

TEACHERS FACING THE CONFUSION AND CONFLICTS IN TODAY'S JAPAN*

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I. *Introduction*

This paper examines the recent teaching environment in Japan. It focuses especially on the social, institutional and pedagogical challenges to the status of teachers during the last decade. Some changes are occurring gradually over a long term, and others unfold more rapidly. But whether short or long term the changes are now causing difficulties, confusion, and conflicts among school teachers.

II. *The Era of Hardship for Japanese Teachers*

Could it be said that in the past there was a "Golden Age" for Japanese teachers? In our interview I listened to several retired teachers say "The period of the 1950s was the Golden Age for us". (Kudomi, 1995) This is perhaps open to question, but in my opinion the 1990s will someday be referred to as an "Era of Hardship" for Japanese teachers.

The following phenomenon reveals how hard the period is for them:

- 1) Wide disorder occurs in the classrooms of primary and secondary schools, such as chattering among pupils, not listening to the teachers, walking around without permission, and even entering and leaving the classroom during lesson time. This situation diminishes teachers' authority and makes it difficult to form normal teacher-pupil relationships. It also creates severe conditions for teachers.
- 2) High rates of exhaustion among teachers are manifested by high rates of illness (Figure 1), a continuously increasing number of mental disorders (Figure 2), a high rate of 'burnout' (Table 1 & 2), early retirement or quitting the job despite the benefits of the long-term employment system (Table 3), etc. This means not only that the teachers' work is demanding, but also that it is hard to perform successfully now in Japan and so leads to exhaustion.

Although the signs of Japanese teachers' hardship are not only limited to the above, two such points in particular sufficiently illustrate the extremity of the situations which Japanese teachers face today.

* This paper is the extended version of my report, "Teachers in Changing Society—their confusion, conflicts and 'getting through'", at the International Conference on the 50th Anniversary of Japanese Association for the Sociology of Education in Tokyo on 28th August 1999.

FIGURE 1. THE RATIO OF SICK TEACHERS AT HEALTH CHECKUP: 1977~97 IN NAGANO PREFECTURE

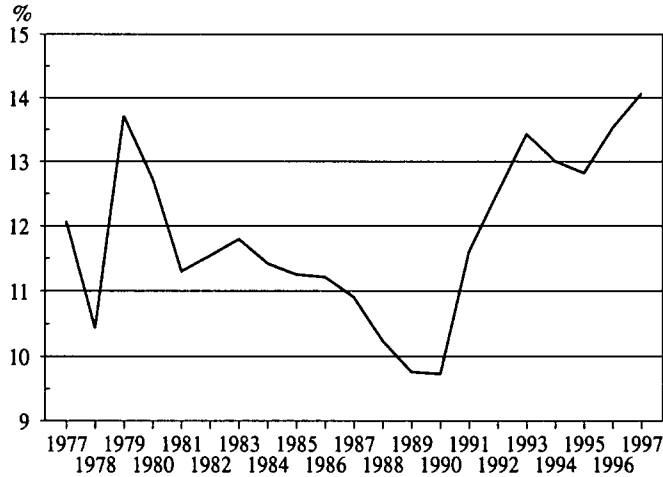


FIGURE 2. THE NUMBER OF TEACHERS ON SICK LEAVE OF ABSENCE FROM WORK AND THE CORRESPONDING RATIO OF MENTAL DISORDERS; 1978-97

