

A New Direction of Geography Education in Japan for the 21st Century

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In search of a new direction of geography education for the 21st century, geography educators throughout Japan is just on the critical stage for the curriculum reform. It may be said that there are three major factors which are causing the dramatic change in educational system in Japan, especially in the social studies curriculum. In this context geography educators are very much concerned with the future of the curriculum reform of geography education in Japan.

The first and the basic factor pushing the educational system of Japan in the direction of the dramatic reform is mainly because of the rapid changes in the social structure. People of Japan is in the beginning of feeling that the society is shifting toward the age of internationally interdependence. The rapid increase in the overseas investments by the Japanese businesses and the massive inflow of foreign workers into Japan is making people feel that they are living in the age of internationalization of the society.

The second factor is the implementation of the revised prescribed courses of study by the Japanese Ministry of Education from 1992. The big change is the cut back of the social studies concept from the school curriculum. In the high school, there are no more the social studies as a subject name. The social studies will be broken up into two subjects: the history-geography and the civics. This is the revival form of the curriculum of the pre World War II in Japan. A question is how teachers could develop a new direction of geography education for the 21st century.

Third factor is the change in geography teacher licensing system from 1991. This is related directly with the reform of the curriculum structure in the social studies of high school. The Japanese Ministry of Education is requiring teacher-license the more credits of history and geography, but the very little credits of economics, politics and sociology.

I. Introduction

In search of a new direction for geography education for the 21st century, geography educators all over Japan are just entering the critical stage of curriculum reform. It might be said that there are three major factors which are causing dramatic changes in educational systems in Japan, especially in the social studies curriculum.

The first and the most basic factor pushing the educational systems of Japan in the direction of a dramatic reform is primarily due to the rapid changes in the socio-economic structure of the country. The people of Japan are themselves beginning to feel that the society is shifting toward the age of international interdependence. The rapid increase in the overseas investments by Japanese businesses and the massive inflow to Japan of foreign workers, especially from Asian countries, are two distinctive causes which are awakening people to the need to improve their world knowledge and understanding of other cultures.

The second factor is the implementation of the revised prescribed course of study by the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1992. The distinctive change was made with the cut-back of social studies framework from the school curriculum. In the high school curriculum, the social studies no longer exists as a subject field. The social studies will be broken up into two subjects, namely History-Geography and Civics. This is not a new idea for Japanese schools but rather the revival form of the pre World War II curriculum in Japan. However, the question remains as to how school teachers can develop a new direction for geography education for the 21st century within this revised framework.

The third factor is the significant change in geography teacher licensing systems by the Ministry of Education which is to be implemented from April 1991. This is directly related to the reform of the curriculum structure of high school social studies. The present social studies teacher's license for high school will be divided into two licenses, namely one for geography-history and the other for civics. The Ministry is now requiring a teacher of geography-history to take more training in the contents of geography and history as compared with the present license for high school social studies teachers.

The purpose of this paper is (1) to provide better understanding the background reasons why the Japanese Ministry of Education

has made a dramatic reform in school curriculum and teacher licensing systems, especially in the area of social studies at this point in Japanese history, (2) to give light on the new direction of geography education in Japan in relation to the revision of the prescribed courses of study, and (3) to make clear what kinds of geography credits the Ministry of Education is requiring for students of pre-service teacher training curricula in relation with the revised prescribed courses of studies.

II. Background of the Educational Reform in Japan

The direct initiation of the present educational reform may be traced back to the establishment of the National Council on Educational Reform in 1984. It might be said that the establishment of the Council was one of the reactions by the Japanese government against the U.S. educational reform report: *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The Council submitted the final report in 1987 after three years of nationwide discussion on education reform in Japan.

The National Council on Educational Reform (1987) summarized the necessity for educational reform in Japan in the following three points: (1) Shifting of the society toward the age of maturity, (2) Progress of science and technology, and (3) Progress of globalization of the society. Then the report proposed the following six point action plan for the reform of education in the 1990s. Those points are (1) the consolidation of the life-long educational system, (2) the diversification and reform of higher education, (3) Enriching and reforming primary and secondary education, (4) Coping with the globalization, (5) Coping with the information society, and (6) Reforming the educational administration and budget systems.

