
Social Education in Modern Japan: Educational Challenges and Institutional Measures

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Abstract:

This paper scrutinizes the genesis and evolution of social education within contemporary Japan. As the educational infrastructure underwent modernization, a corresponding emergence of modern social education ensued. This encompassed the establishment of libraries, museums, youth associations, and cultural organizations, alongside the inception of adult education initiatives, non-formal pedagogical endeavours, and an array of community-based undertakings, all delineated under the rubric of social education. However, following the tumult of the Second World War, the purview of such social education was formalized within the provisions of the Social Education Law. Notably, contemporary discourse in Japan increasingly accentuates the imperative of lifelong learning, marking a pivotal emphasis in educational policy and practice. This article explores diverse facets characterizing the landscape of social education in modern Japan. Notably, it delves into the heightened involvement of libraries and museums as pivotal agents in this educational milieu. The seminal role of libraries heralded as the earliest conduits of social education within the nation, is meticulously examined. Furthermore, the article scrutinizes the deliberate cultivation of youth organizations, with a strategic aim to establish a central coordinating body capable of harmonizing the endeavours of youth groups nationwide. Integral to this endeavour was the consolidation of vocational training centres and youth training facilities under the auspices of a novel framework termed seinen gakkō. Analogous initiatives tailored to the educational needs of young women were similarly devised, thus solidifying their inclusion within the ambit of social education initiatives. The establishment of adult education courses constituted a pivotal development, reflecting a concerted effort to extend educational opportunities beyond conventional scholastic settings. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of public education, the discourse underscores the proposition for establishing both central and regional administrative apparatuses, thus advocating for a comprehensive framework to oversee educational endeavours across diverse domains. Significantly, the narrative accords considerable significance to education beyond formal schooling, emphasizing the vital role played by extracurricular educational initiatives. Ultimately, the principal objective of this paper is to elucidate the array of instruments and strategies deployed within the realm of social education, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of this multifaceted educational paradigm.

Keywords: Social Education, Public Education, Youth organization, Youth training centres, Adult education, Vocational training, School Education Law, Social Education Law



Introduction:

The *Shakai Kyouiku*, or Social Education in the modern period, was begun after the establishment of the modern state of Japan at the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. However, the prototypes of such systems and activities can be traced back to earlier times. For example, the history of libraries shows that in the Nara period (710-784), Isono-Kami Yakatsugu created the Untei library. Young men's associations had been founded in rural areas from earlier times. These were a type of guild for young people that served as hostels and meeting places. In their constitutions, the rules for the principal activities of individual groups were defined. It is said that the young people's groups were defined. It is said that the young people's organization of the post-Meiji period (1912 onward) derived from these guilds of the Edo period (1603-1868). The organizations of young warriors of the Tokugawa period, such as country unions and groups or guilds, may be considered to be the embryonic form of the modern Boy Scout movement. Another predecessor of modern social education is the Society of Practical Ethics, which functioned in the Edo period as a place of spiritual discipline for the social education of townsmen. From these examples, we may see that education for the general public, though not organized in the form of school, has long existed in Japan. However, these cannot be ranked with modern social education in the true sense of the word. True social education as a positive program was part of the framework of the modernized education system in that the social activities and services were, according to law, to be used for the purpose of the general cultural advancement of the nation.

Instruments and Measures of Social Education:

Among the earliest modern social establishments were libraries and museums. The first such public library was established in Yushima, Tokyo, by the Ministry of Education in 1872. In the provision of the Order of Education of 1879, the establishment of libraries was listed along with that of the school system. It was stated that the libraries were to be under the direct control of the Ministry. In the same manner, several public libraries were opened in local districts. According to the annual report of the Ministry published in 1882, libraries, such as the Osaka Prefectural Library, were established in twelve different prefectures. Several municipal and communal libraries, both private and public, were also founded. In 1899, the Library Act was promulgated, and, for the first time, special regulations were made for the establishment of social education.

Later on, more detailed rules for the establishment and administration of libraries were devised. Thus, we may see that libraries were the earliest instruments of social education that appeared in the country. In 1872, the first modern library was created in Japan, and in the same year, for the first time, an exhibition sponsored by the Ministry of Education was held. In 1877, the Education Museum was officially founded and opened to the public. In that year, outside of Tokyo, several other museums were inaugurated in such cities as Osaka, Kyoto, Kanazawa, and Akita. However, though these were specific regulations for library administration, there were none for the administration of museums. They were simply to be supervised by the Ministry of Education as a part of the general program of social education.



A general policy was arrived at for the advancement of the public education policy after 1910. The Ministry of Education took the initiative to give guidance in various fields of social education. According to that program, they were roughly divided into three categories of activities:

- (1) The compilation and awarding of prizes for suitable reading materials, public libraries, itinerant libraries, and exhibitions.
- (2) The selection and preparation of slides and movie films and compiling their accompanying explanatory texts.
- (3) Lecture meetings and the compilation of lecture materials. A comprehensive system of modernized social education was thus begun by those political measures.

