

“Social Education” System in Japan

1. What is “Social Education” in Japan?

1.1. Concept and Legal Framework

Adult education, non-formal education, out-of-school education, and various community-based activities are generally categorized into "social education" in the Japanese education system. The Fundamental Law of Education defines social education as the education conducted in society to meet the demands of individuals and societies (2006, Law No.120, Article 12; the old law was in 1947, Law No.25, Article 7). Social education should be promoted by the governments and local public agencies. The Social Education Law defines it as systematic educational activities, including physical education and recreation, primarily for young people and adults out-of-school; they are distinguished from the educational activities conducted as part of the curriculum in accordance with School Education Law (1949, Law No.207, Article 2).

The purpose of the Social Education Law is to clarify the responsibilities of the central and local governments for social education. The report of the Social Education Council in the Ministry of Education in 1971 mentioned that social education must be regarded as wide activities that improve all kinds of learning in a citizen's life. It also described how national and local administration could promote and help the activities. In other words, there are many activities outside the responsibility of the educational authorities. Vocational training institutions are, for example, under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, and are neither a school nor a social education institution under Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology or MEXT (*c.f.* TVET within MEXT). There are many private educational activities such as lessons for piano, calligraphy, and tea ceremony; cram school or private tutoring; and training for sports activities, but they are not within the scope of social education as defined by the Social Education Law. Therefore, we can use the two types of social education as narrowly-defined and broad ones. The former is clarified by the law and under the MEXT, and the rests are the latter.

Lifelong learning has recently been emphasized in Japan. The Fundamental Law of Education was established in 2006. It says, "We must realize a society in which individual citizens can learn anytime and anywhere throughout their entire lives and make use of their achievements properly to be able to improve their personalities and enjoy rich lives (Article 3)" as a principle of lifelong learning. For this purpose, coordination is necessary as bridging between the formal school system and social education, collaboration among communities, private providers, public service, and so on.

1.2. Brief History of Social Education after World War II

The history of Social Education in Japan can be understood as the trajectory of “Kominkan.” Kominkan, social education facilities that are literally translated as “citizen’s halls,” were created in 1946, when the new Japanese Constitution was promulgated, with the concepts of mutual teaching and learning, and support for voluntary learning by local residents after World War II. The Japanese central government instituted a variety of supportive policies to promote the establishment of Kominkan. The call from the central government to establish Kominkan was a good match for people’s needs to learn new values and improve their lives because defeat in the war generated extreme poverty in Japan at that time, and a thoughtful and reflective review of non-democratic and militaristic education during the war was carried out by the people as well as government. Kominkan were to promote the development and richness of people’s active participation, and they quickly spread across the nation. Although they were established by the government, grass-roots initiatives were highly encouraged. This was because Japanese society faced the necessity of change, partly forced by the guidance of the General Headquarters of the Allied Forces, led by the United States, and the people felt the need to overcome the deficient conditions in their lives. In other words, Kominkan was regarded as a symbol of the new age for those who wanted to find a direction of their lives. During this period, popular activities at Kominkan facilitated women’s empowerment, a better quality of healthy life, income generation, and recreation activities.

The former Fundamental Law of Education was promulgated and established in 1947. The Social Education Law came into effect in 1949, when more than 10,000 Kominkan had been established. In 1950, the central government held the first national-level training for Kominkan staff and began a program of financial subsidies for Kominkan. The National Kominkan Association (initially called the National Kominkan Liaison Council) was formed in 1951, followed by the first national Kominkan conference in 1952. In 1956, the periodical Kominkan Journal started (still in publication today), and the Ministry of Education published an official notification entitled “Standards for the Establishment and Management of Kominkan,” which included standards for Kominkan facilities, target areas, and equipment in 1959. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance established the “10-Year Plan for Providing All Cities, Towns and Villages with Kominkan” in 1960. The subsidies for Kominkan facilities and equipment exceeded 10 billion yen in 1979. From 1984 to 1987, the National Council on Education Reform, a consultative body directly under the Prime Minister, presented the three principles: i) high priority on individual learning, ii) shift to lifelong learning, and iii) catch-up to the trends in the international and information age. The Ministry of Education reorganized the Social Education Bureau into the Lifelong Learning Bureau in 1988. The Japan Society for the Study of Kominkan was established for researchers and practitioners in 2003. The new Fundamental Law of Education was established in 2006, and the revision of Social Education Law followed in 2008.

