

## **Teacher Education and Neo-liberalism – Japan and Other Countries**

IWATA, Yasuyuki

Associate Professor

The Curriculum Center for Teachers, Tokyo Gakugei University

### **1. Asian Image of Teachers**

For worldwide analysis about teachers and teacher education in Asian countries, it is an important fact that there are some mismatches between the concept ‘profession’, ‘teacher as professional’ and the real images of Asian teachers, especially those of Japan, China, Thailand, and so on where Christianity is not so common as Buddhism or Confucianism.

It is well-known that the origin of English word ‘profession’ is ‘profess’, which means religious belief related to God. God entrusts some kinds of limited works that need special skills and wisdom to ‘professions’ such as the special medical care for sick persons to doctors, the special legal service for the people with social troubles to lawyers, and so on. In these sense, teachers are easily regarded as ‘professionals’ with the special skills and wisdom for teaching each subject at various schools. So teachers’ dignities usually depend on their teaching skills, wisdom, and knowledge as their background.

But, popular Japanese word for teaching staff at school is ‘*Sensei*’ (‘Xian-sheng’ in Chinese pronunciation), that means the person who was born earlier. This kind of thought seems to be related to Buddhism to respect elderly persons or ancients. Therefore teachers in Japan (‘*Sensei*s’) are respected not only by their excellent skills for teaching but also their human maturity from longer lives. So in Japan, and maybe the similar or the same as some Asian countries, even if a teacher could have excellent skills and knowledge, it is not enough for her/his reputation as ‘good teacher’. Teachers are also required to be excellent models for students’/pupils’ human development, so they have to be excellent in human behaviors such as in moralities and ethics.

Thus teachers’ works in Japan are not limited only to ‘teach’. Japanese teachers have many roles other than to teach. They are often obliged to work as care-workers for children/parents with problems in their family attachment, as counselors for children and families’ life, as guardians to secure for pupils/students in and nearby schools, as coordinators with communities where schools locate, as managers to organize many kinds of school activities such as school orchestra, swimming club, football team, and so on. Of course they have to work as teachers to

operate classrooms and administrators to manage schools. These kinds of unlimited tasks of Japanese teachers cause various problems among them such as too much stresses and burn-outs, and the solutions for these problems are too difficult to find by the simple Occidental concept of 'profession' or 'professionalism'. That may be the main reason for the confusion of Japanese (Oriental) teachers and teacher education.

## **2. University Reform after the High Growth – Backgrounds and Status Quo**

### **1) Education in Matured Capitalism after the High Growth in Japan**

Before/during the high growth until the mid 1970s in Japan, most of Japanese children were brought up among various people in their natural communities, and schools were principally recognized as the major place for studying and learning. So people's requirements for teachers were based on teaching works such as to teach each subject well, to have high knowledge, with full ability for teaching skills, and so on. But two factors as shown below after the high growth have changed the requirements and suitable roles for teachers.

Urbanized lifestyles of Japanese people with 2-generation families (parents and a few unmarried children) caused an environmental change for children's development. As the traditional communities were disappearing, schools were obliged to take place for children's social skills such as communications, play in groups, making friends, and so on. So people's requirements for teachers/schools have changed and the responsibility of school teacher to keep the children's behavior, communication, and ethics well have been increasing year by year.

In addition, according to the growth of private companies that provide educational services such as *Juku* schools (cram schools for preparing the entrance examination and remedial), many parents recognize that their children's education is a kind of service they buy by their personal expenses. *Juku* schools are not approved as official schools, so the teaching staffs in *Juku* schools need no license. But most of them can provide higher teaching service in competitive environment, so *Juku* teachers have been recognized as professionals with excellent skill for teaching.

Moreover, as a result of popularization or expansion of higher education, many of parents have higher academic basis than school teachers. So school teachers' dignities have become less than before.

### **2) Deregulations and Competitive Environments among the Universities in Japan**

The 1980s was a typical period for the education in Japan as a beginning of neo-liberalistic reform. The Ad Hoc Council for Education was established on 1984, operated directly by the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Council contained many members from the business circle and made its final report on 1987, whose keywords

are ‘deregulation’, ‘individualization’, and ‘diversification’. So, from the late 1980s, these keywords have oriented many of the reform plans for the education in Japan after then, including the introduction of elective subjects in compulsory education, the diversification of higher secondary education, the expansion of private institutions for children who refused to go to school (with special measure to regard the attendance at these institutions as those at public schools). In addition, new administrative treatments have been introduced such as the deregulation of school district and the elective system for compulsory schools which would ask the beneficiaries of education (children and their parents) for the responsibilities of their choices.