Another area of this modernization effort was the fostering of youth organizations. For that purpose, it was considered necessary to create a central organization to coordinate the activities of youth groups all over Japan. The first national conference of young people was held in 1910 in Nagoya. About 1,500 representatives of different prefectures gathered to discuss the development of youth organizations. There the rules and the outline of activities were drafted, and a nationwide policy for the establishment of youth organizations was made. After World War I, this youth organization was further strengthened.

In 1915, the government sent instructions to each prefecture to encourage its establishment. After that, many regional organizations were created in all the prefectures, and a national federation was established. After World War I, the Extraordinary Education Congress was established to formulate basic principles of education. In 1918, Congress brought to the attention of the government the urgent need for the modernization of public education. This recommendation asked for the creation of administrative machinery for the development of public education and proposed to appoint specialists in the Ministry of Education and prefectural offices. Several proposals were made at the basic level of public education. These proposals included such things as suitable reading materials, the development of libraries and museums, the promotion of popular lectures, the improvement of the contents of movie films and other performing arts, the advancement of musical activities, the betterment of theatre and vaudeville installations, and the development of institutions for physical education.

It was proposed that central and regional administrative machinery should be established, as the scope of public education covers various fields. A Bureau of Social Education was established in the Ministry of Education In 1929. After that the facilities for various aspects of social education were substantially expanded. From that time on, the scope of activity of the Bureau was arranged, and all of the activities and services of social education were categorized, and gradually the different tasks of public education were made clear. They consisted of assistance to youth organizations, youth training centres, libraries, museums, and other exhibiting institutions, adult education, organizations for social betterment, authorization and recommendation of good publications, and a few other areas. Through the expansion and development of these activities, new steps were taken for the modernization of education.



Numerous instruments for public education were created, and their activities gradually expanded during the years 1920 to 1930. Among others, special emphasis was laid by the government on the development of youth organizations and supplementary vocational training workers. These were the principal activities of public social education at that time. The youth organizations which were created in the prefectures consisted of many young agrarian workers. Those that were created on a community basis were related to prefectural centres and were further controlled at the national level of the federation. Thus, this became the largest organ of social education in Japan. At the same time, supplementary training schools were established for the young workers who could not attend school.

There were about 15,000 such schools nationwide, and 1,270,000 workers attended them. Most of them attended the evening schools. In 1926, about 15,000 youth training centres were established by the Ministries of the Army and Education to provide military training for young people. About 800,000 young men were enrolled in them. In 1935, the supplementary vocational and youth training centres were integrated into a new group called the School for Young People. These were later expanded, and enrolment became obligatory for all the male population. It provided a five-year course for those not enrolled in middle schools and engaged in practical work. Although they were called schools, they were considered organs of social education established in existing educational institutions. After enrolment became obligatory, about 20,000 of them were established throughout the country. Some of them were created inside factories and other workshops and served as educational installations for the young people working there.

Similar establishments were created for the education of young women and formed an integral part of social education. Among them were the girls' organizations and the three-year youth school, which, though not obligatory for girls, had an enrolment of 900,000 girls. They were run in a manner similar to the system exclusively for boys. In 1940, the National Youth Organization and the Boy Scouts' Association amalgamated into the National Youths' and Children's Organization to serve the country during the wartime regime.

Extension courses were given in various universities and colleges to educate adults. They were called the Adult Education Lecture Series or the Citizen's University Courses. The lectures which were specially planned for women were called Family Lectures. Thus, existing school installations were gradually opened to the public for these programs of public education. The adult education courses that were established in factories and workshops were called Workers' Courses. The models for them were the extension courses of foreign universities. However, as the workers were obliged to attend schools outside their places of employment, attendance was irregular, and little progress was seen in this field of activity.

Another organization similar to these adult education courses was the Mothers Association. Cultural meetings for mothers of elementary school children were organized occasionally at girls' middle schools or elementary schools. For the most part, problems involved in children's education were discussed. Later, these groups were organized into mothers' classes and became more active.



Of all these instruments for social education, the earliest were libraries, which gradually developed throughout Japan. The number of libraries, over 1,000 in 1916, went up to 2,000 by 1921 and 4,300 by 1926. Here, we may see that the number increased four times within ten years. At present, there are approximately 4,700, of which 3,300 are public libraries. This indicates that most of them were established by prefectural and local communities.

During the same time, museums were inaugurated in different places as part of modern social educational policy programmes. However, their number was limited, and they have not made progress comparable to that of the libraries. During these same years, recommendable books, films, slide pictures, and records were designated by the Ministry of Education. During World War II, this kind of policy was pursued more strictly in order to control public thinking.