Table 1 shows the Ministry of Education's various schemes for the reform of education implemented since 1987 after the final proposal by the National Council on Educational Reform.

Since then several programs have been implemented year by year by the government. However, two items out of Table 1 (Items 2-1 and 2-5) have deeply affected the present situation of geography education in Japan. The first one is the revision of curriculum. The revised curriculum will be adapted at the elementary school level beginning in 1992, the junior high schools in 1993, and the senior high schools in 1994. Every textbook publisher is very busy editing new textbooks to pass the censorship of the Ministry of Education before final printing. The second is the major change in teachers

TABLE 1
EDUCATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMS SINCE 1987 IMPLEMENTED BY THE JAPANESE
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

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1. Consolidation of life-long educational system
 - 1) Revision of over much emphasis on school career.
 - 2) Implementation of various programs for life-long educational system.
 - 3) *Enrichment of self-active education programs.*
 - 4) Revitalization of educational activities at homes, schools and community.
 - 5) Promotion of various sports activities.
 2. Enrichment of primary and secondary education
 - 1) Revision of school curriculum through K-12.
 - 2) Coping with bullying in the schools.
 - 3) Diversification of courses in high school.
 - 4) Reform of text-book censorship.
 - 5) Improvement of nature of the teacher.
 - 6) Rationalizing the sizes of a class (40 students) and a school.
 - 7) Strengthening pre-school education.
 - 8) Promotion of education for the handicapped.
 3. Reform of higher education
 - 1) Improvement of the entrance examination for the universities.
 - 2) Revision of the post-graduate courses.
 - 3) Improvement of the university administration system.
 - 4) Improvement of the fund raising system for universities.
 - 5) Increase of budget support against private universities.
 4. Promotion of science
 - 1) Promotion of basic research in the universities.
 - 2) Strengthening the cooperative relationship between universities and the private sector.
 - 3) *Promotion of international exchange programs in research.*
 5. Coping with globalization
 - 1) Enlargement of the number of foreign students and improvement of their study conditions.
 - 2) Improvement of education system at overseas Japanese schools and enrichment of education of returnees.
 - 3) Enrichment of the program for Japanese as a second language.
 - 4) Strengthening foreign language education.
 - 5) Promotion of programs for international understanding in the schools.
 6. Coping with the growth of the information society.
 - 1) Improvement of the use of information systems and the development of skills for processing the varied information.
 - 2) Consolidation of academic information networks.
 7. Reform of educational administration and budgets
 - 1) Revitalization of educational administration.
 - 2) Rejuvenating the board of education at the local government level.
 - 3) Examination of the school calendar.
 - 4) Decrease of the educational expenses in the family budget.
 - 5) Improvement of the administrative system for educational reform.
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Source: Ministry of Education ed. (1990), *Educational Policy of Our Nation 1990*, Tokyo: Govt. of Japan, pp. 233-247.

licensing in social studies, especially at the high school level. For the last 40 years, the government has issued teachers licenses under the category of social studies similarly as in the U.S. pattern. However the Ministry of Education declared the separation of the social studies license into the two categories, Geography-History and Civics. License-holding teachers under the new system will be entering high schools in 1994. To comply with the new system, every college engaged in pre-service teacher training has been thrown into confusion, in terms of rearranging courses in order to become authorized by the Ministry of Education. The revised curriculum and courses will be introduced at every pre-service teacher training college beginning in the new academic year April 1991.

III. Changes in the Prescribed Courses of Study

It might safely be said that parents, teachers and the Ministry of Education in Japan have a view to supporting the national curriculum for school education in order to maintain a unified quality of education. This traditional feeling by the public has not changed for more than a century of modern educational history in Japan. However the contents of the national curriculum in the form of the prescribed courses of study has been changed from time to time, namely in five to ten year intervals in accordance with the societal changes, especially after the World War II.