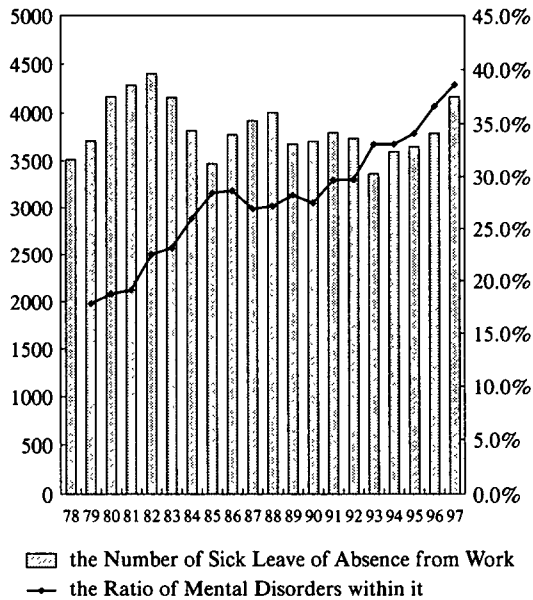


TABLE 1. THE LEVEL OF 'BURNOUT' ACCORDING TO SEVERAL PROFESSIONS

Professions / A Survey; 1985		Burnout (or danger of)
Teachers	(n=204)	41.2%
Nurse	(n=164)	31.7%
Doctor (internal)	(n=78)	17.9%
Doctor (mental)	(n=121)	20.7%
Doctor (pediatrics)	(n=18)	16.7%
Kinds of Job within school/B Survey; 1989		
Principal	(n=29)	13.8%
Head Teacher	(n=37)	18.9%
Chief Teacher	(n=210)	38.6%
Teacher	(n=461)	50.9%
School Nurse	(n=31)	54.9%

*A Survey;1985 Doi, T., ed., *Moetuki-shokogun (Burnout Syndrome)*, Kongo-Shuppan, 1989

**B Survey;1989 Okatoh & Suzuki, *Kyoshi no Kimmukozo to Mental Health (Work and Mental Health of Teachers)*, Taga-Shuppan, 1997

TABLE 2. THE LEVEL OF 'BURNOUT' AMONG SCHOOLTEACHERS

level of burnout	C Survey	D Survey
1. Doing Well	45.9%	41.8%
2. Danger Signs of Burnout	34.1%	34.4%
3. Burnout	14.7%	16.4%
4. Acute Burnout	5.3%	7.4%

*C Survey: 1991-92, n=1,285 in Chiba Prefecture (Kudomi (ed.), 1994)

**D Survey: 1994, n=2,172 in Osaka, *Kyoshi no Taboka to Burnout (Becoming Busy and Burnout of Teachers)*, Hosei-shuppan, 1996

TABLE 3. THE NUMBER OF RETIREMENTS OR QUITTING THE TEACHERS: FROM 1995 TO 1998 IN TOKYO

	Retirement at 60		Retirement Earlier than 60		Quitting the Teacher		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1995	1,126	65.7	219	12.8	370	21.6	1,715	100.0
1996	1,104	63.5	263	15.1	371	21.3	1,738	100.0
1997	1,108	60.3	347	18.9	383	20.8	1,838	100.0
1998	763	53.6	318	22.3	343	24.1	1,424	100.0

III. *Changes in Educational Demography and the Position and Work of Teachers in Japan*

Educational Demography refers to the demographic phenomena concerning education or the statistics and analysis of them. In addition to births, marriages and deaths, the phenomena include the numbers and rates of people attending schools, going on to a higher level of education and graduation, etc.

One of the important changes in this field is that the total number of teachers in primary and secondary education, which had been increasing continuously from 1900 to 1991, suddenly began to decrease in the 1990s (Table 4 & Figure 3). This decrease is ordinarily explained by the decreasing number of children in Japan. However, the decrease in the number of children is not directly linked to the decreasing number of newly recruited teachers. Between these two observations one must also consider the education policy which has maintained class sizes up to 40 pupils for the past 20 years.

The increase in the total number of teachers, which was sustained for 90 years during the process of modernisation and was then followed by a sudden decrease, has had a direct effect on teachers' lives. Teachers' colleges have been restructured drastically. The image of teachers as respected members of a developing profession is disappearing. More importantly, each school only has a small number of young teachers in their 20s or 30s (Table 5). In our rapidly changing society, there appears to be a generation gap opening up between the young and the old. In schools, teachers represent the old generation and pupils represent the young generation (Mannheim, 1928). The presence of young teachers helps to fill the gap between the two generations. Therefore, the rapidly decreasing number of newly recruited young teachers makes the inter-generational communication more difficult.

TABLE 4. THE NUMBER OF SCHOOLTEACHERS IN JAPAN BEFORE W.W.II.: 1875~1945

Age	Primary	Post-primary	Secondary	For Handicapped	Total
1875 (Meiji8)	44565	—	893	—	45458
1880 (Meiji13)	72562	—	1648	13	74226
1885 (Meiji18)	99510	—	1880	24	101414
1890 (Meiji23)	67730	—	1806	23	69559
1895 (Meiji28)	73182	71	2585	24	75862
1900 (Meiji33)	92899	321	6582	55	99857
1905 (Meiji38)	109975	1272	10398	138	121783
1910 (Meiji43)	152011	2260	14362	298	168931
1915 (Taisho4)	162992	2815	17823	455	184085
1920 (Taisho9)	185349	4171	22772	517	212809
1925 (Taisho14)	209894	9821	36817	718	257250
1930 (Showa5)	234799	19078	46330	1027	301234
1935 (Showa10)	257691	68179	50591	1289	377750
1940 (Showa15)	287368	96820	62607	1479	448274
1945 (Showa20)	310281	81327	91594	1645	484847

FIGURE 3. THE NUMBER OF SCHOOLTEACHERS IN JAPAN AFTER W. W. II.

