

The Historical Transformation of the Concept of Equality of Educational Opportunity in Post-war England and Japan

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Introduction

This study is designed as a comparative study of Japan and England in educational policy. It aims to throw light on the evolution and historical transformation of the concept of ‘equality of educational opportunity’ as applied to educational policies in these countries, and on the multiplicity and complexity of factors concerning changes in the meaning of equality of educational opportunity. This study concentrates in particular on secondary education and social class issues, a field in which major changes, events and decisions took place during the period covered.

Setting the Issue

There is no doubt that post-war England and Japan have made enormous strides in providing expanded educational opportunities for their young people. The widespread popularity of the idea of equality of opportunity resulted from the belief that expansion of education would bring about greater social equality and at the same time a stronger national economy. However, in recent years the principle of equality of educational opportunity has raised enormous controversy regarding its practical applications. There is a growing awareness among social scientists and educationists that (Coleman (et al) 1969; Halsey 1972; Jencks (et al) 1972; Kariya 2001):

- the quantitative expansion of education in the post-war period has not resulted in greater equality of opportunity for children from different social backgrounds.
- home background contributes significantly not only to educational outcomes, but also the extent of participation by an individual in education beyond the years where schooling is compulsory.

These findings gave reason to question the effectiveness of the policies pursued in both countries, and the concept of equal opportunity itself began to be more confused and ambiguous and more open to debate. In other words, despite the fact that equality of opportunity has surely become a concept which reflects universal aspirations, there has been no consensus about what equality of opportunity is or about how it can be achieved in either country. This dilemma has led us to review several fundamental questions; “What has equality of educational opportunity meant in the past, what does it mean now, and what will it mean in the future?”, and “How has the concept of equality of educational opportunity shifted in educational policies in the last century?” Concerning these questions, previous research has not considered the historical shift of the concept from a comparative perspective. Thus, this study attempts to analyze what kinds of equality of opportunity England and Japan have aimed to achieve, especially after the Second World War, through cross-cultural comparison.

Arguing over Equality of Opportunity

There has been much sociological and educational research in industrial western countries that can contribute to our understanding of trends in the historical transformation of the concept of equality of opportunity during the last century, particularly after WWII. Some of this research has direct implications for educational policy and reform. Major empirical studies by Coleman et al (1969) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) in America, and Halsey, Floud, and Anderson (1961) in England have examined the historical trend of the concept and also documented persistent inequalities of educational outcome despite dozens of major policy reforms instituted in the name of ‘equality of educational opportunity’ in these countries.

Halsey’s Model

Since the issues of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ had not been taken up in the official dispute of educational opportunity in Japan during the research period of previous research, this study uses Halsey’s thesis of equal opportunity as a major criterion to evaluate the historical shift of the concept of equality of educational opportunity (Halsey 1972: 6-11).

Halsey’s theory of equality of opportunity, similar to the others, is based on three assumptions: (1) since the industrializing nations are subject to a common set of technological imperatives, educational opportunities are expanded quantitatively in an attempt to find national talent; (2) however, the quantitative expansion of educational opportunities has brought about little equality for children from lower social groups in terms of social mobility and income; and (3) in this situation, the notion of equality of educational opportunity tends to shift from equality of *access* (meritocratic concept) to equality of *outcome* (egalitarian concept). In

short, a characteristic common to these studies is that the principle of equal opportunity cannot guarantee equal outcome in education, though it does preserve rights of free choice where reform policies that demand equal results would not. Although there are appropriate reasons for desiring a more equal range of educational outcomes, it is not within the power of the meritocratic concept to insure this goal, in theory or in practice.

Of particular interest here is Halsey's claim that a cross-national similarity in the process and in patterns of shift of the concept will emerge in industrial countries. Since England and Japan experienced continuous expansion of educational opportunity after the Second World War, Halsey's thesis predicts a trend of historical shift of the concept of equality of opportunity and a corresponding increase in universality in the process of the shift in these countries.

The Initial Position of the Concept of Equality of Educational Opportunity: The Mid-1940s

The concept of equality of educational opportunity, as applied to the English education system in the 1944 Education Act and after, has in many ways been a meritocratic concept of Halsey's model (Kang 1986). There are three strands in this concept of equal opportunity: meritocracy, national efficiency, and 'parity of esteem' among the elements of the tripartite system.