The result was that those measures which had been introduced for the betterment of the cultural level of the nation were diverted into means of restricting freedom of public education and brought about negative effects. After World War II, to improve the culture of the state following the principles of educational democracy, great emphasis was laid on the role of education outside the school. Under these circumstances, the conventional public education scheme was re-examined. Many proposals were made for the establishment of new organs and methodologies. To make these changes, however, it was necessary to rearrange the legal provisions on public education in general.

The Social Education Law was promulgated in 1949 along with the School Education Law. Also, shortly after that, the regulations for libraries and museums were drafted. In 1950, the Library Law and in 1951, the Museum Law were enacted. Thus, several legal steps were taken to reorganize the scheme of public education. One of the new creations within social education was the citizens' public halls. Those public halls were founded in municipalities and local communities for the use of the inhabitants of the districts. Each hall is furnished with assembly rooms, an auditorium, and a library. About 3,000 of them were established in different parts of the country.

Especially among the populations of farming villages and fishermen and mountain people, they functioned as public education centres. Notably, they have made a considerable contribution to the cultural, industrial, and technical development of their respective areas in the post-war period. One of the new social education activities in the post-war period was the organization of youth classes. They were the spontaneous gathering of young workers to study some special subject. After finishing their study at middle schools, they were engaged in various vocations. However, to continue their study after their obligatory education of nine years, they organized these courses by the dives in each area. They used citizens' public halls or the elementary or middle school buildings and asked for lecturers to improve themselves. They run these courses autonomously.

These courses for young people were, however, mainly established in agrarian and mountain villages. No special law was made to cover these activities. In 1955, more than 17,000 courses were established throughout Japan, and no less than one million young people attended them. The content of the courses was not only general in nature but also included subjects



pertaining to the technical development of local industry. To assist these classes, the Ministry of Education drafted a Law for Promotion of Youth Classes in 1953, under which they came under the responsibility of the educational programs of municipalities and local communities and were assisted financially from the public budget.

Later, however, as the emigration of the younger generation from rural areas into cities increased, the courses gradually decreased in number. Another phase of public education in the period after the war was the active role of the Parents' and Teachers' Associations (PTA), which were created in all of the schools in Japan. They were established in the elementary, middle, and high schools not only to support schools but also to serve as instruments of adult education. Ordinarily, the parents of all the children attending school participate in those associations, so the total number of associations is approximately 43,000, with a membership of nearly 18,000,000.

At present, these combined associations form the largest adult education organizations in Japan. The Parents' and Teachers' Associations deal with the problems of school affairs as well as those concerning the guidance of school children. Through active discussion, they try to acquire new knowledge and methods. In some cases, they hold lecture meetings that consider such subjects as problems of education, culture, and daily life. It should be noted that attendance at these PTA meetings provides an opportunity for the cultural advancement of the parents, especially of mothers. Many courses were established after the war for the education of women. It should be noticed that these have served to liberate women from their conventional cultural isolation as female citizens. Besides the PTA, several other cultural courses have been organized for the benefit of women. Their appellations vary. Actually, there are more than 30,000 courses for women, with nearly 2,500,000 females attending.

Concluding Remarks:

In conclusion, the evolution of social education instruments across Japan demonstrates a notable trajectory of development. A marked proliferation is evident, with the number of such entities increasing fourfold over a span of a decade. This expansion underscores a significant trend wherein a majority of these initiatives were spearheaded by prefectural and local communities, attesting to their grassroots origins and localized implementation. Within this temporal context, the establishment of museums emerged as a prominent component of modern social educational policy, with initiatives launched in various locales. Nonetheless, it is notable that their proliferation remained relatively constrained compared to the exponential growth witnessed in the realm of libraries. Concurrently, the period witnessed concerted efforts by the Ministry of Education to curate and endorse a selection of commendable books, films, slide presentations, and records, thereby contributing to the enrichment of educational resources available to the populace. In sum, while strides were made in diversifying and expanding the landscape of social education instruments, disparities in growth rates among different initiatives are discernible. Nevertheless, these developments collectively reflect a dynamic and evolving landscape of educational provision aimed at fostering broader societal enlightenment and advancement.



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Besides these, the larger official institutions, organizations, and activities were reformed after World War II and even expanded. Libraries and museums began to play an important role, giving wider cultural development opportunities. Mobile libraries significantly helped to increase the number of readers. In addition to books, libraries began to provide other materials of a cultural nature. They have, in fact, become local cultural centres. Children's and young people's groups have also been reorganized. Especially noteworthy is the creation of youth homes and children's cultural centres. At the same time, there has been remarkable progress during the twenty years after the end of World War II in the expansion of correspondence courses and in the creation of audio-visual libraries, educational films and slides, and educational radio and television.

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