For the higher education policies, Standard for Establishing Universities in Japan has deregulated from 1991, and each university has their own freedom to make up frameworks of their curricula. This change so-called ‘Outlining’ is regarded as the beginning of the competitive environment among Japanese universities. Then the policies for competitive funding also have been introduced. ‘Top 30’ selective funding for Universities in Japan has been introduced from 2002.

Moreover, from 2004, all the national universities in Japan have turned into autonomous ones with the freedom to decide the way to expense the budgets (before then, budgets were itemized by Diet’s resolution), while they have to response the accountabilities. At the same time, competitive funding for education programs among the universities has been introduced, so most universities have to make more emphasis on how to survive than how to fulfill the social mission as higher education organization based on academic freedom.

As the background of these kinds of policies for creating the competitive environment among the universities in Japan, there is the issue of the expansion of higher education in Japan. Regarding the ratio of students going to universities and junior colleges, it increased to 51.5% in 2005 (over 70% to all the institutes for post-secondary education) compared to 23.6% in 1970, so it is possible to say that higher education in Japan is now at the ‘Universal Stage’. Actually, there are over 700 universities with 4-year Bachelor course in Japan, and the number of the students who wish to go to universities will be the same as the capacities of universities in Japan on 2007, so-called ‘free-admission age’ will be the true. So there should be some kinds of grouping or ranking between universities such as ‘basis for top study and research in global standard’ and ‘populated educational institutes for good citizen’ and so on. Of course, tight budget of Japanese Government requires lessening the total amount for university and ‘efficiency’ and ‘strategy’ are requested to universities in Japan.

### 3) The Backgrounds for Reforming Teacher Education in Universities

Concerning the reform of teachers’ licensing system in Japan, two amendments

for Education Personnel Certification Law are typical issues.

From 1988, the relationship between the classification of teachers' licenses and the academic basis has been arranged as below and the 'Advanced' licenses with MA degree have been introduced.

**[Table 1] Types of Teachers' Licenses and Academic Basis in Japan**

Type of License	Academic Basis	For Kindergarten Teachers	For Primary School Teachers	For Junior High School Teachers	For Senior High School Teachers
		Ages 3-6	G1-6	G7-9	G10-12
2nd-class	Undergraduate Diploma	○	○	☆	none
1st-class	Bachelor	○	○	☆	☆
Advanced	Master	○	○	☆	☆

○= Single License for All Subjects

☆= Licenses for Each Subject

One of the aims of 1988 amendment was to raise the teachers' academic basis to post-graduate level by setting up the 'Advanced' license. Then most of the universities with teacher training course (in which to get a license is an obligation for students) have established graduate schools for advanced licenses.

But, in spite of these reforms, new types of school affairs have occurred and become more serious such as school violence, truancy, bullying (*Ijime*) and so on, so next amendment has been required. 1998 amendment aimed to make more emphasis on 'practical teaching skills' for teachers' pre-service education. So more credits for education and teaching professions including teaching practices (shown as category II on [Figure 2]) are required than before, while the minimum requirement of the credits for each subject and specialties (category I) has been decreased. Most of the contents of newly added credits are those of the subjects for teaching such as 'Teachers' Identities and Teaching Profession' and 'Counseling and Career Guidance' and so on. In addition, the amendment has allowed each university to have freedom to provide certain amounts of category I and II credits by their own choices. This change can be understood as a kind of 'Deregulation' policy for teacher education, though it has caused some difficulties for setting up the solid minimum standards for new teachers.