All classes of people had contributed equally to the war effort, and as a result equality of opportunity was seen as essential for national solidarity. Thus, there was a stronger enthusiasm for social reform, which played a leading role in the passing of the 1944 Education Act. The 1944 Education Act concluded an era of

government attempts of over more than a century to establish a national education system for elementary and secondary levels (Barber 1994). The success of the 1944 Act lay in its achievement of a significant goal that earlier Acts had failed to realize; the quest for justice and the trend towards a higher degree of equality of opportunity by raising the school leaving age to 15 and establishing 'secondary education for all'. However, the 1944 Education Act formulated a fundamental expectation that all children should be given education '*according to different age, ability and aptitude*'. The principle of equal opportunity used by the government in setting out this expectation was based on the Reports of the Board of Education, Hadow (1926), Spens (1938) and Norwood (1943), which all approved the psychologists' claim that 'it is possible at a very early age to predict with some degree of accuracy the ultimate level of a child's general intelligence' (Board of Education, Spense Report: 357). Acceptance of these psychological criteria led to the specification by government of a rigid, fixed allocation of places in each of three types of secondary school: grammar, technical and modern, for which children were selected at the age of eleven. Thus the concept of equality of opportunity, as applied in the 1944 Education Act, was essentially a meritocratic version of equality.

In retrospect, it can be said that not only the Conservative Party but also the Labor Party placed great emphasis on 'liberty' which was based on the assumption that children have differing abilities and therefore should be given free choice from a variety of schools, curricula, and subjects that are best suited for them. In fact, a majority of members of the Labor Party, which became the ruling party in 1945, interpreted the concept of equality of educational

opportunity in terms of this view. For the Labor Party, the main aim that justified this meritocratic concept of equal opportunity was the maintenance of the structural order and of the differences between individuals, and particularly preservation of the respected tradition of the grammar school in fulfilling a national need by educating the nation's most intellectually able children. Thus, during the 1940s, the Labor Party's official endorsement of the tripartite system at the time clearly demonstrated the extent to which most English people, apart from radical minorities in the Labor Party, advocated the meritocratic concept of equal opportunity rather than emphasizing the egalitarian concept. In this situation, equality of opportunity was epitomized in the phrase "parity of esteem" among three types of school, or in other terms, "separate but equal".

In contrast to the English case, the general trend of the post-war reform period in Japan was originally to interpret the concept of equality of opportunity in an egalitarian way, emphasizing self-realization, rather than as a justification for differentiation between children (Horio and Yamazumi 1976). In this egalitarian view, the idea of social justice is much more important than considerations of national efficiency or the needs of the economy.

The main goals of the American Occupation of Japan can be described as the 'democratization', 'demilitarization', and 'decentralization' of Japanese society. These goals were clearly opposed to those which had been dominant in pre-war Japanese education, namely: the training of loyal subjects; a narrow nationalistic perspective; and a complex and hierarchical secondary education system comprising middle, vocational, higher elementary and youth schools. The U.S. Education Mission (USEM) put forth

some specific recommendations to achieve greater equality of educational opportunity. For instance, the single track 6-3-3-4 system i.e. six years of elementary school, three years of lower secondary school, three years of upper secondary school, and four years of university, was established to achieve the goal of equal opportunity. The separate tracking of boys and girls at lower secondary school level was ended. The school-leaving age was raised from twelve to fifteen. The extension of the period of compulsory schooling from six years to nine years was well supported and soon put into practice by the Japanese, despite the severe financial and material conditions in the immediate post-war period.

