

International Perspectives in Geography

AJG Library 3

Yoshiyasu Ida · Minori Yuda
Takashi Shimura · Shunsuke Ike
Koji Ohnishi · Hideki Oshima *Editors*

Geography Education in Japan



Springer

International Perspectives in Geography

AJG Library 3

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Preface

Since education in Japan is conducted in Japanese, this is a barrier for non-Japanese speakers who are interested to learn about instructional practices and problems that exist in the country. Even though there is interest in Japanese geography education, there are few opportunities to learn about it owing to this language barriers.

Geography education researchers in Japan have not actively published in English language journals. Therefore, researchers and teachers in other countries only have limited information about the status of Japanese geography education. Recently, many scholars have organized international projects, which have contributed to developing collaboration across nations. From this perspective, a book published in English on geography education in Japan is a timely contribution to the field.

This book provides a comprehensive description of Japanese geography education from diverse viewpoints. The geography education committee of the Association of Japanese Geographers (AJG) led the editing work that resulted in a volume that is part of the International Perspectives in Geography: AJG Library series.

This book includes the following broad topics: introduction to geography education in Japan, regional geography and field surveys as essential elements of geography education, geography education and cooperation with the local community, support for teachers from professional geographers and the AJG, international comparative studies on geography education, and the future of geography education in Japan. The editing team greatly appreciates the hard work of all contributors to this book. We also thank Dr. Niem Tu Huynh for carefully reading through each chapter to make comments and suggest changes.

We hope this book will contribute to the improvement of geography education worldwide.

Ibaraki, Japan
Tokyo, Japan
Niigata, Japan
Tokyo, Japan
Toyama, Japan
Yokohama, Japan

Yoshiyasu Ida
Minori Yuda
Takashi Shimura
Shunsuke Ike
Koji Ohnishi
Hideki Oshima

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Introduction

The nature of geography education in Japan has rarely been communicated to the outside world. The goal of this book is to fill that gap and publicize Japan's geography education internationally by describing it systematically and in detail. In order to describe Japan's geography education system in detail, this book is made up of five different parts. Part I explains the current status of geography education within elementary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools in the Japanese school system. Consideration is also given to detailing geography textbooks and the official screening system they must pass. In Part II the focus is on the learning content of Japanese geography education, and we try to elucidate the characteristics of Japanese geography education, arranging them into six separate themes: regional descriptive geography lessons, field research, maps-globes, and cognitive space, social participation, education for sustainable development (ESD), and disaster preparedness. In Part III, we discuss geography teacher training and licensure procedures required to teach geography education. We continue by explaining the assistance that geography academic associations give to geography teachers and the support for teacher adoption of geographic information systems (GIS). In Part IV, focus is given to geography education research which provides theoretical support for the practical implementations. We review current geography education research and their significance in Japan to offer an overview of what is known about geography learning and teaching in Asia. Based on the contents of Parts I through IV, Part V considers the future of geography education in Japan. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster in March, 2011 delivered a major shock to the Japanese geography education community. Thus, we consider the direction of Japan's geography education after having had this experience. Taking the current situation into account, we discuss the future of geography education as a part of Social Studies as well as the geography curriculum in senior high schools. Finally, we describe the characteristics of Japanese geography education with an eye towards the future, and suggest a path to promote the spread of geography education.

In this book we use the following terms in the interests of uniformity: The guidelines for instructional content that are legally mandated, the *gakushū shidō yōryō*, are sometimes translated as “the course of study” but in this volume it is translated as “the National Curriculum Standards.” Subject names are capitalized. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology will be abbreviated as “MEXT”. The following names will be abbreviated as: the Association of Japanese Geographers (AJG), AJG-Commission of Geographical Education (AJG-CGE), the International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education (IGU-CGE).

Yoshiyasu Ida

Part I

Overview of Geography Education

in Japan

Chapter 1

Outline of Geography Education in Japan

Yoshiyasu Ida and Takashi Shimura

Abstract The aim of this chapter is to present an overview of the current situation of geography education in Japanese schools and consider its future in the country. Geography is part of the Social Studies curriculum in elementary and junior high schools, and it is an elective subject in senior high school. The main content of the geography curriculum in elementary school concentrates on the students' local environment. Japanese and world geography is the focus in junior high school, whereas world geography comprises the main content in senior high school. As for teacher training, there is an in-service training system in Japan. Furthermore, a teacher's license update system was recently implemented requiring compulsory training, which in some universities includes fieldwork training. This chapter also addresses political issues affecting geography education and surveys how geography education groups can appeal to the government and the public, to highlight the importance of geography in schools.

Keywords Geography education • In-service teacher training system • Japan • New National Curriculum Standards

1.1 Education System and Geography

1.1.1 *Overview of the Education System and Geography-Related Subjects*

The latest version of the National Curriculum Standards in Japan was published in 2008/2009. While the former curriculum emphasized methods of learning, the new curriculum focuses on the importance of acquiring fundamental knowledge. This revision is grounded in the philosophy “Bringing Knowledge Back In” (Young 2008) that is seen in developed countries in the 21st global competitive society. Geography education is not an exception to this trend.