2. Social Education Institutions and Staff

Here we see the details of social education institutions and staff, in the narrow definition, under the control of MEXT. There are several institutions and organizations in social education: Kominkan, libraries, museums, “House for Youth,” “Children's Nature House,” sports institutions, distance social education, social education organizations, and etc. The figures of the major institutions and staff are shown below:

Figures of Institutions and Employees in 2008

Institutions (private ones within the number)

Kominkan	15,943 (5)
Libraries	3,165 (25)
Museums	1,245 (518)
<i>Elementary schools*</i>	<i>22,258 (210)</i>
<i>Lower secondary schools*</i>	<i>10,915 (735)</i>

Staff	Full-time	Part-time
Kominkan Staff	10,709	10,407
Library Staff	14,259	2,169
Museum Staff	10,827	1,276

(Source: MEXT, 2010)

* *The figures of elementary and lower secondary schools are for your reference.*

The number of Kominkan used to be almost same as that of elementary schools, but now their number is decreasing; for example it dropped from 17,143 in 2005. In general, social education institutions and staff have also been decreasing recently, and the half of Kominkan staff is now part-time.

2.1. Social Education Institutions

Kominkan

Community Learning Center (CLC) is one of the popular terms for community-based non-formal education in Asian countries. Kominkan are similar to CLCs, which have a certain place to gather for activities, but they are mostly established and managed by municipalities such as cities, towns, or villages. The majority of the approximately 16,000 Kominkan provide not only space for classes and meetings, reading rooms, kitchens, Japanese-style rooms with *tatami* mats or tea ceremony rooms, day-care facilities, audio-visual rooms, and sports facilities, but also programs for life skills, hobbies, and culture. The purpose of the *Kominkan* is stated as

follows: “*Kominkan* shall provide the people living in specific areas, such as a city, town, or village, with education adapted to meet the demands of daily life, and implement academic and cultural activities. *Kominkan* shall contribute to the self-actualization/development/accomplishments of residents, improve health, develop character, vitalize daily culture, and enhance social welfare (Social Education Law, Article 20).” In addition to this public institution, the volunteer-based community learning centers, which residents financially contribute to and where they manage facilities that serve functions similar to *Kominkan*, are called “autonomous *Kominkan*.” There are as many as 70,000 autonomous ones, but the official figures at national level are not available. The local residents can also request to and develop programs they want to learn for their own purposes at the autonomous *Kominkan*.

Management of *Kominkan* is entrusted to the community and opened to all, regardless of age, gender, profession, or any other characteristics. In addition, profit-making, religious, and political activities are prohibited. A steering committee that includes residents to analyze and decide on various activities at the *Kominkan*, with the guidance of the *Kominkan* director, is generally established. Each *Kominkan* must evaluate its management and devise necessary measures to improve the management situation. The budget for *Kominkan* activities must be provided by the municipality, although participants sometimes have to pay for materials and the actual expenses of activities. In order to promote the development of *Kominkan*, the standards (in 2003) for their establishment and management, such as target areas, collaboration with other stakeholders, support for home education, promotion of volunteerism, and etc., have been set by MEXT. The national government celebrates annual superior *Kominkan*, which have met the needs of their respective communities, through the annual commendation system. Based on the recommendations of the prefectural boards of education, superior *Kominkan* are chosen by a selection committee formed by MEXT and receive commendations from the Minister.

In 2005, 472,697 courses were conducted and 244,349,217 participants came to *Kominkan*. Among the participants, 76% were affiliated or organizational users, 11% were independent users, 8% large-scale event participants, and 5% attended classes and courses. (MEXT & ACCU 2008: 14-15)

Libraries and Museums

The Library Law prescribes the establishment and management of libraries as social education institutions. Each local board of education establishes public libraries and assists private ones which are established by industrial corporations or independent organizations. Libraries not only collect documents and information, but also organize, archive, lend, and provide them, as well as hold events and guide the users. Digital archives have become common today, and some libraries actively provide online services for reservation of the books. The public library is one of the most accessible social education institutions for people from young to old.

Museums are the institutions which collect, keep, study, and exhibit cultural materials, documents, and other items to the public. The Museum Law prescribes the establishment and management of museums, galleries, zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, etc. There are also private museums. The number of museums is increasing, while the number of libraries is decreasing.

Houses for Youth and Children's Nature Houses

Houses for Youth are categorized into two types. One has a lodging program that develops sound-minded youth through group stays; the other is without lodging but aims at building friendship and communication among the youth through study, sports, and cultural activities. There are national and public houses. To celebrate the wedding of the crown prince, the present Emperor, in 1959, Houses for Youth started to be established. There have been 13 houses established across the nation since 1976. As a part of the centennial anniversary of the Education Ordinance, 14 Children's Nature Houses have been established since 1991. The National Olympics Memorial Youth Center, named after the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, is the leading institution with a capacity of 1500 lodgers. Children's nature houses always provide lodging so that children may appreciate and enjoy nature, and be cultivated through the experience of a group stay. The National Institution for Youth Education has managed all types of facilities since 2006.