The American ideal of equal opportunity was incorporated into Article 26 of the Constitution and Article III of the Fundamental Law of Education (FLE). These Articles stipulated that all the people shall have the right to an “equal” education “correspondent to their abilities” and shall not be subject to educational discrimination on account of race, creed, sex, social status, economic position, or family origin. At first glance, these Articles might be regarded as a logical balance between the two parallel premises - equality and meritocracy: the Articles’ stipulation of “equal education” emphasized one premise (equality), yet they also stressed the other premise (meritocracy), upon which allocation of children into different types of school “correspondent to their ability” was based. However, in the general circumstances of the post-war period the ideological emphasis was placed upon “equality” rather than “meritocracy” or “efficiency”, and the Articles’ suggested elements were fundamentally divergent from those supported by the state before the war - allocation of national children into different types of

secondary schools in terms of their social function for national prosperity (Monbushō Hourei Kenkyukai 1974). In fact, some progressive reformers pointedly insisted that the expression “correspondent to their ability” should be interpreted in the sense of “correspondent to their developmental need” (Horio and Yamazumi 1976: 339). They regarded education as a valuable commodity in itself and recognized that “equality” demands that effective access to it should not be denied to any child on grounds of lack of academic ability. To put it another way, they demanded a comprehensive secondary schooling for all regardless of children’s difference in academic ability. Thus, the initial position of the concept of equality of opportunity in Japan differed significantly from the meritocratic position which the English governments endorsed during the period.

The 1950s: Redefining the Concept of Equality of Educational Opportunity

The period of the 1950s can be described as essentially one of consolidation, but also a time when the beginning of the important challenges to the implementation of the 1944 Education Act and the FLE were developed.

During the 1950s in England, although the tripartite system was consolidated as the main form of secondary educational provision, the apparent validity of the different allocation of children into such schools began to be criticized. One important aspect of critical appraisal of the 1944 Education Act which began in this period concerned whether the aim of equality of opportunity was being realized, especially through this tripartite system. In this

period, criticism entered on three bases. The first was the psychologists' and the National Foundation for Education Research's exposure of the lack of validity and reliability of intelligence testing at the age of eleven (Vernon 1957). They showed that pupils could be coached for the 11-plus exams and that their test scores could be improved by such training. This clearly undermined any notion of constant measurable intelligence, a notion which was fundamental to the operation of the tripartite system. The second line of criticism, concerning the impossibility of establishing the "parity of esteem" principle among the different types of secondary schools as a main concept of equal opportunity in education, also gained ground during the period. Banks discusses why the "separate but equal" principle failed: it was difficult for the secondary modern schools to live down the tradition of the higher elementary school in the old system; the modern schools would always bear the stigma of failure while the abler children advanced to the grammar schools; they could draw little prestige from the manual occupations which most of their pupils entered (Banks 1952: 214). Indeed, the situation could be regarded as somewhat worse after the 1944 Act, since the meritocratic nature of the concept of equal opportunity was even more firmly declared. Third, considerable evidence about the class-biased nature of the selection process and academic achievement began to be amassed in this period, and there is a sense in which these outcomes were an inevitable consequence of the way in which the 1944 Act itself was formulated. Members of the Central Advisory Council and several sociologists demonstrated how important family background was for children's academic achievement (Floud, Halsey and Martin 1956). By and large, the tripartite system and the content

of the curriculum, plus the way schools were resourced, served to enable the wealthier to ensure that their children secured similarly advanced positions.

Thus, underlying these criticisms of the concept of intelligence, of parity of esteem and the social-related nature of the selection process was the recognition that the principle of equality of opportunity was not realized, especially in the sense that grammar schools still predominantly tended to be attended by pupils from middle-class families while most working-class children were allocated to secondary modern and sometimes technical schools, despite the fact that these two types had long had a poorer reputation.

Once the American Occupation of Japan ended in 1952 the Japanese government began to undertake a revision of various legislative legacies of the Occupation, and to modify it according to the domestic conservative ideology of the day. This process became known as the 'reverse course' (Schoppa 1991: 38-59).

In education the government, with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Zaikai (business community), these three together being so-called 'conservatives', attacked two aspects of the Occupation reforms. First, the conservatives criticized the post-war education system as too 'foreign' and 'democratic' to suit the traditional image of what Japanese education should be. They thought that this resulted in a disharmony between the system and the actuality of the State. They insisted, therefore, that such foreign elements should be re-examined to ensure the new educational system related more closely to native conditions: they made moves to regain central control through the MOE, attempts to reintroduce ethics courses, and attempts to strengthen central control over

teachers and to combat the influence of the Nikkyōso (Japan Teacher's Union: JTU). Second, a particularly strong feature of the criticism was a widespread discontent with the inefficiency of the newly established 6-3-3-4 system. The conservatives, especially the Zaikai, were not satisfied with this system and advocated its diversification as essential for industrial and economic reconstruction. Therefore, they suggested the strengthening of vocational education at the lower and upper secondary education level, and the establishment of separate vocational colleges.

