

Three English Scholars on Japanese Education

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Introduction

I was originally invited to present a paper to this conference on the theme of British people's views of contemporary education in Japan. In the time since I first came to Japan in 1989, it has become more common for British people to visit this country (thanks partly to reduced air fares). There can be no question, therefore, that knowledge about Japan has increased over the past thirty years. Also it must be added that many people return from their visits with a very positive impression. However, if you exclude British participants in the JET programme (like me) the number of people who have informed opinions about Japan's education system remains tiny. It is more likely that the average British person will confuse Japan and China, and that they are familiar with the stereotype of the hard-working East Asian school student that they have picked up from popular media.

Because of the ignorance of most people in the UK about the Japanese education system I have decided instead to take three British scholars who have written on this subject and look at three publications from them in three different decades – the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s. (I have immodestly included myself in this list.) These examples will show that British scholars can study Japan through theoretical devices that are based on the British tradition of scholarship in educational studies and related fields. It is certainly not being argued that these points of view are 'superior' in any way to any other point of view, merely, that they offer a different perspective on the Japanese education system which I am confident will be of value to Japanese scholars.

1. Ronald Dore

The Diploma Disease: Education, Qualification and Development (1975)

Ronald Dore is a highly influential British scholar on Japan. He was one of the 'Dulwich boys', students of the Japanese language on a special programme set up by Dulwich College and SOAS (The School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London) during World War II. He

wrote very influential books on education in Tokugawa Japan, a comparison of a British Factory and a Japanese Factory, and an ethnographic study of a rural Japanese village. The book I want to focus on for the purposes of today's discussion is *The Diploma Disease*. In this ground-breaking book Ron Dore compared four countries (England, Japan, Sri Lanka and Kenya) and the differing ways in each case that 'qualification getting' had become the main goal of formal education systems in the three decades following the end of World War II.

For the purposes of the present discussion I have selected a section from the chapter on Japan in which Dore examines some of the reasons for the differences in the development of mass education in the 19th and 20th centuries compared to the U.K. I have summarised some of them in the following table (Dore 1975 pp 35-36).

Dore's Comparison of Mass Education in Britain and Japan

Britain	Japan
Slow growth in the provision of primary education	Much more rapid growth
Growth started when industrialisation was well underway	Growth was almost completed by the time industrialisation began in earnest
The State's role in this growth was minimal at first increasing slowly	The state was dominant at an earlier time
The dominant social classes were uncertain about the desirability of mass primary education	The dominant social classes had little doubt that mass education would contribute to both the productiveness and loyalty of the masses
Many individual schools were the product of an evolution over time	Japan's modern schools started from scratch in the late 19 th Century
Schools were different due to social class	The national ideology was more homogenising and less class-divisive
The schools' role of allocating people to jobs did not predominate over heredity and apprenticeship until mid-20 th Century	Educational qualifications played a large part in determining career opportunities from a very early stage

Dore's work was influential in two ways. Firstly, it emphasised the differences that occur between an 'early developer' and a 'late developing' political economy. Britain was the first large capitalist industrial nation in the world, and Japan was the first in Asia. Many of the anachronistic features of the British state in the 21st Century are due to an ad-hoc, 'muddling through' process of industrialisation: for example, the continued presence of the House of Lords and the Church of England. The modernising Japanese state, on the other hand, could borrow from models already in place in the West. Once the decision was made to adopt a highly centralised bureaucratic state (on the French and Prussian models) then it was inevitable that there would be more clarity and uniformity in Japan's modern education system. The second way in which Dore was influential was in helping comparative scholars of education avoid the trap of putting every difference between England and Japan down to 'culture'.

2. Joy Hendry

Becoming Japanese: the world of the pre-school child (1986)

Joy Hendry, a professor of the Social Anthropology of Japan at Oxford Brookes University, based her conclusions about Japanese childrearing on reading literature on advice for mothers and other carers and also her direct experience living in Tateyama city in Chiba prefecture in 1981. She found that in the home, children learn the importance of Inside-Outside differences and also about hierarchy: “older-brother”; “older-sister” etc. Older children feel the responsibility they have to younger ones outside the family as well as inside. This is emphasised by linguistic differences used when an older child talks to a younger child and vice versa. Great emphasis is placed on harmony and smooth social relations when children play together. Children are taught to avoid causing trouble (*meiwaku*). “An understanding must be gained of the limitations of self-interest.” (Hendry 1986 p. 166)