For example, the prescribed courses of study for senior high schools were revised in 1947, 1951, 1956, 1960, 1970, 1978 and 1989. Whenever the revised prescribed courses of study are announced officially by the Ministry of Education, teachers become very nervous about accepting and introducing it in their classes. Because the prescribed courses of study are mandated to be adapted in their daily teaching activities, all teachers must study the revised objectives and contents of their subject fields.

As a matter of fact, teachers will have three years time to study the revised prescribed courses of study before the use of revised textbooks in their classes. For example, newly announced prescribed courses of study for 1989 as mentioned in the previous section, will be scheduled for introduction in elementary schools in 1992, in junior high schools in 1993 and in senior high schools in 1994. This time lag is of course required by the publishers for editing the revised textbooks and also by the Ministry of Education for the censorship of textbooks.

A. Changes in the Basic Structure of the Prescribed Courses of Study

The remarkable changes in the basic structure of the prescribed courses of study for 1977-78 and 1989 can be seen at Grades 1, 2 and 10 as shown in Table 2.

At Grades 1 and 2, the new subject area of Environmental Studies was established after the integration of Social Studies and Science.

At the Grade 10, the subject area of World History has become a required subject instead of Contemporary Society as in the 1978 courses of study. The introduction of World History as a required

TABLE 2
STANDARD CURRICULUM OF THE PRESCRIBED COURSES OF STUDY FOR 1977-78 AND 1989 IN JAPAN

Prescribed Courses of Study 1977-78	Prescribed Courses of Study 1989
Grade	
Elementary Schools	
1. Self, Family and Society (68)	Environmental Studies (102)
2. Occupation (70)	Environmental Studies (105)
3. Community (105)	Same as 1977
4. Local Geography and History (105)	Same as 1977
5. Geography of Japan (105)	Same as 1977
6. History of Japan and Japanese Political System (105)	Same as 1977
Junior High Schools	
7. Japanese and World Geography /Japanese and World History (140)	Same as 1977
8. Japanese and World Geography /Japanese and World History (140)	Same as 1977
9. Civics (105)	Same as 1977
Senior High Schools	
10. Contemporary Society (4-6)	World History A (2) or World History B (4)
11. Contemporary Society or/and Geography or/and Japanese History or/and World History (4-6)	Japanese History A (2) or Japanese History B (4) or Geography A (2) or Geography B (4)

TABLE 2 CONTINUED

Prescribed Courses of Study 1977-78	Prescribed Courses of Study 1989
12. Geography or/and World History or/and Japanese History or/and Ethics or/and Political Science or/and Economy (4-8)	Contemporary Society (4) or Ethics (2) or Political Science & Economy (2)

Notes 1) Numbers in () at the columns of Elementary Schools and Junior High Schools show the standard periods in a year.

2) Numbers in () at the columns of Senior High Schools show the period per week or credit per year.

3) A standard year is 35 weeks (6 days) of schooling from April to March.

Sources 1) Ministry of Education ed. (1977), *Prescribed Courses of Study for Elementary Schools*, Govt. Printing Office, 109p.

2) Ministry of Education ed. (1989), *Prescribed Courses of Study for Elementary Schools*, Govt. Printing Office, 113p.

3) Ministry of Education ed. (1977), *Prescribed Courses of Study for Junior High Schools*, Govt. Printing Office, 157p.

4) Ministry of Education ed. (1989), *Prescribed Courses of Study for Junior High Schools*, Govt. Printing Office, 124p.

5) Ministry of Education ed. (1978), *Prescribed Courses of Study for Senior High Schools*, Govt. Printing Office, 158p.

6) Ministry of Education ed. (1989), *Prescribed Courses of Study for Senior High Schools*, Govt. Printing Office, 220p.

subject in high schools is the first experience in the history of social studies in Japan. It is well known that there were strong claims from the scholars of European history to make this change. They held the view that the study of World History as a required subject as the grade 10 is necessary for the future citizens of Japan to live in a global age.