Behind these criticisms, the philosophical basis of the egalitarian characteristics in the concept of equality of opportunity in the Occupation's educational reform began to be eroded by strong emphasis on efficiency and meritocracy. Concerning the necessity for industrial development proposed by the Zaikai, the conservative governments, with the MOE, began to argue during the period that it would be desirable to diversify the 6-3-3-4 system according to the varying circumstances of (1) different attainment of children, (2) different locality, and (3) different demands resulting from socio-economic structural changes. Essential to the conservatives' thinking was the belief that the diversification of the 6-3-3-4 single-track system would make it possible to seek out the most able children in the interests of national efficiency and to ensure various educational opportunities according to personal liberty and freedom. These twin themes are a consistent strand in meritocratic strategies designed to elicit some new recruits for higher social positions and thus implying equality of opportunity at the *starting* point in the educational competition. Although the idea of providing each child with a suitable education wherever it is found clearly does involve some

form of “equal” distribution of educational opportunity in favor of the nation’s children and thus appears to conform to a notion of “liberty” and freedom of choice, this can be part of a strategy with a primary purpose of serving the industrial and economic development of the state.

The 1960s and the 1970s: The Emergence of a New Concept of Equality of Educational Opportunity

In both England and Japan, the early 1960s saw an unprecedented surge in enthusiasm for expansion in education at the secondary and tertiary levels. The expansion, in both countries, soon gave way to the need for national efficiency combined with equality of opportunity. The national emphasis on the prevention of waste of talent accelerated the speed of the educational expansion which covered the whole range from pre-school to higher education. Behind this situation, the new element introduced by the ‘manpower approach’ and ‘human capital approach’ provided a theoretical basis for the expansion and a rationale to justify the change in the education system, lack of educational opportunity being denounced as a waste of valuable human capital (Schultz 1963).

During the 1960s in England, as far as the education system was concerned, the concept of equality of opportunity began to be used to justify the move towards comprehensive education. Behind this lay the message that the earlier assumption, of a ‘pool of ability’ having to be filtered through a battery of selection tests, needed revision. Mounting evidence indicated that some form of secondary reorganization needed to be considered urgently (Halsey, Floud and

Anderson (ed) 1961). The 11-plus (selection test at the age 11) was seen as coming too early and being too unreliable, but it was also felt that all children should benefit from the same standard of facilities and the same quality and allocation of staff. In addition, the national concern that ability which hitherto had gone to waste should contribute to human capital for economic growth hastened the conceptual change and helped the comprehensive school be recognized as an important element in the education system. Equality of opportunity implied at this point that all children should have the same opportunity to experience an equal educational environment, and that all abilities and social classes, and both sexes, should be taught together. Thus, comprehensive reorganization helped significantly to shift the focus of the educational debate from equal *access* to equal *outcome*, and therefore at least moved it in the direction where the aims of the reorganization could be in egalitarian rather than meritocratic terms. This trend reached its highest point in the mid-1960s when Circular 10/65 finally declared the social integration of children at the secondary level.

The continuous shift of the main concept of equality of opportunity reached its crest in the 1960s. In both the Newsom and Robbins Reports (1963) ‘compensatory education’ was seen as essential for realizing equality of opportunity, and the consensus of two political parties on the point that every child should enjoy an equal opportunity to acquire intelligence was the high-water mark of the egalitarian view of equality of opportunity. Furthermore, the Plowmen Report (1967) showed that the children of low social class were outpaced in the educational competition because their material and social environment was inadequate. New concepts were

developed: ‘cultural deprivation’, ‘restricted linguistic codes’, ‘the educationally disadvantaged’ and as a result the notion of ‘positive discrimination’ was introduced to describe the process of changing the status of children in these situations. Thus, with the emergence of the ideas of the comprehensive school, compensatory education, and positive discrimination, the official definition of equality of educational opportunity in England entered a new phase: the main concepts of equality of opportunity broadened in scope to take into account children’s equal access to a good environment, to promote children’s better performance, and to include “positive discrimination”, if necessary, for socially deprived children.

