

# Chapter 17

## The Role of Archaeology and Its Challenges in Japanese School Education: The Curriculum and History Textbooks

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### Introduction

Prior to World War II, history education in Japanese schools was centered on the Emperor. History textbooks began by describing the myth regarding the birth of the Japanese nation, which was closely related to the origin of the imperial family. After Japan was defeated in World War II, the nationalist bias in its history education was re-examined. Evidence-based learning, instead of the mythology of the nation, was emphasized, and archaeological data came to play a fundamental role.

From the late 1950s, Japan experienced rapid economic growth. Large-scale development and construction work took place throughout the country and, as a result, the amount of archaeological excavations increased. Accordingly, a series of new archaeological findings found their way into history textbooks.

Rapid economic growth came to an end in the mid-1970s. With Japan gradually engulfed in ever faster globalization, its school education system came under increasing pressure to transform itself. Educational reform thus began in the late 1970s, which was characterized by two major elements: neoliberalism that stressed competition among, and self-responsibility of, individuals, and nationalism that emphasized patriotism and public duties. Both school curricula and history textbooks have since been strongly affected by these concepts. This educational reform is still ongoing, and one of its recent outcomes is the revision of Japan's Fundamental Law of Education in December 2006. The Law, which outlines the principles of the Japanese education system, was revised for the first time since its establishment in 1946.

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In this paper, I wish to examine Japan's educational reform since the late 1970s in relation to the school curriculum and history textbooks. Through this examination, the role of archaeology and the challenges it faces within Japan's school education today is critiqued and discussed.

## **An Overview of the Transition of the Japanese School Curriculum**

Currently, school education in Japan is mandatory for 6 years at elementary school, 3 years at junior high school, and optional for a further 3 years at senior high school. According to the Basic School Surveys conducted annually by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (formerly known as the Ministry of Education), 97.7% of all junior high school graduates continued onto senior high school in March 2007. After graduating from senior high schools, students decide whether to take a job or further their education at universities, junior colleges or vocational schools.

The curricula for elementary, junior high, and senior high schools are based on the curriculum guidelines set out previously by the Ministry of Education, and currently by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. When the first of these guidelines were published in 1947, they were presented as a "draft proposal (*shian*)" and were not considered to be legally binding. However, the phrase "draft proposal" disappeared from the second guidelines published in 1955, and in 1958 the Ministry of Education published the third guidelines through official gazettes and they thus came to assume a legal status. The guidelines have since been revised approximately every decade.

According to the current guidelines, the sixth grade students at elementary school study Japanese history as part of their Social Studies classes; in junior high school, it is studied in relation to world history as part of the history section of Social Studies. In high school, world history is a compulsory subject in the study of geography and history, and students study it together with a choice of either Japanese history or geography.

In the late 1950s, under the strict control of the Ministry of Education, the primary aim of the school curriculum was to ensure that every student could acquire a certain level of knowledge. Yet in the 1960s and early 1970s, the percentage of students going on to high schools and universities significantly increased. As competition in school entrance exams intensified, the existing curriculum came under increasing criticism, being labeled as cramming or fact-obsessed. With the end of Japan's rapid economic growth in the mid-1970s and the ever faster economic globalization of the 1980s and 1990s, there was an increasing recognition in the Japanese business world that it was more important to develop the capacity of a limited number of students who could eventually contribute to Japan's global competitiveness than to educate a large number of students in a uniform manner (Japan Federation of Employers' Associations 1995). Reflecting this new trend, neoliberal

educational reform was pursued from the late 1970s onwards. This reform resulted in the reduction of class hours, the increase of elective subjects, the diversification of teaching subjects and entrance exam systems, and the expansion of the school choice system through the easing of school zoning rules.

## “Relaxed Education” and the Reduction of Class Hours

As shown in Table 17.1, the amount of class hours were progressively reduced from the late 1970s, following the so-called policy of “relaxed education (*yutori kyouiku*).” In the revised 1989 curriculum guidelines, the study of the Jomon Neolithic culture (c. 13000 to 300 BC), which chronologically precedes the Yayoi culture based on full-scale agriculture (c. 300 BC to AD 300), was eliminated from the sixth grade Social Studies program at elementary school. In the revised 1998 curriculum guidelines, the teaching of ancient civilizations that did not closely relate to Japanese history, such as Greece and Rome, was suspended in the history section of Social Studies at junior high school.