Sports Institutions and Distance Social Education

Sports institutions are national, public, and private. The private ones are set by private companies and non-profit, or non-governmental, organizations. Tennis, baseball, football, and swimming are popular sports. Distance social education consists of correspondence learning activities, outside of formal school education, authorized by MEXT. Learning purpose of this distance education is not degrees, but mainly to pursue a hobby and skill development. Open University, an independent organization and formerly called "University of the Air," provides anyone who graduated from upper secondary school with a bachelor degree if the learner enrolls in a structured degree program. All of the course content, except for that presented during a small number of schooling days and on examinations, is offered by radio, TV, video, and the internet.

Social Education Organization

This is defined as "an organization outside of the control of a public authority that has the purpose of providing social education programs, whether or not it is a corporate body (Social Education Law, Article 10)." PTAs, children's associations, boy/girl scouts, and athletic

associations are typical examples. In addition to them there are other civil organizations whose establishment was accelerated by the NPO (Non-Profit Organization) Law of 1998 (amended 2008).

2.2. Social Education Staff

The five main types of social education official staff are as follows:

- 1) Supervisors and assistant supervisors for social education, who give professional and technical advice as well as guidance to personnel at boards of education and institutions;
- 2) Directors and curators of Kominkan, libraries, museums, etc.;
- 3) Kominkan supervisors who implement Kominkan programs;
- 4) Librarians and assistant librarians who engage in the professional work of libraries; and
- 5) Museum attendants and curators who engage in the professional work of museums.

Other types are small but various, from supervisors and lecturers, to technical staff for programs; these individuals conduct each task at the above social education institutions. Type 1), 4) and 5) above require official qualification attained by passing a public examination after taking the necessary courses at a university. Type 3) requires employment in the relevant municipality and a variety of training at national, prefectural, and municipal levels.

Outside of formal education, there can be social education staff such as teachers and instructors in technical and vocational institutions, agricultural extension advisors (certificated by the Ministry of Agriculture), and instructors in private culture centers and sports clubs, although MEXT does not directly exercise jurisdiction over them.

3. Recent Trends, International Cooperation, and the Future of Social Education

3.1. Kominkan for a Changing World

Kominkan and their activities are challenged by many social changes, such as the development of various media, people's diversified interests, the slow-down in economic growth, and population decline in Japan recently. The local economy and communities can hardly secure successors due to the aging population today. For example, a few Japanese private companies have been able to keep traditional training for their workers and the guarantee of lifetime employment even today, but the majority tends to give up such practices. This ironically promotes the workers to learn independently in educational and training programs provided by universities and private organizations for skill certificates, even though these certificates sometimes bring little promise of their promotion or finding a job. In light of such changes,

some local governments choose to close Kominkan down but open community centers in the same building for the wider needs of learning in restructuring public services when their resources are limited now that the jurisdiction over Kominkan in Social Education Law has been shifted to local mayors. Existing Kominkan are expected to play a more active role in such a difficult time.

A new Kominkan trend is that they have become more active in connection with school children to respond to the needs of the society and their own reorientation. To support school education in this period of child population decline, for example, *Kominkan* creates safe and comfortable places for children to come after school and on the weekends. The national government uses *Kominkan* and school buildings as bases for activities. It implemented a national "Program to Promote After-School Classes for Children [*Houkago Kodomo Kyoshitsu*]" first as a pilot project from 2004 to 2006, and then as a permanent program starting in 2007. The *Kominkan* staff is responsible for coordinating the program with their local board of education and schools. Families and community volunteers get involved in the planning and management of these classes.

Kominkan also target non-Japanese residents. The ratio of foreign residents was about 1.7% of the 126 million people that made up the total population in Japan in 2009 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications – Statistics Bureau, 2010). Although the foreign population is increasing, and Kominkan offer space to hold volunteer Japanese language classes for this group, there are still only a few courses authorized by official organizations for Japanese language education. Public opinion, industry, and governments have recently mentioned the necessity of importing a labor population as a countermeasure against the ageing Japanese society. Finding a job in Japan does not always require language fluency, but living in the local community does necessitate a minimum level of proficiency. Kominkan may play a key role in education both for the non-Japanese residents and foreign newcomers in the future, while measures and support systems for this demand will grow soon in the difficult condition in which adult education and continuing education tend to stay lower on the list of policy priorities than school education in Japan.