B. Change in the Objectives of Geography in the Revised Prescribed Courses of Study of 1989

Now a careful attention is paid to the changes in the objectives of geography in the Revised Prescribed Courses of Study of 1989 (to be written as Revised PCS 1989 in short form).

The objectives of geography in the Revised PCS 1989 indicates no major changes in the basic structure for elementary geography (grade 5), junior high (grades 7 and 8) and senior high school (grade

11 or 12). However, it might be safely said that there are a few important changes in the objectives of Geography for elementary and senior high school. For elementary Geography at grade 5, emphasis was put on the need to strengthen affection toward the nation. For the senior high Geography, the Revised PCS 1989 has stressed the importance of understanding world culture, and on the cultivation or development of consciousness and nature of Japanese. For the junior high school, the objectives of the Revised PCS 1989 remain almost the same as the 1978 edition.

The full text of the objectives of the Revised PCS 1989 for elementary, junior high and senior high schools is presented as follows in order to show the principal ideas and views expressed by the Ministry of Education.

Objectives of "Geography of Japan" at Grade 5:

- 1) To have pupils understand the features of food manufacturing, industrial production, transportation and communication in our nation, and the relationship between these productive activities and national life. Further, to have pupil interest in the development of manufacturing and industries of our nation.
- 2) To have pupil understand the features of the land as geographic environment, and to help pupils deepen their interest in the preservation of the environment and effective use of resources. Further, to cultivate affection toward the land and people of our nation.
- 3) To enable pupils to make effective use of the basic learning materials such as maps, chronological tables, statistics, and to make pupils think about the meaning of the social phenomena.

(The Ministry of Education ed., 1989, *Prescribed Courses of Study for Elementary Schools*, Govt. Printing Office, p. 31)

Objectives of Junior High School Geography for grade 7 or / and 8:

- 1) To cultivate the foundations of the geographical viewpoint and ways of thinking through the study of various regions of Japan and the world, and to foster the recognition of the land of our nation from a broad perspective.
- 2) To make students notice both regional peculiarities and common features seen in the life of the people in Japan and in the regions of the world, and also to make students think about the geographical elements supporting the formation of the region and thereby cultivating the foundations for the proper understanding of each region and the people's lives.
- 3) To make students understand that there are various region-

al groupings, large and small in their size, in Japan as well as in the world, and that they are mutually interdependent, and to think about the role of Japan in the international community.

- 4) To make students notice that the relations of human beings with natural and social conditions have continuously undergone changes due to human activities and that each region has also been transformed correspondingly, and to make students think about the relationship between the environment or resources and the human life.
- 5) To cultivate in students, the ability necessary for a proper understanding of geographical phenomena through direct contact with them, and to develop an attitude of considering geographical phenomena from various points of view and making a sound judgement on the basis of proper materials. (The Ministry of Education ed., 1989, *Prescribed Courses of Study for Junior High Schools*, Govt. Printing Office, p. 17.)

Objectives of High School Geography: The Revised PCS 1989 has created Geography-A (2 credits = 2 periods in a week) and Geography-B (4 credits = 4 periods in a week). Below the objectives of Geography-B are shown. Further it is the subject exclusively prepared for the comprehensive courses.

Objectives: To make students understand regional features of people's life style and the culture of the world, and their trends in connection with natural and social environments of each area, and to make students consider the facts comparing Japan in the world, and to cultivate the geographical observation and analysis, and to develop the consciousness and nature of Japanese in the international community.

(The Ministry of Education ed., 1989, *Prescribed Courses of Study for Senior High Schools*, Govt. Printing Office, P. 38).

C. Teacher's Response to the Revised Courses of Study of 1989

Two very different responses have been made by not only a group of teachers, but also individual teachers on three major points of change.

Firstly, most of the teachers are very pleased to accept the emphasis on cultural study of the world in geography education which promotes mutual understanding of the nations and the regions of the world.

