Non-Formal Environmental Education in Japan

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Abstract
This paper summaries non-formal environmental education in Japan from a historical standpoint. In pre-war Japan, although development based on the policy of “rich country and strong army” brought about environmental degradation in all parts of the country, this did not lead to the birth of environmental education. The nature conservation and anti-Kogai movements that emerged in the post-war era prompted the “environmentalization” of society and education, marking the birth of environmental education in Japan. This education expanded to include nature-oriented education starting in the 1980s and became institutionalized starting in the 1990s. In today’s context characterized by neo-liberal restructuring of the entire educational system in which environmental education is becoming increasingly marginalized, the organization of locally based critical and creative learning is urgently needed.

I. Introduction
The objective of this paper is to describe the historical development and characteristics of Environmental Education (EE) in Japan’s non-formal education sector. Here, “non-formal education” is defined as “any organized educational activity outside the established formal system (Coombs and Ahmed 1974). To achieve this objective, we employ an eco-socio-historical approach which Seki formulated “comparative social history of human development” (Seki 2012). The evolution of EE in Japan is deeply related to the country’s rapid modernization. As such, we believe that a historical approach is an effective method for tracing its development process. At the same time, this paper attempts to question the nature of research on EE, which has generally not taken a historical approach.

II. Formal and Non-Formal Education in Japan
1. Formal and Non-Formal Education in Pre-war Japan
Japan’s modern educational system began with the gakusei happu [proclamation on the educational system] issued by the Meiji government, which was established in 1868. Although the Meiji government rapidly expanded the educational system to subsequently advance its goal of developing a “wealth and military strength,” the institutionalization of non-formal education (in Japan, the term “social education” has been used almost synonymously with “non-formal education” since the 1880s) progressed at a very slow pace along two parallel axes of adult education and education for youth (Matsuda 2004.).

Meanwhile, the policy of “rich country, strong army” was advanced as a part of continuous expansion of Japanese territory. Under the Meiji government, Hokkaido, whose population at the end of the Edo era (which ended in 1868 when the Meiji government was established) consisted of a mere 20,000 indigenous Ainu and 60,000 Japanese, became a key target of development. By the end of the 19th century, Hokkaido’s population had reached one million. Okinawa was annexed as part of Japanese territory in 1879, followed by Taiwan in 1895, the southern part of Sakhalin Island in 1907, and Korean peninsula in 1910. While the Japanese educational system was being introduced into these territories, non-formal education through young persons’ associations and other organizations were also institutionalized much in the same way as in other parts of Japan.

2. Environmental Degradation and Non-Formal Education in Pre-war Japan
It goes without saying that environmental degradation caused by industrialization did not start after the end of the Second World War. A large portion of the descriptions of Japan’s environmental history by Iijima (1979) and Walker (2010) is spent on describing environmental degradation prior to the Second World War.

The wave of industrialization reached Japanese colonies in Asia and Southeast Asia. While the details of the environmental impact of such development activities in colonies are still not clear, what is certain is that such
activities consistently contributed to “the ‘othering’ of the physical space represented by nature, wilderness, wild lands, etc.” (Whalen 2016).

The question is how this affected education, and particularly non-formal education at the time. However, there is no evidence that shows any connection between the content of education and environmental degradation due to Japanese pre-war industrialism. If we exclude Shozo Tanaka’s protest of the Ashio Copper Mine-poisoning incident (1890-1913), few thought or movement to re-examine the direction of “development” existed in pre-war Japan.

The main objective of the Imperial Rescript on Education issued by the Meiji Emperor in 1890 was to nurture subjects who would be loyal to the Empire of Japan. As such, excluding a handful of educational movements on promoting literary works about daily life, the institutionalization of educational efforts to turn a critical eye toward society was insufficient.

III. Economic Growth-Oriented Developmentalism and the “Environmentalization” of Education

1. Formal and Non-Formal Education in Post-war Japan

Japan’s defeat on August 15, 1945 marked the dissolution of the Empire of Japan, which was followed by reconstruction of Japan’s political, economic, and other social institutions under the Allied Occupation Forces.