The same period in Japan saw the establishment of a system of rescue excavations by local governments, which led to a significant increase in archaeological investigations across the nation and, as a result, to important discoveries that many thought should be incorporated into the school curriculum. For example, in the late 1980s, the rescue excavation at the Yoshinogari archaeological site in Saga Prefecture brought to light a large-scale moated settlement dated to the Yayoi period. In the early 1990s, the Sannai Maruyama site in Aomori Prefecture was investigated before the construction of a baseball stadium, leading to the discovery of a giant settlement dating back to the Jomon period.

The curriculum guidelines since the 1950s have emphasized the importance of experience-based learning through the use of museums and other facilities, and have consistently recommended that archaeological sites and objects should be used as educational tools. Results and findings of archaeological excavations have thus come to be mentioned more frequently in textbooks. However, while archaeological

**Table 17.1** History class hours per year as specified in the curriculum guidelines

Year of revision <sup>a</sup>	1958	1968 <sup>b</sup>	1977	1989	1998	2008
Elementary school	140	140	105	105	100	105
Junior high school	175	175	140	140 <sup>c</sup>	105	130

Note: “Elementary school” indicates the unit hours (1 unit hour=45 min) of Social Studies classes in the sixth grade at elementary schools, and “Junior high school” indicates the unit hours (1 unit hour=50 min) of the history section of Social Studies

<sup>a</sup> “Year of revision” indicates the year in which the revised curriculum guidelines were published. The 1958 guidelines took effect in the same year of its publication (1958) while the other guidelines came into effect three to four years after their publication

<sup>b</sup> In 1968, only the elementary school curriculum guidelines were revised. In the following year, the junior high school curriculum guidelines were revised

<sup>c</sup> The 1989 junior high school guidelines stated that each school could reduce the number of annual class hours to 128 if necessary

findings increased and archaeological study became more specialized from the late 1970s to the 1990s, the reduction of class hours continued. As a result, it became difficult for elementary and junior high schools to utilize archaeological findings for their classes (Furuichi 2004).

## **Concerns Over the Decline of Student's Learning Abilities and Changing Educational Policies**

Gradually, the successive reduction of class hours generated public concern about children's declining learning abilities. Finally, in 2002, only a few years after the announcement of further reductions of class hours through the revised 1998 curriculum guidelines, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology switched its education policy from "relaxed education" to "the enhancement of students' learning abilities (*gakuryoku no koujyou*)" through the publication of the Proposal for Improving Learning Ability, or the so-called Encouraging Learning (*Manabi no Susume*). This new policy was strengthened further in March 2008 with the proposal of new curriculum guidelines, which recommended the increase of class hours for the first time in 30 years. According to this proposal, the teaching of the Jomon culture would be reintroduced into the sixth grade Social Studies program at elementary school.

Japan's educational policies in recent years appear to be wavering between relaxed education and education for the enhancement of students' learning abilities. This inconsistency is closely related to, and probably due to, the lack of evaluation of each of the policies thus far adopted. More fundamentally, there has never been a clear consensus as to what type of learning ability students should be equipped with, and whether students' learning abilities are really deteriorating at all.

## **The Neoliberal Deregulation in Educational Policies and the Widening Gap Between Schools**

Since the late 1970s, neoliberal reform emphasizing competition among, and self-responsibility of, individuals has been pursued in many aspects of Japanese politics. Government rules and regulations that once underpinned the national welfare system have been abolished or simplified, public institutions have been privatized, and public services for which the government was previously accountable have become increasingly subject to market mechanisms. This trend seems to have intensified since the early 1990s, with the end of the Cold War and the burst of the Japanese bubble economy.