**[Table 2] Standards for Teachers' Licenses (from 1998)**

Type of School	Type of License	Minimum Requirements (Credits)					Total
		For Each Subject / Specialties (I)	For Education / Teaching Profession (II)	(I) or (II)	For Special Education	Others*	
Kindergarten	2nd-class	4	27	0		8	39
	1st-class	6	35	10		8	59
	Advanced	6	35	34		8	83
Primary School	2nd-class	4	31	2		8	45
	1st-class	8	41	10		8	67
	Advanced	8	41	34		8	91
Junior High School	2nd-class	10	21	4		8	43
	1st-class	20	31	8		8	67
	Advanced	20	31	32		8	91
Senior High School	1st-class	20	23	16		8	67
	Advanced	20	23	40		8	91
Special Schools	2nd-class					13	13
	1st-class					23	23
	Advanced					47	47

\*including 'The Constitution of Japan', 'Foreign Language Communication', 'Physical Exercises' and 'IT Practic

### 3. Typical Issues and Problems of Teacher Education Reform in Recent Japan

#### 1) Needs for Amendments of the 'Open System' of Teachers' License

Japanese teacher education system is well-known as two major concepts of 'Open System for Teachers' License' and 'Teacher Education at Universities'.

At the beginning of 'Open System', there was severe shortage of school teachers' quantities in Japan, especially for junior high schools (G7-9) which has become compulsory for all the children from 1947. So the 'Open System' had a meaning of a solution for the shortage, and it has a big merit until now to gather many teachers' license holders from various types of universities with many kinds of academic/professional backgrounds. As shown on the [Table 3] below, 2<sup>nd</sup>-class license with undergraduate diploma is no longer a major status, and most of the teachers in Japan have academic basis with BA degree or higher. There are two types of universities with have the approved course for teachers' license in Japan as below.

#### (1): Universities and Faculties of Education (45 organizations on 2005)

Before 1949, each Japanese prefecture had its own Normal School which was specialized for the pre-service training of primary school teachers. The only way to get the genuine license for primary school was to graduate from this kind of Normal School, whose graduates had obligations to get teacher's license and had to work as primary school teachers for several years.

These Normal Schools has turned into national universities with BA Degree course since 1949 and they are now called 'Universities and Faculties of Education'. These universities and faculties have special course for teacher training, whose students have to get some kind of teachers' license for primary or secondary schools.

(2): Other Colleges and Universities (509 organizations on 2005)

Besides these ‘Universities and Faculties of Education’, there are many national, municipal and private universities with optional courses to get teachers’ license. Students of these universities are not necessary to get the license, and this is the point of deference from Type (1) organizations.

Since the basic status is the same, there are no difference between the licenses qualified at Type (1) universities and those at Type (2) universities. This is what ‘Open System’ in Japan means. The share ratio of institutes which provide teachers’ license is shown on the [Table 4] below. For primary school teachers, the proportion of Type (1) graduates and Type (2) graduates is almost the same, while for secondary schools (junior high and senior high schools) the Type (2) graduates are the majority.

**[Table 3] Higher Education & Teacher Education Orginizaion in Japan (2005)**

Type of School	Total Number	w/ approved course for license	propotion	Details					
				Kindergar ten	Primary	Junior High	Senior High	Special Schools	
Universities (4-years)	National	83	77	92.8%	49	51	70	77	65
	Municipal	73	42	57.5%	4	2	31	38	1
	Private	548	435	79.4%	83	50	376	427	43
	Total	704	554	78.7%	136	103	477	542	109
Junior Colleges (2-years)	National	10	0	0.0%					
	Municipal	42	14	33.3%	8		10		
	Private	436	257	58.9%	204	33	136		1
	Total	488	271	55.5%	212	33	146		1
Graduate Schools (MA)	National	87	80	92.0%	50	51	73	80	65
	Municipal	62	31	50.0%	1	1	26	29	
	Private	409	289	70.7%	29	27	243	285	4
	Total	558	400	71.7%	80	79	342	394	69

**[Table 4] The Share Ratio of Newly Recruited Teachers (2005)\***

Type of Institutes	Type of License	Primary Schools	Junior High Schools	Senior High Schools	Special Schools	Total					
Total		11,518	100%	5,098	100%	2,750	100%	1,486	100%	20,852	100%
Junior Colleges & Universities (1)	2nd-class	417	3.62%	85	1.67%	11	0.40%	30	2.02%	543	2.60%
	1st-class	5,285	45.88%	1,466	28.76%	347	12.62%	570	38.36%	7,668	36.77%
Universities (2)		5,124	44.49%	2,958	58.02%	1,752	63.71%	698	46.97%	10,532	50.51%
Graduate Schools	Advanced	692	6.01%	589	11.55%	640	23.27%	188	12.65%	2,109	10.11%

\* Public/Municipal Schools Only

Universities (1) = With Special Teacher Training Course (To get license is an obligation)

Universities (2) = Without Special Teacher Training Course (To get license is an option)

But, according to the increase of the persons who get teachers’ license under this system, some problems due to the over production of teachers’ license holders have occurred. As it is shown in [Table 5] below, the number of teachers’ license holders in Japan is almost ten times as the demand. Particularly for secondary schools, over 90% of teachers’ license holders do not become teachers. As a result of the over production, the efficiency of teacher pre-service education in Japan has many problems.