After the ‘reverse course’ of the 1950s, Japanese education entered on the period of expansion of opportunities. During the 1960s, the conservatives produced *The National Income Doubling Plan* which advanced the trend towards unifying economic development and educational expansion. The series of publications by the Central Council for Education (CCE 1966) and the Economic Deliberation Council (1963) stressed the link with education through a new concept of equality of educational opportunity - the “*ability-first*” (Nōryokushugi) principle. Under this new ideology, the conservatives’ concept of equality of opportunity was to treat all those children of the same measured ability in the same way, irrespective of environmental factors. In contrast to the English educational trend during the period, the conservatives in Japan attempted to bring the concept of equality of opportunity back to the meritocratic concept: this, in essence, was the same concept as that on which the pre-war education system and also the tripartite system of secondary education in England were based. The conservatives

attacked the uniformity of the 6-3-3-4 system and urged very strongly that education should be diversified in accordance with ‘ability’.

However, the conservatives’ interpretation of equal opportunity in line with the ideology of ability-first faced severe criticism from the progressives, mainly the JTU (Aspinall 2001). The battle over the principle of equal opportunity between the conservatives and the JTU during the 1960s can be seen in the struggle over how to interpret the phrases in Article 26 of the Constitution and Article III of the FLE concerning the people’s right to receive an education “equally” and “correspondent to their ability” when it came to upper secondary education. On the one hand, the Liberal Democratic Party, the MOE and Zaikai, supporters of the “ability-first” ideology, made a great deal out of the words ‘according to their ability’ as they pressed their arguments for diversification of the upper secondary schools, in conformity with the report of the CCE in 1966. As logical consequences of such an interpretation, it is argued that, at the national level, quality and talent are not fostered for national development and, at the individual level, personal freedom is eroded by an excessive emphasis on “equality” in the terms of the FLE. On the other hand, progressives, especially the JTU, asserted that all children should be given upper secondary education regardless of their ability and that the principle of ability meant recognition of the principle of “individuality”. Thus, Kariya argued that the JTU established its own concept of equality of opportunity – the “Sabetsu = Senbetsu” (discrimination = selection) principle as a counter-strategy against the conservatives’ favored principle –discrimination on the basis of

academic ability (Nōryokushugi) (Kariya 1995: 156). Criticizing the so-called ‘examination hell’ in the contemporary Japanese education system, the JTU strongly demanded the establishment of a comprehensive upper secondary school with no selection, based on the 1946 USEM Report. Furthermore, this was expressed in a more developed form as the “Right to Learning” (Kyōiku-ken) in a series of reports published by the the JTU’s Council on Education Reform in the early 1970s (JTU 1975). The JTU attempted to promote the development of human character under conditions of equality without the imposition of improper forms of nationalism and intensified State control with regard to the opportunity for learning. Thus, during the 1960s severe disputes frequently unfolded between conservatives and the JTU over the principle of equality of educational opportunity.

As a result, despite the JTU’s aspirations for the establishment of a non-selective comprehensive upper secondary school, no basic change has occurred in the educational structure. With a few exemptions, students still have to pass an entrance examination to enter upper secondary schools, which are diversified into many different tracks. Ironically, in this education system, the more emphasis the JTU places on the egalitarian concept of equal opportunity in education and the more teachers treat children equally in terms of the same curriculum, non-streamed classes, and whole-class teaching methods, the stronger the meritocratic concept is becoming.

From the 1980s to the Present Day: From Human Capital to Market Principle Values in Education

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw a sustained, predominantly right-wing critique of education. The conservatives in many advanced industrialized nations began to assert that egalitarianism had brought about a lowering of standards and loss of traditional values in education. Conservative governments in both Japan and other industrialized nations approached these issues in a similar way. For instance, the powerful conservatives Ronald Reagan in the United States, Margaret Thatcher in England, and Nakasone Yasuhiro in Japan adopted a New Right philosophy (Hayek 1960; Friedman 1962; Gamble 1988), encompassing both neo-liberals, who called for decentralization, and neo-conservatives, who called for tough steps towards centralization, in order to bring recovery to the nation's economy.