In school education, taught subjects and entrance exam systems have been diversified, and the school zoning rules that used to be in place to ensure equal educational opportunity for all children has been eased for the purpose of providing more freedom to choose schools. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science,

and Technology and local education authorities have explained that this policy is not intended to widen the disparity between schools but to help children select schools according to their individual characters. In line of this policy, the establishment of “unique schools (*tokushokuaru gakkou*)” has been advocated alongside the expansion of school zones. The unique schools thus established are characterized by the adoption of “integrated studies (*sougou gakka*),” the combination of junior and senior high schools, and the introduction of credit systems, and/or the teaching of highly specialized subjects and courses. In terms of history education, for example, Nara Prefectural Ikaruga High School set up a History and Culture Course in 1996 as part of its Comprehensive Program. In 2005, this school was merged with Nara Prefectural Katagiri High School and became Horyuji Kokusai High School, in which an independent program, History and Culture, was introduced. Located in a region rich in historical and cultural resources such as Horyuji Temple, Horyuji Kokusai High School is unique in offering as part of its History and Culture program classes specializing in Nara Studies,<sup>1</sup> archaeology and hands-on sessions in collaboration with local research institutes and museums. Meanwhile, in 2003, Nagasaki Prefectural Iki High School, located in Iki Island, set up a Harunotsuji History and Culture Course as part of its Comprehensive Program. The course took advantage of the presence on the island of the major archaeological site of Harunotsuji, which is believed to have been the political center of a small state in the Yayoi period. The history class in this program provides introductory lessons in archaeology as well as on-site activities at the Harunotsuji site.

It is no simple task to find teachers, facilities, and equipment that suit the characteristics of each of these unique schools. In Japan, where the standard number of students per class is 40, far greater than in the USA and Europe where a class tends to have 20–30 students, the burden on the teacher to manage a class is great. Even worse, the ongoing neoliberal reform in Japanese politics advocates small government, as a result of which the national budget for education is likely to be reduced. Attempts to establish unique schools under these conditions could result in widening the gap between schools that can afford to do so and those that cannot. The disparity between schools is thus likely to be reproduced on an expanded scale. As mentioned, the reduction of class hours may well result in the weakening of the standard of education that should be guaranteed to every pupil. In other words, it might detract from the national minimum of the Japanese people. As the diversification of school systems and the expansion of school zones have taken place simultaneously, children and parents are now under pressure to compete for education offered at good schools. This pressure might create a situation in which wealthier and more capable children are able to receive better education while others are excluded from adequate education. Thus, educational disparity might well be further aggravated.

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<sup>1</sup> Nara Studies are studies on various aspects of the history, tradition, architecture and culture of the city of Nara.

## Nationalist Trends in Postwar School Education Policies

What made Japan's nationalism distinctive before and during the war was that the Emperor, granted mythological authority, stood as the spiritual and cultural pillar of the nation. This situation was manifest even in school education; the "Imperial Prescript on Education (*Kyouiku Chokugo*)", issued in 1890, emphasized loyalty and patriotism, and the first thing that pupils learned in history education was the myths relating to the origin of the imperial lineage. This form of nationalism in education was renounced in the process of postwar democratization, but nationalism based on patriotism and public duties persisted and has survived even to this day.

The Ikeda-Robertson Talks<sup>2</sup> of 1953 confirmed that the nurturing of patriotism was a means for strengthening Japanese national defense. In 1967, the National Foundation Day (February 11), based on the mythological establishment of the nation, was declared a public holiday despite opposition by a number of archaeologists and other scholars. In the meantime, it became a *de facto* convention that the Ministry of Education asked for amendments to the contents of school textbooks. In 1982, revisions made in Social Studies textbooks describing Japan's recent wars caused diplomatic tensions with the Chinese and Korean governments.

Nationalist policies in school education were maintained even after the start of neoliberal educational reform in the late 1970s. For example, the government kept control of school education through the curriculum guidelines and the system of textbook authorization. The hoisting of the national flag and the singing of the national anthem at official school events also became mandatory.