A phenomenon so-called ‘Teaching Practice Pollutions’ has been occurred since 1960s because many students experience teaching practice at primary/secondary schools but actually few of them have become school teachers, so mentor teachers at primary/secondary schools have to work hard to support many student teachers with little rewards. The ‘Pollution’ is now getting more and more serious in recent years, and it effects even as a hindrance to development of teacher education. For example, according to the recent increase of new types of school affairs, more and more practice at school in teachers’ pre-service education is required. But, due to the capacity of primary/secondary schools, it is difficult to extend the period of teaching practice for student teachers so longer. That is the reason why the minimum standard of teaching practice period in Japan is not so long (3-4 weeks for Primary School Teachers and 2-3 weeks for Secondary School Teachers).

**[Table 5] Teachers’ Demand & Supply in Japan (2004)**

Type of School	Type of License	Number of Issued License	Sub-total (A)	Numbers of Newly Recruited Teachers (B)*	(B)/(A) %
Primary Schools	2nd-class	6,340	24,986	10,483	41.96%
	1st-class	16,534			
	Advanced	2,112			
Junior High Schools	2nd-class	4,155	58,685	4,572	7.79%
	1st-class	44,942			
	Advanced	9,588			
Senior High Schools	1st-class	70,687	80,275	2,985	3.72%
	Advanced	9,588			
Special Schools	2nd-class	5,101	8,273	1,525	18.43%
	1st-class	2,838			
	Advanced	334			
Total			172,219	19,565	11.36%

\*= Public/Municipal Schools Only

Introduction of the renewal system for teachers’ license is one of the biggest topics in the policy for reforming teacher education in Japan, but it has some difficulties in the treatment of so-called ‘Paper Teachers’ (teachers’ license holder without teaching at any schools), which is now a point of arguments for making up solid framework of the renewal system.

It is also difficult that the quantity and the quality of teachers’ production go together. According to the increase of teachers’ license holders, the problem due to the shortage of knowledge and skills of young teachers has become more serious, and the dignity of the license has become less than it used to be, so children and their parents pay less respect for teachers.

Thus the strong requirement for the quality assurance of teachers has been realized.

## 2) Pressures for Quality Assurance of Teachers

The issue of the requirement for quality assurance of teachers has become crucial one since the late 1980s in Japan.

A compulsory system for in-service training for all the first year teachers has started in 1989, with giving them the status of 'temporary employment' for one year and requires them to receive 300 hours of in-service programs operated by the local governments. In addition, systemized program for all the teachers with 10 years experience has been introduced since 2003.

The evaluation system for teachers' achievement has started in these several years by each local government, some of which has relation with teachers' salary. In this system, teachers are practically evaluated by principals and vice-principals, so both teachers and principals/vice-principals feel stresses due to the work of evaluation. It is possible to say that this system is now acting as stressor for teachers. Since teachers in Japan have many roles and unlimited tasks including factors depend on humanities, it is difficult to find disinterested and objective criteria for evaluating each teacher's achievement. That is the major reason for the difficulty and conflicts related to the evaluation system for teachers in Japan.

Concerning the curriculum reform for teachers' pre-service education in universities, certain requirements for making them more practical have been effective in recent years. On November 2001, Committee for the Future Status of the National Universities of Education in Japan, a consultative committee of Ministry of Education, has made a final report after their discussion about one year and a half. The report offered many suggestions about teacher education and the future status of 'Universities and Faculties of Education' (Type (1) on [Table 4]), and one of the major issues is a recommendation to arrange a solid curriculum model for teacher education in universities. In recent Japanese higher education organizations, there are some movements of making up curriculum model by universities themselves in other fields such as medicine, nursing, technology, literature, and so on. So the report pointed that universities who can certificate teachers' license have to develop some kind of curriculum model for teacher education.

According to the recommendation above, Japan Association of Universities of Education (JAUE) has organized a special project team to consider the issues about curriculum model for teacher education and has made a final report on March 2004, that recommends to each university should make their curriculum based on 'Core Subjects for Teacher Education'.

