No More Playing 'Catch-up' with the West : Educational Policy during the "Lost Two Decades"

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In the early 1980s, Japanese society and Japanese people experienced "a revolution" in terms of their mindset as they recognized that Japan's "catching up with the West" had ended. In official documents, the clearest declaration of this was probably the Ōhira Masayoshi Policy Research Group's report, which marked the beginning of this recognition. Drawn to the field of education, the Ad Hoc Council on Education Reforms of the Nakasone Cabinet era took over this recognition and constructed policies using it as a framework of reference. How did this mindset of "the end of catching up with the West" influence Japanese society? This chapter will analyze the "Lost Two Decades" of Japanese society, using the socially constructed mindset of "the end of catching up with the West" as a clue and focusing particularly on discourses in education policies.

In examining education policies, I will also explore how such societal recognition deepened Japan's confusion in a so-called "model-less" era with a) its identification of the prior era as a "catch-up" model following system, b) its emphasis on the importance of a new nationalism in the "post-catch-up era," and c) the impact of recent catching up with globalization and other internationalization. Particularly in this chapter I will discuss the recent problems in Japanese education wherein the lost decades have not ended by elucidating the historical background of those problems, known as the "delay in a global response" in today's education reforms.

Japanese Popular Mindset in the 1980s

Before analyzing policy discourses, I will introduce some results of several interesting surveys, which will help clarify the characteristics of the Japanese mindset in the 1980s. Figure 1 shows the changes in participants' responses to the question "Are Japanese people superior to Westerners?" in the Survey on Japanese National Character conducted by Institute of Mathematical Statistics. In 1953, only 20 percent, and even in 1963, only slightly over 30 percent responded that they were "superior." However, in 1983, the number of responses rose up to over 50 percent. Conversely, in 1953, nearly 30 percent responded that Japanese people were "inferior," whereas in 1983,
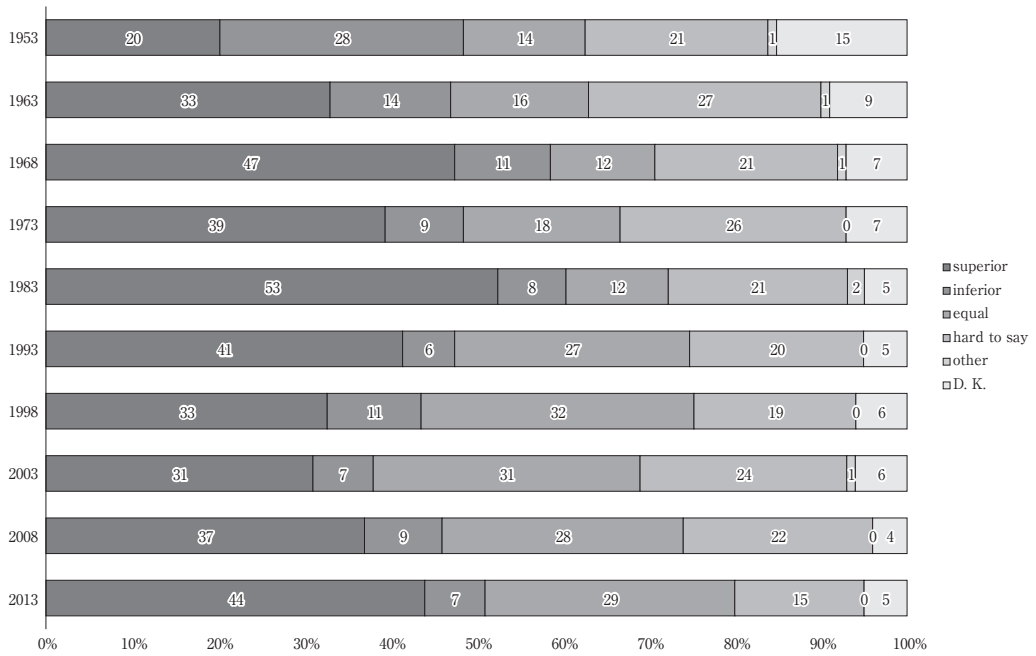
this number was less than 10 percent.

Figure 1. Are Japanese people superior to Westerners?
（Annual Survey of Japanese National Character, Institute of Mathematical Statistics）
From the left side, responses are: "superior", "inferior", "equal", "hard to say", "other", and D.K.