In the 1990s, nationalism in school education took a new turn. In 1996, the Japanese Society of History Textbook Reform (JSHTR) was established. Later, in 2001, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology approved a Social Studies textbook for junior high school compiled by members of JSHTR (Nishio et al. 2001), a book which caused great public concern because of its strong nationalist and ethnocentric descriptions of Japanese history.

Meanwhile, the National Commission on Educational Reform, a private advisory body reporting to the prime minister, suggested the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education in 2000. This move created momentum for the revision of the law, particularly from conservative politicians. After deliberations in the Central Education Council and the Diet, the law was finally revised in 2006. The new law emphasized the nation's authority to control education rather than the people's right to receive it. Its validity has been the subject of nationwide debates (Murata 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> The Ikeda-Robertson Talks were held at the United States Department of State in October 1953 between Ikeda Hayato, a special envoy of the then Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, and Walter Robertson, the US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. During the talks it was agreed that Japanese self-defence capabilities should be gradually strengthened.

## The Description of Japan's Ancient History in JSHTR's History Textbook

Since its establishment in 1996, JSHTR has publicly criticized existing history textbooks in Japan for “inculcating self-hatred in children (*jigyakuteki*)” (Fujioka and Kenkyuukai 1996; Nishio 1999; Nishio and Fujioka 1997). The Social Studies textbook for junior high school compiled by JSHTR members has thus far been reviewed twice during the Ministry's textbook screening process in 2001 and 2005. Over 100 comments and suggestions for modification were given at each screening, and the textbook was revised accordingly and then approved and published (Fujioka et al. 2005; Nishio et al. 2001). Although few schools have actually adopted this textbook, its impact on Japanese society has been significant due to the massive campaign JSHTR launched for its promotion with the help of celebrities and its publisher, as well as the active involvement of politicians (Ogushi et al. 2000).

While the textbook's description of recent Japanese–Korean–Chinese relations and warfare has often received the most public attention, its description of the primeval and ancient periods in Japan is also noteworthy in two regards. First, the textbook stresses the uniqueness and independence of ancient Japanese culture. Some members of JSHTR called the Jomon culture “the civilization of forests and spring water (*mori to iwashimizu no bunmei*)” and emphasized the advanced level of its technology, the typical example of which is the invention of ceramic pottery. In its 2001 edition, the textbook originally described the Jomon culture as a “civilization”. Although this wording was altered following suggestions given at the Ministry's screening, the published version still emphasized the venerability of the Jomon culture and the high standards of living enjoyed by the Jomon people (Nishio et al. 2001: 23–25). The 2001 edition also stressed the continuity of the Yayoi culture from the Jomon culture (Nishio et al. 2001: 29). Further, it stated that the description of Japan in the third-century Chinese history book, *Gishi-wajinden* (*Legend of the People of Wa*), was “not necessarily accurate” (Nishio et al. 2001: 33).

In Japan, the Jomon culture tends to be described as unique on the grounds of the use of ceramic pottery in its very early stages as well as the nonexistence of full-scale agriculture or farming despite its Neolithic nature. In contrast, the Yayoi culture, which showed evidence of the beginning of wet-rice agriculture and the production of metal tools, is usually related to Japan's exposure to Korean and Chinese cultures. Presumably for this reason, JSHTR's history textbook placed stronger emphasis on the Jomon culture – it can be more easily utilized to stress the uniqueness of Japanese culture than the Yayoi culture.

Overall, JSHTR's history textbook seems to refer to the results of archaeological studies for the purpose of emphasizing the uniqueness and independence of Japanese culture. Although it appears less so in the revised 2005 edition, there are still remarks in it that stress the invalidity of China's Sino-centrism and the inaccuracy of *Gishi-wajinden* (Fujioka et al. 2005: 26–27). As for its description of Japanese foreign diplomacy during the seventh and eighth centuries, the period in which Japan's governmental system was established, the 2001 edition emphasizes the independence of Japan's

Yamato regime, which did not adopt the system of serving the Chinese Emperor (Nishio et al. 2001: 44–45). This description echoes the description in the same edition of Japan's diplomacy in later periods, and as such seems to help justify Japan's invasion of China and its colonial rule of Taiwan and Korea in modern times. These characteristics are maintained in the revised 2005 edition (Fujioka et al. 2005: 36–37).