In 1947, a new educational system was established through the enactment of the Basic Act on Education, whose central principles included equal opportunity in education, coeducation of both men and women, and devolution of authority related to education to local governments. Article 7 of the Basic Act on Education included an item titled “social education,” which stipulated that “the national and local governments shall encourage education carried out at home, in places of work and elsewhere in society.”

Based on this provision, the Social Education Act was established in 1949. This Act defines social education as “systematic educational activities targeting primarily youths and adults (including physical and recreational activities) outside of school curricula stipulated by School Education Act.” The Social Education Act requires local governments to take responsibility for establishing educational settings in various facilities including kominkans, museums, and libraries. Non-formal education in post-war Japan has been carried out along two parallel tracks comprising programs offered by kominkans and other social education facilities with the support of local governments and activities organized voluntarily by various organizations or groups (Usui 1971).

2. Rapid Economic Growth and the “Environmentalization” of Education

Japan experienced a period of rapid economic growth starting in 1956, eleven years after losing the war, and ending in 1973. The governmental policy of regional development, whose goal was to expand Japan’s heavy and chemical industry, caused environmental degradation throughout Japan. One characteristic that contrasts this period with pre-war Japan is the systematic efforts to protest the environmental degradation caused by such developments (Miyamoto 2014). The nature conservation and anti-Kogai movements prompted the “environmentalization” of society, which led to the “environmentalization” of education and the birth of EE (Buttel 1992).

Japan’s nature conservation movement began in the late 1940s and subsequently spread to various regions around Japan through the rapid economic growth period. In the suburbs of Tokyo, outings to observe nature have been conducted by groups such as the Miura Peninsula Nature Conservation Association since the late 1950s. Many of these activities were closely associated with local museums having to do with nature. The term “conservation education” emerged in the mid-1950s from the nature conservation movement and has become increasingly common along with the spread of activities to observe nature (Ogawa 2008).

The anti-Kogai movement and Kogai education also developed in step with the development of conservation education. Starting with the campaign to protest expansion of the petrochemical industrial complex into Mishima City and Numazu City at the foot of Mt. Fuji (1963-4), the anti-Kogai movement spread to all parts of the country from the 1960s to the 1980s. One characteristic of this movement was its consistent positioning of so-called “study meetings”—i.e. collaborative non-formal education—as a nucleus of the movement. These study meetings entailed continuous examination of environmental research results by the residents themselves and critical scientific inquiry as well as discussion of what issues the movement should focus on. Although there were cases in which Kogai was studied as a part of programs offered by social education facilities, such as the classes for women to study air
pollution offered by kominkan in Kitakyushu City, a steel industry town, such examples were rare (Fukushima 1993).

Efforts were also made to incorporate the study of Kogai and related issues broadly into school curricula. Such efforts were offered by kominkan in Kitakyushu City, a steel industry town, such examples were rare (Fukushima 1993). Supporting these efforts were campaigns by the teacher’s union. Since January 1970, the Japan Teachers’ Union has promoted the exchange of experiences and collaborative research related to teaching about pollution in the classroom by establishing a working-group on “Kogai and education” as a part of National Assembly of Educational Studies.

Fujioa refers to such educational practices in the formal and non-formal sectors as “Kogai education,” which he defines as “education against environmental disruption” aimed at “teaching natural history, social history, history of the respect for men, formation of citizens through the comprehensive study of the history and current state of pollution” (Fujioa 1976). As Harako defined, Kogai education was a Socially-Critical Environmental Education in Japan (Harako 1997).

What conservation education and Kogai education have in common is the idea of protecting nature and human health from the industrialism that emerged during the rapid economic growth period and, based thereupon, their emphasis on a critical and comprehensive approaches to learning these issues.

The same era also saw advancements of outdoor education, which developed along with YMCA and boy scout activities prior to the war and was largely influenced by outdoor education in the USA after the war (Ebash; 1964), and education on the inhabited environment, which was promoted by individuals involved in architecture, urban planning, and community development (Group for the Study of Built Environmental Education 1982).

IV. Into the Era of Environmental Education

It was in the 1970s that the term “Environmental Education” (EE) was introduced into Japan and began to gradually be used in the sense that it is understood today (Ichikawa 2016). In contrast to the terms “Kogai education” and “conservation education,” which grew out of domestic grass-roots movements, “EE” is imported from abroad.