The results of another survey reveal similar changes in the Japanese mindset. Figure 2 depicts part of the results from the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute's Mindset Survey (Takahashi and Aramaki 2014). As the graph demonstrates, the mindsets that "Japanese people have outstanding qualities" and "Japan is a first-rate nation" both increased in 1973 and peaked in 1983. These survey results indicate that in the early 1980s, Japan dispelled its sense of inferiority to Western developed countries and reached what could be called a sense of superiority. This was the Japanese people's mindset just before the Japanese economy moved toward the bubble, and four years after 1979, when Harvard University professor Ezra Vogel's *Japan as Number One* was published in Japan and the United States simultaneously, becoming a bestseller in Japan, with over 700,000 copies sold.
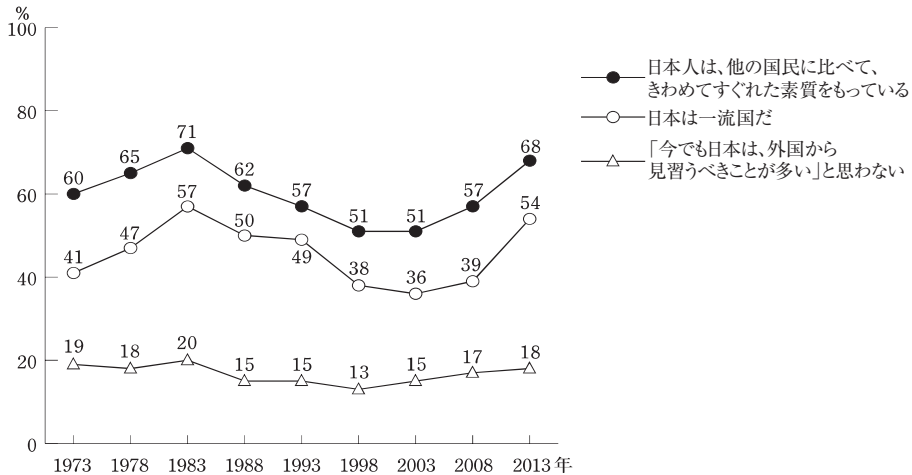
Figure 2. Japanese popular mindset ("Confidence in Japan")
- •　J apanese people have outstanding qualities.
- ○　Japan is a first-rate nation.
- ➢　I don't think "Japan still has a lot to learn by looking at other countries."

Ōhira Policy Research Group's Report and the End of the Catch-up Mindset

In line with this general mindset of the Japanese people, discourses publicly declaring the end of the catching up to Western advanced countries appeared in official documents looking toward Japan's long-term policies. One example, published in 1980, is a series of reports of the Policy Research Group, which was organized by Prime Minister Masayoshi Ōhira (Age of Culture Research Group 1980). The group was divided into nine subcommittees, each of which made a report. Report No. 1 presented a section titled "The Age of Culture" states:

> In the past, there have been periods that strongly demanded countries to westernize, modernize, industrialize, and pursue economic growth. Then, the content of the needs of the times were clear, and there existed models we needed to aim toward. Since the Meiji period, such needs have denied, or even ignored, our own traditions, placed our nation as backward and low-level, and constituted a way to pursue alien aims.

> [⋯] In order to "catch up" as speedily as possible with the advanced nations of the West, Japan has proactively pushed forward with modernization, industrialization and westernization since the Meiji Restoration. As a result, Japan succeeded in reaching the stage of a mature, highly industrial society, and everyone has come to enjoy freedom and equality, progress and prosperity, economic wealth

and the convenience of modern life, high education and high welfare standards, as well as advanced scientific technology. These are all qualities we can be proud of in the world. Moreover, with the backdrop of enormous structural socio-economic changes, which were induced by industrialization and modernization, the nation's consciousness and its behavior have been undergoing major changes.

As these quotes show, in the early 1980s, Japan loudly and proudly declared that its time of catching up to Western developed countries was over. With this "Zeit-Geist" as a framework of reference, the report clarifies what is necessary for future generations. Report No. 7, titled "Economic Administration in an Age of Culture," added:

Japan's modernization (industrialization and westernization) and the maturation of it into a highly industrial society imply the end of any models involving the need to align to, or to "catch up with." From now on, we need to find our own path to follow.

This quote presented the notion that with the catch-up model at its end, it was time to "find our own path to follow."

As a result of this end-of-the-catch-up mindset, the loss of the catch-up model was taken over in 1984 by the Ad Hoc Council on Education Reforms (AHCER) organized by Prime Minister Nakasone. The council found that education until then had been of the "catch-up model." To catch up with developed Western nations, introducing advanced knowledge and skills had been essential, and the efficacy of this had been emphasized. It was indicated that the resulting problem of catch-up-type education was knowledge-cramming type of teaching and learning as well as a uniform and highly centralized education system which sought for efficiency in education. The identification of these educational problems coincided with the recognition that the catch-up model had ended. This led to the construction of educational issues that are related to today's issues, such as the importance of cultivating individuality and creativity in future education (Kariya 2015a). The Ad Hoc Council on Education Report expresses this in the following passage (Ministry of Finance Printing Bureau 1988).

However, it is undeniable that Japan's traditional education has mostly rested upon the tendency of cramming knowledge by rote memorization. The society of the future will require us not merely to acquire knowledge and information, but to further develop the ability to express, create, think with our heads, and to make an appropriate use of that knowledge and information. Creativity is closely

connected to individuality, and only when individuality is fostered can creativity be nourished.

Catch-up-type education was found to be an outdated educational model that did not meet the changes of the era or societal demands, and a departure from this model was sought.