The second characteristic of the description in the JSHTTR textbook of the primeval and ancient periods in Japan is its emphasis on Japanese mythology. The oldest myths in Japan are considered to be those included in the ancient history books *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) and *Nihonshoki* (The Chronicles of Japan), completed in the eighth century AD. Although both *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* explain the origin myth of Japan, most Japanese historians concur that this myth has nothing to do with historical fact. The reading of *Nihonshoki* requires particular attention, as it is considered to have been compiled under the political influence of the Yamato regime, which had sought to adopt the governmental system from China's Tang Dynasty – the Yamato regime might have produced the book with a view to justifying its rule over Japan.

The 2001 version of JSHTTR's history textbook devotes more pages to this Japanese mythology than textbooks produced by other publishers. It also mentions myths not only in relation to the eighth-century Japanese culture, but also the Yayoi culture (pre-third century AD) as well as the Kofun culture (pre-sixth century AD); thus, the reader may well have an impression that these myths are based on older historical facts (Nishio et al. 2001: 30–31, 36, 42–43). Although this characteristic is somewhat weakened in the revised 2005 edition, it still mentions Japanese mythology, for example in relation to the Kofun culture (e.g. Fujioka et al. 2005: 30).

What underlies such characteristics of the textbook is the aim of JSHTTR itself, which is to advocate ethnocentrism in Japan. However, from a broader perspective, the national curriculum guidelines have also shown the same tendency to emphasize the uniqueness and independence of Japanese culture and link the history of the state formation of Japan to its mythology. Since the 1950s, these guidelines have demanded that history education should refer to myths and folklore along with archaeological finds and historical sites. It is, therefore, unsurprising that history textbooks produced by other publishers also make reference to Japanese mythology in their descriptions of the Yayoi and Kofun cultures. Admittedly, such mythology constitutes an invaluable part of Japanese cultural heritage, and studying it is important for an understanding of the worldview of the ancient Japanese population. However, it is worth remembering that the myths recorded in *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* are likely to reflect the thoughts and cultures of those who sought to establish a centralized system of Japanese government in the seventh and eighth centuries. Therefore, careful consideration is required when mentioning them in history education.

## The Revision of the Fundamental Law of Education

Japan's Fundamental Law of Education, established in 1946 in close association with the Japanese Constitution, remained unchanged for several decades. Its original principles were clearly expressed in the preamble to the law, which stated that

“We shall esteem individual dignity and endeavor to bring up people who love truth and peace, while education which aims at the creation of culture general and rich in individuality shall be spread far and wide” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, n.d.).

In postwar Japan, in the political context of the termination of state suppression of thought and speech, the archaeological study of Japan’s past developed rapidly, in particular thanks to the discoveries of the Toro archaeological site in Shizuoka Prefecture and the excavation of the Tsukinowa tumulus in Okayama Prefecture (Fawcett 1995). This development was promoted not only by archaeologists working at universities and research institutions, but also by amateur archaeologists, such as elementary, junior and senior high school teachers, and local historians (Kondo 1960). Attempts were also then made by archaeologists to produce senior high school history textbooks (Asano et al. 1972).

The revision of the Fundamental Law of Education in 2006 drastically changed this situation. The law now came to express moral ideals that had not previously been conceived, for example: “to foster an attitude to respect our traditions and culture, love the country and region that nurtured them, together with respect for other countries and a desire to contribute to world peace and the development of the international community” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, n.d.). The revision of the law coincided with the government’s move to adopt the Basic Promotion Plan for Education (*Kyōuikushinkō Kihon Keikaku*), which set out to strengthen state authority in education. As shown above, Japanese school education, particularly at elementary and junior high school, had been strongly controlled by the state – even before the revision of the law – through the regulation and implementation of the curriculum guidelines. The revision of the Fundamental Law of Education is likely to further intensify such state control of education.