3.2. International Contexts for Social Education

The Japanese government and civil organizations together proactively showed the Kominkan activities at the 6th International Conference on Adult Education, or CONFINTEA VI, held in Brazil in 2009. The theme was, "Living and Learning for a Viable Future: The Power of Adult Learning." The conference provided an important platform for policy dialogue and advocacy for adult learning and non-formal education at the global level. UNESCO member states, United Nations agencies, multi- and bi-lateral cooperation agencies, organizations from civil society, representatives from the private sector, and learners from all world regions were involved. The

participants shared information and arranged for action based on the recognition of adult learning/education as an important element of and a factor conducive to lifelong learning, and of the crucial role of adult learning/education in realizing current international education and development agendas (EFA, MDGs, UNLD, LIFE, and DESD).

In addition to UNESCO, OECD is another key organization for Japan. Japan is participating in OECD-PIAAC (the Programme for the International Assessment for Adult Competencies), specifically, the feasibility study in 2010 and main study in 2011. PIAAC is the most comprehensive international survey of adult skills; it measures the skills and competencies needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies to prosper. The survey will be carried out by interviewing about 5,000 adults aged 16-65 years in each participating country to assess their literacy and numeracy skills and their ability to solve problems in technology-rich environments. The results will be released in 2013.

Japanese international cooperation/aid toward developing countries will hardly be revitalized as much as it used to be, because Japanese economic growth has seriously slowed down and stayed the same for the last two decades. But the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has several programs in the field of non-formal education – no matter what name is used within the Agency – such as agricultural extension, income generation, health and hygiene, empowerment of women, and literacy courses. The name "Kominkan" is also used in some areas, particularly in the ACCU literacy projects, and its approach could suit the community development in some countries. However, program evaluation is one of the most difficult tasks in any case of non-formal education projects under official assistance.

3.3. Social Education for Sustainability of Environments after the Fukushima Disaster

It can be described as Japanese characteristics of social education that official initiative and institutional supports are stronger than other Asian countries, and at the same time, the learning content is autonomously decided by the learners and participants. These factors should become more important since natural and social environments radically changed in the massive crisis in Fukushima.

There seems to have been an essential change in the scope of social education since the huge tragedy of the Fukushima earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis in March 2011. There are certain movements that people have begun to shift their lifestyles and values to more sustainable ones. It is also now more popular for ordinary people to participate in civil movements ever than before. Discussions about energy policy have grown in number, more families have become vocal about protecting their children from nuclear radiation, and collaborations have emerged between public and civil sectors. For example, the official social education staff and civil volunteers have started to cooperate to save the archives and institutes of social education

facilities (*see* Save MLAK: "Save Museum, Library, Archives, and Kominkan"). Civil demonstrations in public areas have become more frequent as a form of civil participation.

Japanese social education is understood as education separate from school education. However, as the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2009) illustrates, the importance of the continuum of learning among the categories of formal, non-formal, and informal forms of learning, based on the concepts provided by the European Commission (2000, 2001), implies that it may be high time to integrate more social education and school education into lifelong learning for Japan's tomorrow.

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社会教育制度（記述の要点）

1. 社会教育概要

1.1. 教育基本法と社会教育法、生涯学習の概念

- ・ 社会教育の定義
- ・ 生涯学習概念の包摂

1.2. 戦後以降の社会教育史

- ・ 公民館を中心とした近代社会教育史
- ・ 公民館について政府による主導と拡大

2. 社会教育の施設等と職員

社会教育施設等と職員の数

2.1. 社会教育施設等のまとめ

- ・ 公民館
- ・ 図書館と博物館
- ・ 国立青少年交流の家、国立青少年自然の家、国立オリンピック記念青少年総合センター
- ・ スポーツ振興・遠隔教育
- ・ 社会教育団体・NPO

2.2. 社会教育職員

- ・ 社会教育指導主事等

3. 国内外の状況変化に対する社会教育の将来

3.1. 変化する社会における公民館

- ・ 人口減少と経済停滞による変化と公民館
- ・ 在日・在留外国人への日本語教育の場
- ・ 諸外国の生涯学習の動きとの違い

3.2. 国際的文脈における社会教育

- ・ 国際成人教育会議での公民館の紹介
- ・ OECD-PIAAC 調査への参加
- ・ 我が国のノンフォーマル教育等による国際協力

3.3. 東日本大震災以後の持続可能な環境に向けた動き

- ・ 持続可能な環境と市民参加の拡大
- ・ 今後の社会教育概念が拡張する可能性