This policy discourse clarifies the following three points. First, the mindset of competition with Western developed nations and the hierarchical mindset (advanced and backward) were the basis of this era's "Zeit-Geist" as a framework of reference. Furthermore, this mindset leaning toward international competition was particularly emphasized in terms of industrialization and economic development and their connection to science and technology. Second, an aspect of postwar Japanese nationalism appears in these competition and hierarchy mindsets. The defeat in World War II left an impression among citizens of the failure of the first catch up trial that began in the Meiji era ("national wealth and military strength") and ended with the defeat of the WW2. The era from the postwar rapid economic growth period to the 1980s was, in a sense, marked by the second catch-up challenge, and the recovery of the Japanese national identity was attained once again catching up to western advanced nations in terms of economy, science, and technology, with excluding military power in this second challenge.

Third, and most important to the following discussion, the recognition that the catch up had ended produced the "loss of the catch-up model" mindset. This mindset renounced education until then as outdated. Additionally, since the catch-up model was completed, education from then onward was required to develop human resources equipped with problem-solving skills and the idea of "think on your own, learn on your own," which would lead to technological innovations and economic growth by fostering creativity and individuality, even though they obviously reflected values of the West. This education was based on the framework of a mindset that the Japanese needed to discover problems and resolve them on their own. A search for the ideal type of education began, which did not take into account its feasibility, that is, how it could be accomplished by specific methods as well as lacking enough resources (Kariya 2002).

The Problem of the Lost Two Decades and Globalization

As we have seen, the zeitgeist of the end of catching up was already established before the start of the lost two decades. After this zeitgeist was established, Japan

moved toward the bubble economy, and after the bubble's collapse, Japan experienced the lost two decades. For education policy, the problem of the "delay in response to globalization" arose during the economic stagnation and has continued to date. This has been particularly directed toward higher education. The "Super Global Universities Initiative" currently in progress is one of the easiest of these policies to understand.

A recommendation from the Cabinet Office's Education Rebuilding Conference presented the following recognition of the current situation in regards to the policy section of the Super Global Universities Initiative.

> The delay in the globalization of Japanese universities is reaching a critical state. With the accumulation of knowledge as their foundation, universities are expected to be the nucleus for creating new knowledge by exploring uncharted territories and for transforming society. Rebuilding Japan's universities to a position where they can persistently pursue new challenges and create new knowledge is an important pillar for re-enhancing Japan's international competitiveness and "revitalizing Japan" so that it can regain its former brightness (Cabinet Office, Education Rebuilding Conference, 2013).

To rectify this delay in response to globalization, deemed a "critical state," a specific aim is to provide focused support to universities actively carrying out internationalization ('Super Global Universities (tentative name)'), such as by actively hiring foreign professors, collaborating with overseas universities, and expanding degree programs that can be completed entirely in English. It has also been proposed that Japan aims to enhance its international collaborative research and, in the next ten years, raise its international presence by having at least ten universities in the top 100 universities in the world universities ranking. To improve scores on the Internationalization Index, which is deemed a weak point of Japanese universities, universities must recruit more foreign professors and introduce more classes taught in English. Aiming for a top 100 ranking through such measures was cited as a numerical policy target.

Thirty-seven universities were chosen in the Super Global Universities Initiative. Further analysis of the plan's breakdown reveals that the method of global response is in fact superficial. Although this has already been analyzed in detail elsewhere, there is, for example, the goal of increasing the number of foreign professors in order to increase the number of classes in English; however, in many Super Global Universities, this function is being fulfilled by Japanese professors who have one to three years' experience of research and education in a foreign country (Kariya 2015b). In reality,

most of them had only research experiences in abroad as parts of their sabbatical years, meaning that they lack enough teaching experiences in English.

With such superficial and perfunctory globalization, even though the world ranking could increase slightly, Japan will not be able to say that its universities are progressing with globalization. Furthermore, the chances that this will "re-enhance Japan's international competitiveness and 'revitalize' Japan so that it can regain its former brightness" are certainly minuscule. Nevertheless, the reason these policies are accepted and Japanese universities are caught up in them is that the previously stated zeitgeist still exerts force as a framework for problem construction.

Even after the lost decades, the aforementioned hierarchy mindset and competition mindset concerning "advancement and backwardness" continue to exist because of the era perception that Japan once caught up with and overtook the West. Furthermore, this is combined with the mindset that the catch-up model has been lost. Between these have visible and measurable scales such as the straightforward university world ranking permeated and led Japan to play the "catch-up game" again. While there is no escaping the mindset of techno-economic nationalism that was born after the war and seeks economic, scientific, and technological development, the numerical policy targets have been incorporated without bearing in mind the relevance and validity of the criteria for the world ranking.

Meanwhile, the spread of the recurrent and life-lomg model of graduate education, which is progressing in other developed countries, still does not exist in Japan. This is not only a problem of education but is also due to the fact that the Japanese trait of linking education and employment (or based on the mechanism of forming human resources through 'on the job training' in the workplace) remains unchanged. These specific policies that are thought to be necessary are not effective, and they incorporate competitive-type reforms that pursue perfunctory numerical values. This reflects an image of Japan that experiences the impatience of other Asian countries catching up, who are themselves undergoing catch-up-type development, yet is unable to let go of the superpower mindset and become a mature society.

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