Secondly, opinion was divided into two groups concerning the emphasis on teaching more consciousness and nature of Japanese. Many teachers are very concerned that the effect of emphasizing the

education of consciousness and nature of Japanese might lead to ethnocentrism or strong nationalism through geography education. Therefore those teachers who are critical of this part of the PCS 1989 are in the first stages of making curriculum and contents more appropriate so that past mistakes of Japanese geography education should be avoided. However it is also a fact that there are many teachers who support the importance of stressing the consciousness and nature of Japanese through geography teaching in the schools. They believe that the emphasis of the cultural identity of a nation among its citizens will become very critical as the nation approaches the global age of the 21st century.

Anyway the debate on this issue among the geography educators in Japan will continue for several years. The author is very confident that the priority on this issue must be put upon the point of how the geography teachers can explore the theory "to live and develop together among the nations and the regions of the world" through geography lessons in the schools.

Thirdly, the Revised PCS 1989 has expressed the importance of teaching the concept of geographical observation and geographical ways of thinking or analyzing, unlike the present PCS of 1978 which stressed the necessity of teaching the geographical recognition. However, it is very unfortunate to realize that the geography educators and teachers in Japan, in general, have not found yet a nation-wide answer for the teaching methodology of geographical observation and geographical ways of thinking in the schools (Geographical Review of Japan, vol. 63, no. 6, 1990, pp. 397-398.)

On this issue the author considers that the U.S. publication, *The Guidelines for Geographic Education* edited by the joint committee on geographic education of the NCGE (National Council for Geographic Education) and the AAG (Association of American Geographers), is the best model for geography teachers in Japan. The merit of these Guidelines may be found in the demonstration of the concept of geographical observation and geographical analysis with a simple manner.

IV. Reform of Licensing Systems for Geography Teachers

The reform of licensing systems for teachers was another important policy change proposed by the National Council on Education Reform in 1987.

As far as the licensing systems for geography teachers is con-

cerned, the Japanese Ministry of Education implemented a two tiered reform in April 1989. Firstly, the class category of licenses was revised through creating a special class other than the general class licenses for all the categories of schools along with an increase in the required minimum credits. The major purpose of this revision was to produce the leveling-up of skills and attitudes of teachers. Secondly, the license for social studies was rearranged into two licenses to be implemented in April 1991, namely one for geography-history and the other for civics.

A. Improvement of Categories of Teachers' Licenses

Major improvements for teacher licenses have brought the creation of special licenses for all school categories with the expectation of creating master teachers in the schools. Table 3 shows the revision of the teacher licenses.

Another point of improvement in the licensing systems was to increase the minimum requirement for credits need to require the license as shown in Table 4. The increase in the minimum requirement of credits is reserved for more study in the field of skills for class room management and student counseling in the pre-service

TABLE 3
THE REVISION OF CATEGORIES FOR TEACHER LICENSES

	The Old Act			The New Act		
Basic Requirements	Two years of college education and more than 62 credits	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Two years of college education and more than 62 credits	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree
Teacher License for Kidergarten Elementary & Junior High	2nd Class	1st Class	None	B License	A Lic.	S. Lic.
Teacher License for Senior High	None	2nd Class	1st Class	None	A Lic.	S. Lic.

Notes: Please read A Lic. as A License and S. Lic. as Special License.

Source: *Teacher Training, Special Volume*, Dec. 1990, p. 69.

TABLE 4
CHANGES IN THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENT OF CREDITS FOR TEACHER LICENSES IN THE
CASE OF A LICENSE

Category of Schools and Subjects		No. of Credits	
		The Present	The Revised
Elementary		48	59
Junior High	Social Studies and Science	54	59
	Other than above Subjects	46	59
Senior High	Geography-History, Civics, and Science	54	59
	Other than above Subjects	54	59
Kindergarten		44	51

Source: *Teacher Training, Special Volume*, Dec. 1990, P. iii.

teacher training courses in colleges.

