiation of education. This dual concept originally existed in postwar Japanese education. Educational reform should not be biased to either aspect.

Through this analysis and discussion, this study not only explained why the social justice research boom and reform trends have not occurred in Japan but also explored the relationship among the concepts related to social justice in education within the Japanese social and cultural background. It also analyzed how Japanese concepts of equality and equity are implemented in educational policies. The results of in-depth interviews and field research analysis in this study surprised many Japanese scholars and enabled them to begin to focus on related educational issues of social justice. Therefore, it is necessary to further clarify the concept of social justice or educational justice in Japan through comparative education research. In addition, this study found that policies concerning the pursuit of educational equality and fairness in Japan are often confined to the field of public education and do not account for private schools, in contrast to relevant policies in Taiwan and other countries. In particular, the upper secondary education stage, which is

regarded as quasi-compulsory education, is worthy of further attention and discussion regarding whether Japan can fully realize social justice.

Based on this analysis, I propose the following research directions.

Necessity of In-depth Analysis of Concepts of Social Justice and Capacity for Self-development in Japan

Japan has no equivalent policy to Taiwan's *TYBEP*. This study demonstrated that despite equal opportunity in education often being emphasized and discussed, social justice is rarely used in Japanese educational policy and research. The Chinese characters (*kanji*) for social justice are identical in Taiwan and Japan. Further research on Japan's specific social and cultural background, concepts of social justice, and capacity for self-development is necessary. In particular, clear evidence and more relevant research is necessary to analyze the differences between the concepts related to social justice (including educational equity, equality, and fairness) and the relationship between social justice concepts and the capacity for self-development in the education system. Because the education systems of the two countries are highly similar, we believe that Japan's challenges and reform trends are a useful reference for Taiwan.

Necessity of Comparative Research in Taiwan and Japan

This study demonstrated numerous similarities between the education systems of Taiwan and Japan. Moreover, Taiwan and Japan are both fundamentally valid objects of comparison. The education systems of Taiwan and Japan not only are highly similar but also entered the universal stage simultaneously. Moreover, both countries have faced issues such as "diploma disease," namely, the excessive demand for and reliance on educational qualifications (Dore 1980). Therefore, further comparative research on social justice and the capacity for self-development in Japan and Taiwan is necessary. Different concepts of social justice (including educational equity, equality, and fairness) may be one of the reasons for the different education systems and policies in these countries. The results of this and future studies can provide a useful reference for Taiwan, Japan, and other countries.

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