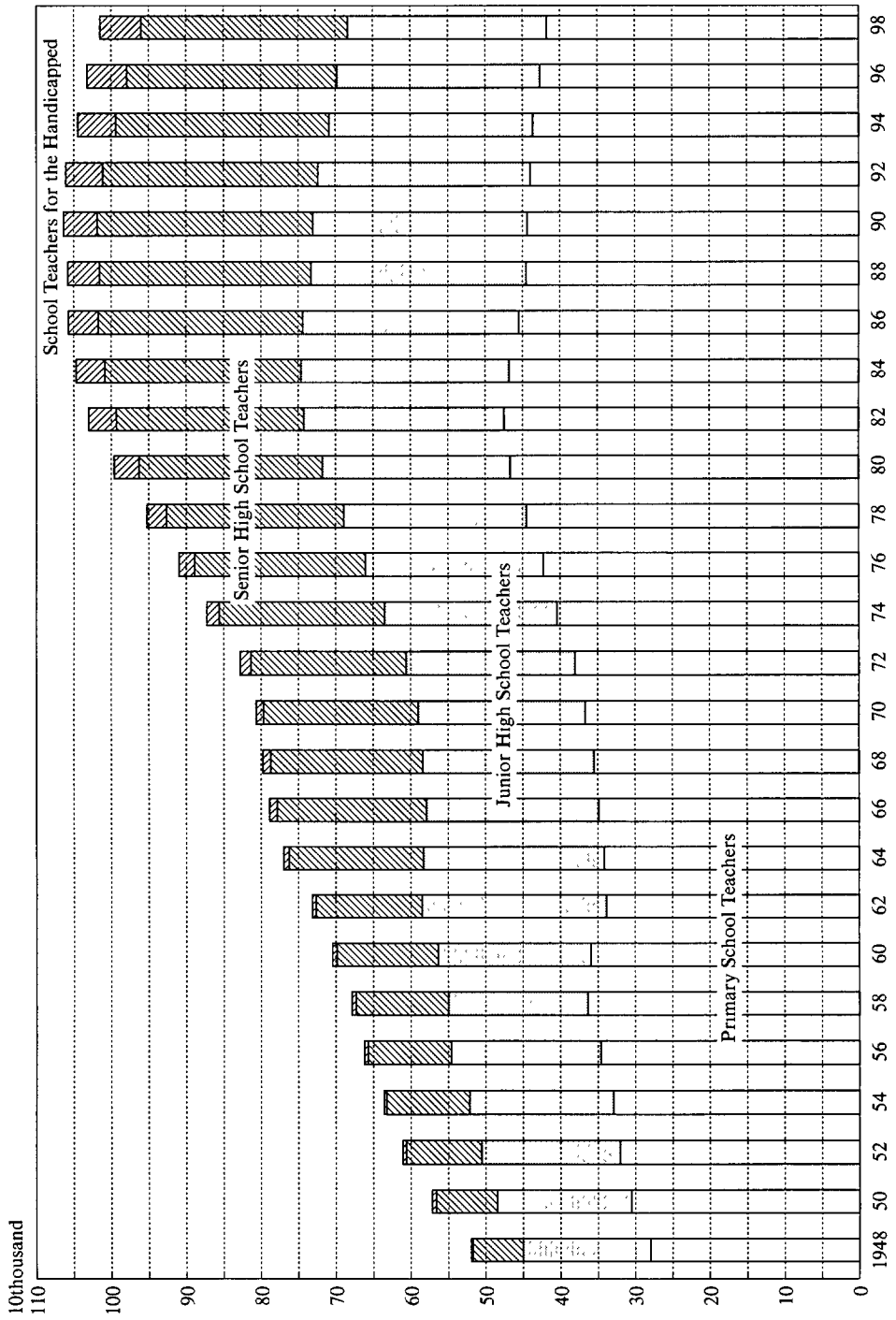


FIGURE 4. THE RATIO OF STUDENTS WHO GO ON TO A HIGHER LEVEL OF SCHOOLING IN JAPAN; 1950-99