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We first present an overview of the current situation of geography education in Japanese schools and consider future teaching options available, with a focus on curricula and in-service teacher training.

Since the beginning of modern education in Japan, in the late nineteenth century, the school system has been strictly administrated by the Ministry of Education (MEXT).¹ The government established a uniform national education system by means of the Educational Ordinance in 1872 and Education Order in 1879, which included the National Curriculum Standards. This marked the first educational reform in Japan. In this curriculum system, Geography was an independent and compulsory subject, in addition to History (Japanese history) and Morals (*Shyuushin*) in elementary schools.

In 1947, just after World War II and under the Allied occupation, there was a second educational reform that used the U.S. educational system as its reference. The school system adopted a 6-3-3 structure (6 years of elementary school, and 3 years each of junior high and senior high school). The length of compulsory education was increased from 6 to 9 years, extending the school age of students from 6 to 15 years old. This system has continued to the present day; elementary and junior high schools remain compulsory.²

Under this education system, MEXT enacts and revises the National Curriculum Standards at approximately 10-year intervals. The first National Curriculum Standards reform in 1947 introduced the new subject area of Social Studies borrowed from the U.S. curriculum. As a result, geography and history were integrated into Social Studies which emphasized problem-solving skills. However, a systematic method of learning was adopted for Social Studies after 1955. This measure was taken for various reasons, including the fact that the ability to solve problems only provided fragments of knowledge.

Learning centered on problem-solving was criticized, and a systematic method of learning was feared that this instructional method stressed cramming of information or overly emphasized rote learning. This led to careful selection of learning content and experiences for the 1989 National Curriculum Standards. In elementary schools, Social Studies and Science were abolished in the first and second grades and replaced by Life Environmental Studies, which emphasized experience. This change marked the beginning of the third educational reform, which is used in the present education system. In the 1989 revision, high school level Social Studies was separated into two new subjects: Geography and history, and Civics.

In recent years, new criticism arose faulting the current school curriculum for failing to teach basic knowledge. In response, the revised 2008/2009 National Curriculum Standards once again emphasized the acquisition of basic knowledge in all subjects. The new curriculum also focuses on social participation, or means of personal contribution to society. Table 1.1 outlines the current Japanese school system and geography-related subjects.

¹The current office is the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

²All senior high schools have an entrance examination. However, the percentage of students who attend high school is currently around 98 %.

Table 1.1 School system and geography-related subjects in Japan

1.1.2 *Geography in the Japanese Education System*

1.1.2.1 Social Studies Curriculum in Elementary Schools

In the first National Curriculum Standards (1947), Social Studies was considered the most important subject, known as a core subject, because of the significant role it played in creating a democratic society in Japan. Therefore, teaching Social Studies involved many hours of lessons, comprising 16.5 % of total elementary school classroom hours. Since then, however, the number of hours dedicated to Social Studies have decreased.

The implementation of a new subject area, Life Environmental Studies, replaced Social Studies and Science at the first and second grade levels in 1989. By 2002, a new subject called Integrated Studies, included in all grade levels, had a huge impact on Social Studies education. After 2002, only 6.4 % of classroom hours were dedicated to Social Studies (Tabe 2004). Table 1.2 shows unit hours allocated to Social Studies per year (MEXT 2008). The curriculum regulation defines one school year as having 35 weeks of instruction, which translates to only 2 or 3 class hours per week of Social Studies from third to sixth grade.

Overall, the aims of elementary Social Studies in the National Curriculum Standards are³: (1) to develop an understanding of life in society; (2) to develop an understanding and love for Japan's land and history; and (3) to foster foundational qualities of citizens who are members of a peaceful and democratic country and society. These aims respectively correspond to an understanding of Japanese society, geography, history, skills, values, and attitudes. This structure is the same in each school grade, while the final goal of Social Studies is to foster students' understanding of basic contributions as a citizen to the nation.

Social Studies in elementary schools encompass broad and comprehensive content. The term "Geography" is not used in textbooks, but many geography-related topics are included in all grades although the content and expectations are different across each grade level (Table 1.3). In this table, columns are divided by strands into geography, history, and civics. The instruction emphasis is on geography and civics in grades 3 and 4, geography in grade 5, and history and civics in grade 6. However,

Table 1.2 Unit hours allocated to Social Studies per year (National Curriculum Standards 2008 edition)

Grade	Elementary				Junior high school		
	3rd	4th	5th	6th	1st	2nd	3rd
Social Studies	70	90	100	105	105	105	140
Total unit hours of schooling	945	980	980	980	1,015	1,015	1,015

Course length: 1 unit hour is 45 min in elementary school, 50 min in junior high school

³There is no English version of the course of study in Social Studies that is authorized by MEXT. The text is a translation by the authors.