B. Improvement of Minimum Requirements for Geography Teachers

In the newly created license for geography-history teachers, the revised Teachers' License Act requested those who want to receive the new license to obtain more credits in both history and geography. The improvement made by the Act is clearly understood from Table 5.

Those who want to get any type of teacher's license should meet all of the credit requirements for graduation from college and university. In the case of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, Hiroshima University, the minimum requirement of credits for graduation (Bachelor of Education) is 130 in 4 years. The new curriculum is being implemented from April 1991 after receiving the authorization from the Ministry of Education. The presenter, who is a staff member of the Faculty of Education, is now reconsidering the geography curriculum appropriate to the revised licensing systems for geography teachers. On average, two thirds of the graduates from our section of the social studies major (Regulated enrollment number is 27 each year) usually become

TABLE 5
CHANGES IN THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENT OF CREDITS IN THE SPECIALIZED FIELD FOR
GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS IN THE CASE OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Name of License	No. of Credits under the Old Act	Name of License	No. of Credits under the Revised Act
Social Studies	Japanese History and World History	Geography and History	Japanese History 6 or 4
	6		World History 6 or 4
	Geography (Including Regional Geography)		Human Geography and Physical Geography 8 or 6
	6	Regional Geography 4 or 2	
		Total	20
	Law and/or Politics	Civics	Law including International Law and/or
2	Sociology and/or Economics		Politics including International Politics 6
2	Philosophy and/or Ethics and/or Religion		Economics including International Economics and/or Sociology 6
4			Philosophy and/or Ethics and/or Religion and/or Psychology 8
	Total	Total	20

Note: Minimum requirement for each subject is 40 credits.

Source: The Notification of the Ministry of Education on the Revision of the Teacher Licensing Regulation, 1990.

high school teachers every year.

V. What We Are Doing to Improve Our Geography Education in Japan? — Concluding Remarks —

It might be said that one of the objectives of geography education is mentioned in the prescribed courses of study of 1989: "to make students understand regional features of people's life-styles and culture in the world," must be considered as the top priority subject for deepening the geography education in Japan.

The Ministry of Education had sponsored energetic activities, such as in-service workshops in major cities of Japan for last two years to enable teachers to understand the objectives and contents of geography education based on the prescribed courses of study of

1989. However, major associations of Japanese geography educators have not yet succeeded in demonstrating the dynamic way of improving geography education.

The routine in-service workshop for geography teachers is being held at the Education Service Centers at the prefectural as well as the municipal government level with the help of master teachers and geographers. And the semi-public forum for geography teachers at the prefectural level continuously is offering seminars or workshops to improve teachers' teaching skills and their knowledge of geography.

The author has managed the Geography Alliance of Hiroshima since January 1990 as one of the special committees in the Hiroshima Geographical Association. The principal objectives of this Alliance is to develop a new direction for geography education in Japan with the help of a concept of five themes of geography developed by the joint committee of the NCGE and the AAG of the U.S.. The Geography Alliance of Hiroshima is trying to develop new curriculum content for geography education in junior and senior high schools in order to make geography education more attractive to the students and also to make geography a powerful subject for the education of both national and international citizens.

The Geography Alliance of Hiroshima has discovered tentatively an effective question to put into geography classes in order to increase the attractiveness of learning. The question is "what is your perception about your environment, if you were the resident of that place of other culture? The important point to using this question is that it must be asked in a unit of a lesson or a period of class at least once and it must be a part of a well-planned lesson framed by the five fundamental themes of geography. It is also important to understand that it requires a good knowledge of culture about a particular place or places for students to be able to give their perception of an environment.

The author named this question-method as the "place-perception inquiry method for geography teaching." It might safely be said that this is one of the most powerful inquiry methods in geography teaching for breaking the traditional "place-name geography" or "sailor geography", which is still prevails in geography education in Japanese schools.

The author is very confident that the most important characteristics of future citizens to be developed through geography education is to achieve the skills and attitudes for deep understanding about

the development of other places and cultures.

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