## **The Bizarre Fusion of Nationalism and Neoliberalism**

As discussed above, there has been a bizarre fusion of nationalism and neoliberalism in Japanese education policy in recent years. JSHTTR’s actions, as well as the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education, seem to indicate an increasingly nationalist trend in Japanese education. However, educational reform since the late 1970s has been characterized by neoliberalism. Theoretically, nationalism and neoliberalism are incompatible. The former tends to demand strong government control on various aspects of social activities and pursues the collective interests of the nation, while the latter seeks to reduce government control as much as possible and maximizes the interests of individuals who are the beneficiaries of free competition. The increasing nationalism currently seen in Japanese school education should not be considered simplistically as a return to pre-WWII conditions but rather as an attempt to cope with the social problems created by the government’s neoliberal educational policies. Neoliberal educational policies inevitably widen the disparity between schools – and also students – and consequently contribute to the weakening of social unity in each community, alongside the marginalization of certain types of

people – often the weak – from the nation. Since it is difficult for the state to govern the nation in such conditions, the need arises for it to control education and maintain the unification of the Japanese people by the use of power.

This mutually complementary relationship between nationalism and neoliberalism has been pointed out by Saito (2000), a journalist who interviewed members of the Central Educational Council (established by the Japanese government), and also by Hirota, a scholar of social pedagogy, in his analysis of the relationship between education, individualization, and globalization (Hirota 2004).

## **What Role for Archaeology in School Education Today?**

Two final remarks are pertinent in connection to the role that archaeology should play in school education and the challenges it faces in the current socio-political context. First, there seems to be an urgent need to restore the close connection between schools and local communities, and school education based on archaeology could play an important role in this process. Schools in Japan are currently faced with two major problems: the widening gap between schools that has been caused by neoliberal educational policies, and the continued lowering of the birth rate since the 1970s. The unpopularity of some schools and the declining number of students in general are sometimes used as justification for abolishing and merging schools. The situation is particularly serious in some rural areas, where schools have completely disappeared.

Measures must be taken swiftly to redress the negative effects of neoliberal education policies, and it should be of primary importance to improve the general conditions of education, by securing sufficient numbers of teachers and equipping schools with adequate facilities. In doing so, extra attention must be paid to strengthening – or better, recovering – the connection between schools and local communities. Every community has its own history and culture. Making use of local cultural heritage in school education is essential for re-establishing the tie between schools and the community, and archaeology and archaeological findings are a key to this process. This situation, however, should neither lead to a cramming style of education nor overemphasis on the uniqueness of each school and locality, as is the case with the current policy for the establishment of unique schools.

The use of local cultural heritage as educational material requires that archaeologists and school teachers work together. Given the specialization of each study subject and the ever greater amount of tasks schools are expected to carry out in contemporary society, this challenge will not be easy. However, it is worth noting that some schools have been successful in designing and implementing classes that effectively make use of archaeological materials and museums (Abe 2005; Kuga 2002; Yoshihisa 2001). Active research is needed to determine what role archaeology can – or should – play to bring up children in collaboration with local communities, and involve local people in the creation of a distinctive local culture of general appeal.

Secondly, archaeology should be utilized to emphasize the relativity of the concept of the nation-state. JSHTTR's history textbook and the revised Fundamental Law of Education are both based on the assumption that fixed, solid nation-states exist. However, the nation-state is a modern construct. With economic and cultural globalization occurring at an increasing pace, it is no longer possible to structure school education in terms of inculcating national identity. In this respect, archaeology, which studies various past cultures and societies (including those preceding the emergence of modern nations), could play a vital role in making the concept of the nation-state relative. It is, however, worth remembering that the mindset of archaeologists and history teachers itself may well be biased by the conceptual framework of the nation-state – because no one living in contemporary society is free from its influence. In this regard, some recent attempts to overcome this conceptual framework by drawing on cognitive archaeology should be welcomed (Matsugi 2007).

Neither nationalist nor neoliberal education is sustainable. Archaeology should play a more active role in school education in order to help children learn and understand a variety of human cultures, without being restricted by parochial nationalism and ethnocentrism. If thoughtfully utilized in education, archaeology could help children – hence, us – find a way to develop a society that is free from neoliberal competition and obsession with self-responsibility.

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