A fascinating point made by Joy Hendry at the end of her book makes reference to the work of Basil Bernstein on the ‘elaborated speech’ versus ‘restricted speech’ codes of middle class and working class families he studied in the UK in the 1960s (see Bernstein 1974). Hendry points out that children that are raised to “achieve a new identity of their own as members belonging to, co-operating in, and enjoying the benefits of a collective organisation” (Ibid. p.173) are more likely to use the ‘restricted code’ of speech in which much of the intent of communication can be taken for granted. This is different from the British experience where ‘restricted code’ is a marker of working-class status. In Japan, the children of all classes are brought up to use this ‘restricted code’ in verbal communication. This insight goes a long way to explaining the trouble older Japanese children have with expressing themselves verbally (or in written form). It may also help to explain the lack of class-consciousness in Japan compared to Britain. There are clear consequences for policy ideas aimed at improving their ability to express themselves creatively and in sophisticated ways in both their own language and in foreign languages.

3. Robert Aspinall

Teachers Unions and the Politics of Education in Japan (2001)

This book was based on my 1997 D.Phil. thesis which I researched at St Antony’s College Oxford, under the supervision of Roger Goodman and Arthur Stockwin. Since Roger Goodman had been a PhD student of Ronald Dore in his time, it can be clearly seen that there is a link between this work and case one above. Also, at the time I carried out my research, Joy Hendry was a professor of anthropology at Oxford Brookes University and frequently participated in seminars and academic events related to Japanese Studies that I also attended. The field of Japanese Studies in

the UK is composed of a fairly small group of scholars whose paths often criss-cross.

In my research I found that for most of their post-war history, Japan's teachers' unions have been involved in conflict with the central government. The leaders of both sides were bitter ideological enemies. The leadership of Nikkyōso (The Japan Teachers' Union) saw the LDP and the Ministry of Education as plotting to return the education system to its pre-war state, i.e. one where teachers and schools were totally controlled by central government and where children were taught nationalistic and militaristic ideals. For their part conservative politicians and bureaucrats saw Nikkyōso's left wing leadership as plotting to politicise education and instil revolutionary ideas into children's heads. Some conservative leaders made it their explicit goal to break the union, and a chronic decline in Nikkyōso's membership figures from the late 1950s onwards seemed to indicate that they were having some success. This decline of Nikkyōso's power continued into the 1980s. Then, in 1989 in the wake of a bitter feud between right and left-wingers within the union, Nikkyōso split into two. Following this, the government no longer faced the same strong, united opposition to its education policies that it had faced before.

Nikkyōso's Schism and the Formation of Zenkyō

Disagreement over plans for the formation of Rengō and conflicting views about how to deal with the education reforms being proposed by Rinkyōshin combined to paralyse Nikkyōso's organisation at the national level. Affiliation with Rengō was an issue that could not be fudged. For committed communists and left-wing socialists, it represented a complete sell-out to the power of enterprise unionism and 'collaborationism'. Inevitably those prefectural unions with left-wing leaderships began to discuss the option of refusing to affiliate with Rengō. The initiative was taken by Mikami Mitsuru president of the Tokyo Metropolitan Teachers' Union and Sayama Shigeru, president of Osaka High School Teachers' Union who both refused to attend Nikkyōso's September 1989 national conference. Instead they formed a rival national organisation that immediately attracted the leaders of thirty-three prefectural unions to its banner. (At this point it should be noted that most prefectures and designated cities had two teachers' union each – one for compulsory sector teachers and one for senior high school teachers.) In November these rebel organisations officially inaugurated a new organisation, the All Japan Council of Teachers and Staff Unions, known as Zenkyō for short. This new national union at once affiliated itself with the national labour confederation known as Zenrōren, the new, militant JCP-supported alternative to Rengō.

Teachers' unions at the prefectural level were now faced with a clear choice. Throughout November and December, 1989, local union conferences voted on their future. Some voted to stay with Nikkyōso and thus affiliate with Rengō, while others voted to go the other way and side with Zenkyō and Zenrōren. A further, important development was the creation in many prefectures of new parallel organisations set up by the losers of the prefectural vote. Nationally, after the schism, Nikkyōso claimed a membership of about 430,000, while Zenkyō claimed 210,000. In order to clarify the picture at the prefectural level I have identified five different types of outcome that summarise

the differing balances in power in each prefecture following the schism (Aspinall 2001, p. 69) .