In Theory of Environmental Education (Numata 1982), the author explains that “conservation education is one aspect of EE.” While positioning conservation education as a base for natural history education, Numata attempted to construct a comprehensive “EE” that encompassed conservation education and environmental science education.

In the early 1980s, various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that would later lead learning through natural environment in Japan, such as the National Outfitters Training School and the Whole Earth Nature School, began to emerge around the country. With the convening of the Kiyosato Forum in 1987, independent movements became part of a transverse network. The Forum was attended by various individuals in their 30s and 40s who were involved in conservation education, outdoor education, or outdoor recreation (Japan Environmental Education Forum 2003). The young people who attended the Forum felt that the environmental movement at the time had become closed off and that the potential for new undertakings within existing organizations and movements was limited. Thus, they adopted a new term, “EE,” to describe their own educational practices to avoid the preconceptions attached to existing terminology.

The common theme of EE discussed by attendees at the Kiyosato Environmental Education Forum was their focus on activities to experience nature. By the early 2000s, the term “Environmental Education” encompassing both conservation and outdoor education had become established to such a degree that EE to become synonymous with learning through experiencing nature (Nitta 2003).

V. Institutionalization of Environmental Education

The 1980s marked a turning point for EE in Japan. At the start of the decade, the term EE was known only by a handful of experts. However, by the end of the decade, the term was beginning to be used by many with a sense of hope. In 1988, the Environmental Agency issued its first report on EE titled “In Pursuit of a Better Environment Created by Everyone” (Environmental Education Committee 1988). Two years later, in 1990, the Society for EE was established with the goal of advancing EE. The greatest characteristic of EE since the 1990s up to today has been its institutionalization.

1. Institutional Arrangements by the Central Government

The Environmental Agency has played a central role in the institutionalization of EE. In 1989, the Agency installed its first expert on EE, marking the first step towards the institutionalization of EE. The Basic Environment Law was established in 1993 and its article 25 stipulated that ‘The State shall take necessary measures to increase corporations’ and
citizens’ understanding of environmental conservation and to encourage their willingness to engage in activities related to environmental conservation, by means of promoting environmental education and learning and improving public relations activities with regard to environmental conservation.’ In 1999, the Central Environment Council issued a report titled “Environmental Education and Environmental Learning in the Future” (Central Environment Council 1999), which positioned EE within national Basic Environment Plan and emphasized the need for action with concrete effects.

On the side of educational administration, the Central Council for Education proposed that a new “period of integrated study” aimed at enhancing students’ ‘ikiru-chikara (zest for living, similar to life skill or ability to live)” through hands-on activities be established and that EE be propelled in connection with this class (Central Council for Education 1996). In 2001, the School Education Act and the Social Education Act were amended in response to this proposal, institutionalizing the promotion of activities to experience nature.

The Act on the Promotion of Environmental Conservation Activities through Environmental Education was adopted in 2003 and revised in 2011. The revised Act places particular emphasis on the creation of EE plans by local governments and the promotion of collaborative efforts by governmental and private organizations.

2. New Proponents of Environmental Education

In contrast to the proponents of conservation education and Kogai education who were engaged in confrontational social movements related to conservation and pollution aimed at the government, public administration, and companies, the proponents of EE emerged from grass-roots movements that exercised a variety of approaches including the presentation of proposals to and collaboration with such entities. In 1998, Act on Promotion of Specified Non-profit Activities (the NPO Law) was passed. The relaxation of requirements to legal entities engaged in non-profit activities led to further expansion of grass-roots activities (Sato 2004). As the result, systems for funding EE activities carried out by such organizations were also developed. EE was expanded through grass-roots activities from the latter half of the 1990s to the 2000s and developed into something akin to a public service contractor.

It should be noted that, around the same time, zoos and aquariums began species conservation and EE activities as central pillars of their mission. Such facilities not only provide EE for visitors but also work with schools to provide EE for students.