The aim of "Core Subjects for Teacher Education" is to make sure that every student to be a teacher can have a chance to practice at various educational fields and

reflect them at university together. to make a clear structure in the curriculum for teacher education, and then to make the collaboration among teaching staffs in universities and between universities and various educational fields, especially primary and secondary schools attached or located nearby the universities. This concept is so-called 'Practice' and 'Reflection' model and has been a major trend for reforming teacher education curricula by universities themselves.

But in spite of the universities' trials mentioned above, the pressure to develop teachers' competencies is getting stronger and stronger. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is now planning to enforce the inspection for the approved course for teachers' license in universities, and the establishment of professional graduate school for 'School-leaders' besides the present graduate schools for teachers with advanced license is now under planning.

In addition, there have been new movements that some large municipalities such as Tokyo, Yokohama, Kyoto have come to provide the teacher education programs by their own operation. For example, Tokyo Metropolitan Government has started the program named 'Tokyo Cram School for Teacher Training' (*Tokyo Kyoushi Yousei Juku*) on 2004. The program aims to recruit excellent young teachers for public primary schools in Tokyo Metropolitan area. One hundred of selected fourth year students can participate in the program, and they can have priority in screening. The program contains special teaching practice, seminars, experience of social services, vocational internship, etc. over the span of one year. Whole the program is organized by Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, so the program has a meaning of an alternative to undergraduate education by universities. Thus the identities of universities for teacher education face to the crisis.

### 3) Teacher Education in Competitive Environments

From 2005, MEXT has begun the 'Good-Practice' competition for teachers' pre-service education with 2-years extra funding for selected universities. On the financial year 2005, 34 programs have been selected among 101 applicants, and on the financial year 2006, 24 have been selected from 92. This plan is certainly good chances for each university to innovate their teacher education programs, while few universities consider teacher education curricula as long-lasting ones. For example, the selected university can employ the new personnel only by 2-years limited terms, while the university education needs at least 4-years.

The recent national policies for teacher education in Japan finally may aim to restructure of 'Open System' by making the difference between the institutes of two groups of 'Haves' and 'Have-nots'. Universities of 'Haves' group emphasize on teacher education, establish new type of professional graduate schools for teacher training and

may have some priority about certification of teachers' license, while universities of 'Have-nots' group do not emphasize on teacher education and have their teacher education course as appendix or students' option under the principle of 'Open System'.

#### 4) Neo-liberalistic Aims of the Renewal System for Teachers' License

Concerning the teachers' license renewal system, the new Prime Minister ABE Shinzo seems to have strong will to introduce it as an effective way for excluding teachers with fewer competencies. This is an example in which the neo-liberalistic aim of education reform is typically shown. For the neo-liberalistic policies, to support teachers' daily activities is not the first priority, while the aim of 'exclusion' is the key concept with the good reason of 'Quality Assurance'.

Since the renewal systems for teachers' license in the U.S. have long history, the arguments for introducing the renewal system in Japan have sometimes referred the U.S. system. But, it is well known that the major aims of the renewal systems in U.S. are to encourage teachers' in-service training and the exclusion of teachers with fewer competencies is the work of local administration for education. However, these matters are not so seriously considered in the policy making process in Japan

#### **4. Issues and Problems Remained for Future Consideration**

In the process of neo-liberalistic reform of teacher education in Japan, some ironical issues/phenomena have been appeared.

Competitive and limited budgets cause the trend to cut off the unprofitable sections for universities' managements. However, teacher education in university originally has such an unprofitable factor such as the pre-service education for primary school teachers in undergraduate level with various subjects. Several universities in Japan have had reformed their educational organizations with less sections for natural sciences and arts, which may cost much for the equipments and personnel. It may be called as the victim of neo-liberalistic reform.

In addition, the enforcement of inspection and evaluation for the teachers and the universities for teacher education may cause the denial of the autonomy of teachers' and universities. Neo-liberalistic policies force the teachers to fulfill the official criteria though the real 'competency' required for teachers' work can be developed with teachers' own decision.

Educational reforms based on neo-liberalistic principles are common not only in Japan but also other countries. But, especially in Asia, there seems to be some conflicts between the occupational culture of teachers and the neo-liberalistic policies, most of which are based on Occidental models. More discussion about these issues would be needed for the future.