Both strands shared the view that government intervention and investment in education as well as in other public services should be decreased and they called for the slimming down of the welfare state and the adoption of the market economy system in all public systems. They attempted to introduce market values in their education system to ensure efficiency and to counter egalitarianism. This introduction of market values heralded the end of the liberal consensus in education. The many elements of this New Right philosophy were reflected in the 1988 Education Reform Act in England and the proposals of the Ad-Hoc Council in Japan, which sought to make a reality of consumer choice and to restore notions of merit.

Freedom of Choice and Privatization

Two main market concepts have penetrated the education system since the 1980s: first, competition and choice; and second privatization. The idea that schools would achieve better standards and greater efficiency using the same resources if they were driven not by providers (politicians, officials, and teachers) but by consumers (parents and children) was first put forward in 1962 by Milton Friedman. The idea was to establish a direct link between education choice and taxation by giving all households allowances to be spent on education, not in cash but in the form of ‘vouchers’. The value of the voucher would be that households choosing to send their children to private schools would receive a voucher from the government that covered some or all of the private school tuition costs. Advocates of the voucher system insist that it provides parents with greater freedom of choice and strengthens competition, providing an incentive system that encourages all schools to improve the quality of education offered to students. They also argue that students from low-income families enrolled in private schools attain higher levels of achievement on standardized tests (as compared to students with similarly observed academic levels who are enrolled in public schools).

The second element of the market approach that penetrated into the education system was privatization. This idea of a greater degree of freedom and autonomy in the education system had attracted support since the 1980s, and conditions were created to decentralized power in order to create an innovative environment by the time students leave school and to create the conditions for schools to become ‘entrepreneurial cost centers’. The devolution of

the power from public sectors (i.e. Ministry of Education, local educational authorities) to schools was recommended by the education policies in both England and Japan. The government of these two countries responded to growing interest in lay participation in education as part of a wider consumer movement by advocating that the community needed to take a greater part in and responsibility for school life by means of greater parental representation in the governing body of each school.

In England, the 1988 Education Act was a radical reform that formed a new order by shifting power between the four main actors in the education system – teachers, parents, local education authorities, and the government – and establishing a new relationship between them. Among the fundamental changes are the introduction of a national curriculum supported by assessment of attainment targets; open enrolment for schools; the possibilities of schools ‘opting out’ of Local Education Authorities (LEA) and becoming ‘independent’ grant maintained Schools; the establishment of City Technology Schools and the delegation of power from LEAs in the local management of schools. These approaches were in tune with Conservative policy, which was to create the potential for schools to become entrepreneurs. Measures were taken to encourage maintained schools as well as for the private schools to look for private finance, in line with the campaign of the New Right steps.

In Japan, Freedom of choice within the educational system has been one of the most discussed topics in regards to educational reform since the late 1980s (Okada 1999). The main reforms in Japan included the introduction of 6-year secondary schools with a relaxed system of school catchments areas, which would permit more variety

as well as allow schools to rest upon the ideology of market-based choice. Critics argued that this would in turn increase the disparity between schools, lowering academic competition to a too-early age and also strengthening the effect of social stratification on educational opportunity (Kariya 2001). Proponents argued that these education reforms were designed to lower the number of children in tragic situations, which were so often sensationalized in the media and blamed on the pressures put directly on the children by the educational system.

In general, introducing the market principle into the education system was severely criticized through a variety of objections from its opponents in both England and Japan on legal, economic, administrative and egalitarian grounds. The legal argument was that the government had a statutory obligation to provide free education without any additional charge and that the voucher system breached this. The second criticism was that vouchers would not achieve the government's purpose to reduce the education budget. The third objection was an administrative issue relating to how schools coped with the logical problems of fluctuating demand. For example, some schools would have to employ more teachers at the same time as less attractive schools would have to make their surplus teachers redundant. The fourth point was that the free choice and competition scheme would deepen existing inequality in education.