3. Development of Systems to Train Leaders

In the case of non-formal EE, each grass-roots organization developed their own system for training leaders among their own ranks in a manner consistent with the principles and nature of the organization’s activities. Near the end of the 1990s, given the multiple systems for training leaders, various organizations engaged in EE began exploring the idea of a single, unified system for leader training programs. This led to the establishment of the Council for Outdoor & Nature Experiences (CONE) comprising a variety of grass-roots organizations in 2000. A new system for training EE leaders based on national standards, the Nature Experience Activity Leader (NEAL) system, was launched and has been operating since 2013 (Furihata 2014).

4. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Revision of the Basic Act on Education

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development was implemented from 2005 to 2014 and the final meeting of it was held in Japan in 2014. How did the discussion on ESD during this period influence environmental education in Japan? At the Japanese Society of Environmental Education (JSEE) symposium held in August 2015 after the end of the Decade, many attendees pointed out the impact was “limited” (Nagoya City University 2016). This means that the reorientation of education was insufficient. While many factors contributing to this result have been discussed, the impact of the neo-liberalist ideology that permeated all aspects of Japanese politics upon entering the 21st century cannot be ignored. In 2006, the Basic Act on Education was revised to give the national government greater authority over education. Although two legally-mandated Basic Plans for Promoting Education have been adopted since 2008, neither of these plans have contained an inkling of “reorientation of education” in terms of ESD. Social education facilities, which play a sizable role in non-formal education, have been encouraged to proactively rely on the vitality of the private sector since the middle of 2000s and have been given no choice but to focus on their own sustainability. In this context, the realization of the Kominkan-CLC International Conference on ESD hosted by the Okayama City kominkan in 2014 as part of the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development represents an extremely valuable precedent (Uchida 2015). Attention is being paid to the fact that community-based ESD involving elements such as systemic change, consensus building, and community...
VI. Non-Formal Environmental Education after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 3.11

Japan was struck by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, immediately followed by the explosion at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant. These two events shook Japanese society to its core and affect all aspects of society. Non-formal EE was no exception. Individuals involved in nature schools were among the first to organize support educational activities to sustain support for survivors of the disaster. Others also set up private radiation monitoring facilities in Fukushima Prefecture and around the country and have provided monitoring and education on radioactive contamination. In addition, efforts to educate the public on the restoration of agriculture and communities have been organized by various sectors. “Disaster risk reduction education” and “radiation education” have become new keywords in the non-formal environmental education lexicon.

Immediately following the earthquake disaster, it was thought that these efforts would be an opportunity to create a new environmental culture in Japan. Today, five years after the disaster, we are keenly aware of the reality that progress toward this goal is not so simple. A new wave of developmentalism is assaulting major urban areas and some rural villages, accelerating the decline of regions and communities left behind by this wave. Opposition to developmentalism and critical creativity are basic themes that run through the history of Japanese non-formal environmental education. There is no doubt that the pursuit of the themes through the cooperation of people from diverse backgrounds while maintaining a basis in regions and localities will remain one of our challenges (Mochizuki 2017).

VII. Conclusion

In this paper, we summarized non-formal EE in Japan from a historical approach. Non-formal EE emerged in the post-war era at the same time as the nature conservation and anti-Kogai movements and expanded starting in the 1980s along with the environmental movement. Although the institutionalization of environmental education has progressed since the 1990s, environmental education is becoming increasingly marginalized, particularly in the context of the neo-liberal restructuring of the entire educational system staring in the 2000s.

Today, some organizations and facilities do not just offer classroom activities in their own facilities or use locally-oriented instructional material but, also, while opposing the persistent pressure from a development mindset, provide opportunities to empower local people to connect each other in communities through learning (Abe and Kawashima 2012, Noguchi 2017). The big challenge now is how these efforts can be used to create an environmentally just and democratic political culture which will really lead the reorientation of education.

The future of non-formal EE in Japan depends on such grassroots’ initiative.

Notes

(1) Facilities established by municipal governments based on the Social Education Act whose aim is to provide cultural enrichment, promote the health of, and cultivate the sensibilities of local residents.

(2) The various physical, mental, economic, and social damage to residents caused by the destruction of the natural and living environments by private-and public-sector activities.

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