The Prefectural Level after the Schism: Five Categories of Outcome

- i) Nikkyōso unchallenged i.e. those prefectures where Zenkyō failed to set up any prefectural organisation at all. (Fifteen prefectures: Iwate, Miyagi, Yamagata, Kanagawa, Ishikawa, Fukui, Yamanashi, Mie, Tottori, Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Oita, Miyazaki, Kagoshima, Okinawa).
- ii) Nikkyōso dominant i.e. those cases where Nikkyōso won at least twice as much support as Zenkyō. (Twelve prefectures: Hokkaido, Akita, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Chiba, Niigata, Nagano, Shizuoka, Aichi, Hyogo, Okayama, Hiroshima.)
- iii) Evenly divided i.e. those prefectures where neither rival was able to gain an upper hand. (Eight prefectures: Tokyo, Gunma, Toyama, Shiga, Osaka, Nara, Nagasaki, Saga.)
- iv) Zenkyō dominant i.e. those cases where Zenkyō won at least twice as much support as Nikkyōso. (Eight prefectures: Aomori, Saitama, Gifu, Kyoto, Wakayama, Shimane, Yamaguchi, Kōchi.)
- v) Both Decimated i.e. those cases where the combined membership of both unions was less than five per cent of the prefectural teaching force. (Four prefectures: Tochigi, Tokushima, Kagawa, Ehime.)

The Effect of the Schism on Political Realignment, and Conflict within the Education System

Post-schism Nikkyōso, at the national level, has consciously abandoned its old policy of confrontation and is now pursuing a policy of *ayumiyori* or compromise with government and ministry. Since the schism, Zenkyō has maintained its identity as a left-wing 'class conscious' union acting as the standard bearer of the traditions of post-war militant teacher unionism. It has therefore condemned Nikkyōso for its 1995 policy U-turns, actions which it regards as surrender to the enemy. Zenkyō has also maintained the post-war tradition of involving teachers' unions in the broader struggles of the Japanese Left.

During my research I often compared teachers' unions in England to those in Japan. Before going to Japan I had been a member of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) which is the largest teachers' union in England and Wales and for two years I had been the union representative at my school. The NUT and Nikkyōso were both left-wing in their ideology (like many public-sector unions in England, Japan and elsewhere) although this was expressed in different ways. One of the most important advantages the NUT had over its Japanese counterpart was the fact that the UK sometimes elected left-leaning governments led by the Labour Party. This has not been the case in Japan except for the dismal period of DPJ government 2009-2012. The failure of this government and the return to power of the LDP has consigned teachers' unions in Japan to irrelevance when it comes to national policy-making over educational issues.

In 2017, I contributed a chapter on Japan to a book on the comparative study of teachers' unions in several nations. A chapter on teacher unions in England by Susanne Wiborg was also included in

that volume (Wiborg 2017). In this chapter it was argued that teachers' unions in England lost much of their influence during the years of the Thatcher and Major governments (1979 – 1997) but they were still able to maintain strong membership numbers. They have been flexible in the face of structural changes to the education system. While I was doing my research in Japan in the 1990s I could see that Nikkyōso was also trying to be flexible in its approach to a new era (in contrast to Zenkyō that was stuck rigidly in the past). However, Nikkyōso was unable to reverse its decline in membership and I noted in my chapter that in 2012 more than 60 percent of Japan's school teachers were not a member of any union (Aspinall 2017, p. 212).

Conclusion

The three British scholars I have chosen to look at for the purposes of this discussion have researched different parts of the Japanese education system at different periods of time since the 1960s. In each case they have used their perspective as British people raised and educated in the UK to inform their investigations into educational phenomena in Japan. Dore looked at the way industrialisation affected the development of the education system in both countries. Hendry looked at the concept of restricted and elaborated speech codes in early-years education in both countries. As a starting point for my research into teachers' unions in Japan, I contemplated my own experience as a union member and a union representative in a secondary school in England.

From time to time I have heard the opinion expressed that if you are not Japanese you cannot understand Japan. I can only assume that the people who make this point are using the verb 'to understand' in a way that is totally alien to me. It is certainly true that a person who is born and brought up in a particular culture will have a deep understanding that is very different to someone looking in from the outside. But the outsider, for her part, is looking at the culture from a different perspective that may shed light on aspects of the culture that are not noticed by the person who spends their whole life within it. Human beings have now evolved to a position where they can use the scientific method to greatly further our knowledge and understanding of the universe: from the smallest sub-atomic particle to the most distant galaxy. The assumption must always be that our current state of knowledge is imperfect and in need of further improvement. Another scientific maxim holds that the position of the observer will also have an effect on what is observed. If social phenomena can be observed from as many different perspectives as possible, that will improve our understanding of said phenomena. In this way, British scholars can offer their contribution to the study of education in Japan. This can be added to the contribution made by Japanese scholars and those from other countries to create a dynamic matrix of views that can only enhance our understanding of the education system of Japan and other nations.

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