Opponents of the voucher systems argue that the higher level of academic performance in private schools is the result of a sample-selection bias, noting that private school students tend to come from more affluent households in which the parents also have

higher levels of educational attainment. They also view those who volunteered to participate in the voucher programs as non-random students from the population. Instead, the individuals are seen as tending to come from homes in which parents place a greater interest on educational achievement, making comparisons between public and private school outcomes problematic. The sample-selection bias argument suggests that lower academic performance of public school students is the result of differences in ability and family background factors rather than the result of a lower quality of education offered to the students. In addition, a related argument is that the alleged “inefficiency” of public schools is the result of the more expansive range of services required to serve their more diverse blend of students. Moreover, advocates of the public school system argue that the voucher systems transfer inordinate amounts of resources and capital away from the schools that provide education and training to the most disadvantaged members of the society.

As a result, under these circumstances, the meaning of equality of opportunity was variously defined by different types of interpreters, who can no longer be classified into the two rigid political categories—conservatives and progressives—but who certainly have different beliefs, apply different emphases, and make contradictory proposals concerning educational reform. On the one hand, the supporters of neo-conservatism emphasized the establishment of a disciplined society, the restoration of selection in secondary education, and the preservation of traditional values in education. On the other hand, the supporters of neo-liberalism emphasized the establishment of a free market society, the minimization of governmental interference in education, and the

maintenance of parental freedom of choice. Thus, in the sphere of recent educational reform in England and Japan, there was no consensus about what equality of opportunity was or about how it could be achieved.

Cross-National Distinctiveness in the Process of the Shift of the Concept of Equality of Educational Opportunity

Here, we can now summarize the significant differences between England and Japan in the historical shift of the concept over the period. By using the explanatory models of the concept of equal opportunity, the periods and the shift of the concepts can be roughly represented in chart form as follows:

Table 1 The Historical Shifts of the Concept of Equality of Educational Opportunity in Post-war England and Japan

	England	Japan
The mid-1940s to 1950	meritocratic	egalitarian
The 1950s	meritocratic vs egalitarian	egalitarian vs meritocratic
The 1960s	egalitarian (dominance)	meritocratic co-operating with egalitarian
The 1970s and after	various definitions	various definitions

When the central government in England recognized elements – the issues of impossibility of parity of esteem within the tripartite system, selection, and social class – as input the result was an overwhelming change in output, that is, subversion of the official policy, the tripartite system, and a shift of opinion in favor of

comprehensive schools. The concept of equality of opportunity had been transformed from the meritocratic concept in the mid-1940s to the egalitarian concept in the 1960s. This shift in the concept is a world-wide phenomenon over the period, as Halsey's thesis predicted. In Japan, on the other hand, with regard to the shift of the concept of equality of opportunity, our empirical findings are not altogether consistent with the prediction of Halsey's thesis. Although the same input elements such as the social class issue in the selection process were identified in the Japanese case, the concept did not achieve its highest point – equality of outcome – during the 1960s. However, it is important to note that the concept of equality of educational opportunity shifted from the egalitarian concept to the meritocratic concept over the period.

Peculiarities in Japanese Sense of Egalitarianism

It is worth pausing here to recapitulate and clarify some important distinctions between the egalitarianism in Japan and in England. How different are the attitudes of England and Japan to egalitarianism in relation to equality of educational opportunity? In specifying the principle and setting priorities, the 'egalitarianism' endorsed in the educational debates of England over the post-war period would not be the same as that of Japan. Perhaps, they differ mainly in the following three points.

First of all, in post-war England it was realized that the 11-plus system (selection test) was meritocratically biased. Due to this, the sense of the concept of equal opportunity became more egalitarian. One of the most desirable solutions was the comprehensive school, in which equality of opportunity was

primarily interpreted as social integration of children at a secondary level. The Labor Party attributed the bias to inequalities in education such as a social bias in grammar school and a cultural bias in the IQ selection, and criticized this on social justice grounds. On the other hand, political progressives in Japan were more focused on the sense of inferiority of the children who could not continue on to post-compulsory education because they had to work, and condemned this as discrimination (Kariya 1995: 160-180). In contrast to the Labor Party, the egalitarianism supported by Japanese progressives did not deal with social class; instead, it was considered taboo to raise the issue of class in the debate on equality of educational opportunity. Japanese teachers thought that the combination of the class issue and educational opportunity might itself be 'discrimination'. Despite the clear distinctions between social classes in terms of academic attainment and chances to enter higher levels of education (Moriguchi 1960), teachers as well as Japanese people in general have tended to be reluctant to attribute low academic achievement of poor children to their family background.

Secondly, the egalitarianism in England as well as other Western nations tends to recognize the difference in children's individual potential. Western people are skeptical when told that all children have the same potential. If necessary, the provision of support teachers, ability tracking and group teaching are practiced in order to accommodate children of different abilities effectively. Egalitarianism in Japan however, does not recognize the differences in individual potential. Since many Japanese teachers are committed to equality and social organization, teaching and pupil evaluation methods are designed to standardize the treatment of children which minimizes discrimination (Cummings 1980). For example, '*Isseijyugyō*' (the whole class teaching method) makes it possible for both able children and late developers to be taught at the same place and time. Japanese people, in addition to believing that all children

have the same natural potential; also place more emphasis than Western people on ‘*doryoku*’ (effort) than ability, as the primary factor determining academic performance (Holloway 1986: 269-286). Basically, Japanese people tend to attribute poor performance to lack of effort rather than lack of ability.

Thirdly, Japanese egalitarianism allocates little attention to the inequalities of the selection process and focuses on inequalities which arise from the selection’s outcome. Alongside ‘degreeocracy’ (educational credentialism), the Japanese believed that opportunities for educational advancement were open to everyone and that those who were talented and worked hard, would continue to higher education regardless of their social background (Okada 2001). As Entrance exams are perceived as culturally neutral, the critics of educational inequality steered away from social class inequalities in the selection process and turned to the unreasonable effects of the ‘*Gakubatsu*’(school cliques) (Kariya 1995). *Gakubatsu* denotes group conciseness and in-group feelings shared by those from a common or the same university background. If one’s school is highly ranked, one’s school contemporaries are often progressing in other institutions as well, so that they might provide mutual services when needed. The *Gakubatsu* is widely criticized due to its network offering unfair advantages inside and outside one’s workplace. Overall, egalitarianism in Japan is conceived of an open process with transparent hierarchies and “achievable” criteria for success. It is this openness and transparency that is to blame for the fact that there are barely any traces of compensatory education, and that the aid given to students is very modest.

Conclusion

In fact, for almost three decades after the Second World War, in the wake of the expansion of the education system, terms such as ‘class inequality’ or ‘social group bias’ were widely used in England in educational debates. So, social and educational reforms were introduced with the desire to reduce existing inequalities between social groups. Particularly in England the implication of just how socially biased the existing tripartite system was became the most powerful driving force behind this shift in the main concept of equal opportunity.

However, in Japan the social background issue did not attract much attention in the official debates on education. Although some educational sociologists in Japan revealed social bias in children’s academic achievement and in the proportion entering higher education, the Japanese government did not adopt the same educational policy as its English counterpart, maintaining instead its policy based on a meritocratic concept. Indeed, the issue of inequality between social groups has faded from the educational debate and concern for other issues such as “examination hell”, “*degreocracy*”, and “*ijime*” (bullying) have taken its place. Thus, although social inequality in educational opportunity has existed in Japan, and England, the governments of the two countries took different roads to reform the structure of their national education systems over the period.

It has argued that egalitarianism is probably the most significant variable that distinguishes Japan and other industrial nations. The fundamental difference between the egalitarianism in Japan and England lies in the question of whether the social class

issue is treated or not. Japanese egalitarianism pays little attention to the class bias and inequalities which appear in the process of selection, whilst English egalitarianism is always concerned about it.

The result of this study suggests that Japanese people need to reconsider and explore in more depth the various possible meanings of terms such as ‘equality of opportunity’, ‘ability’, ‘egalitarianism’, ‘meritocracy’ and how these have been treated and debated at different periods in other industrial countries. Indeed, the social class issue has not received much attention in educational debate. This situation has led us to a fundamental question: How is it possible to maintain ideologies of equality of opportunity and meritocracy when it has been clear for a long time that wealthier families have better educational chances than non-wealthy ones? Thus, Japanese people in general and their government in particular ought to seek to promote both formal and substantive equality of opportunity – for all the nation’s children, and so far as they are able, in the functioning of the system as a whole.

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