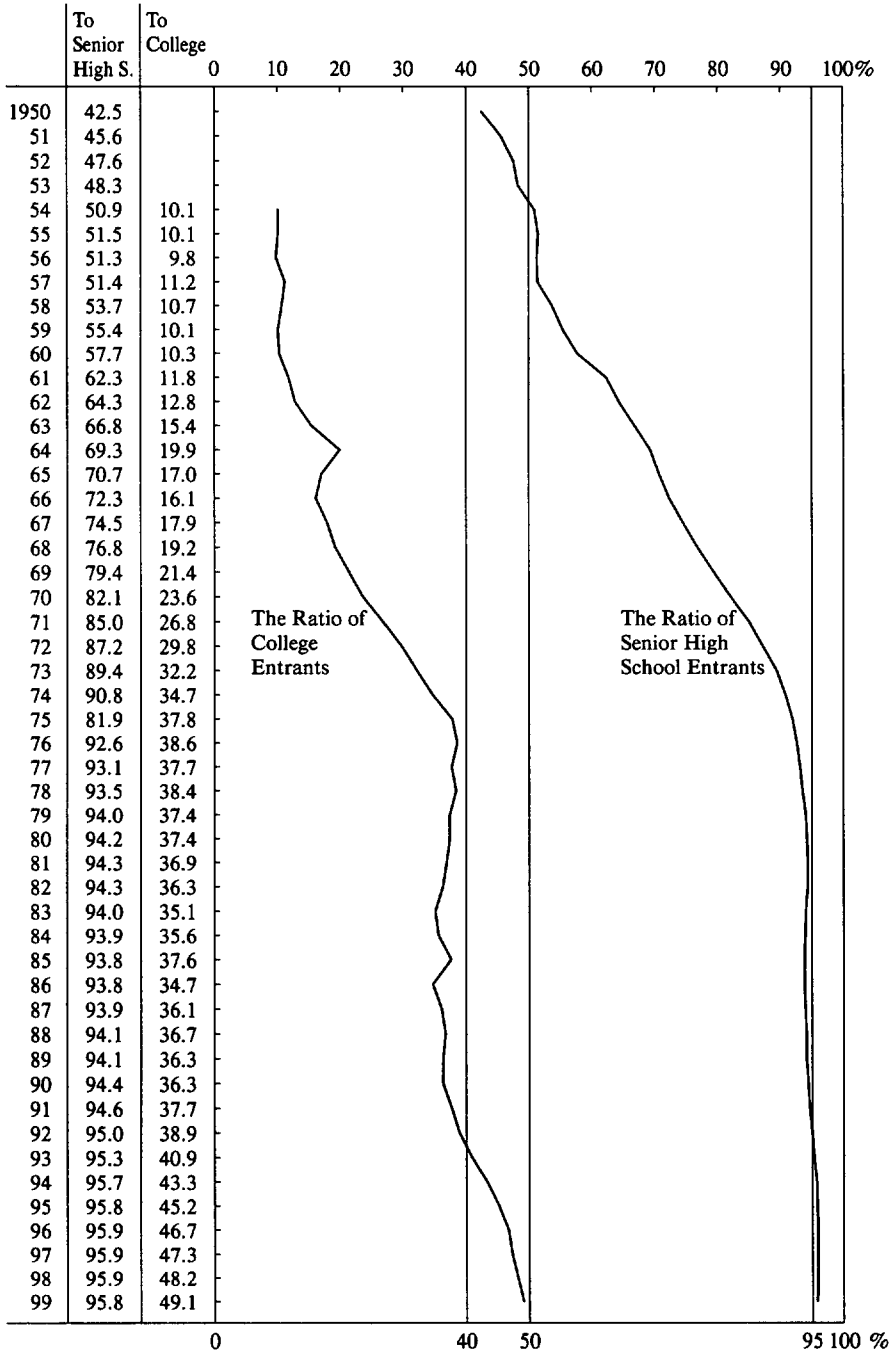


TABLE 5. THE RATIO OF SCHOOLTEACHERS IN EACH AGE GROUP IN JAPAN IN 1995 & 1998

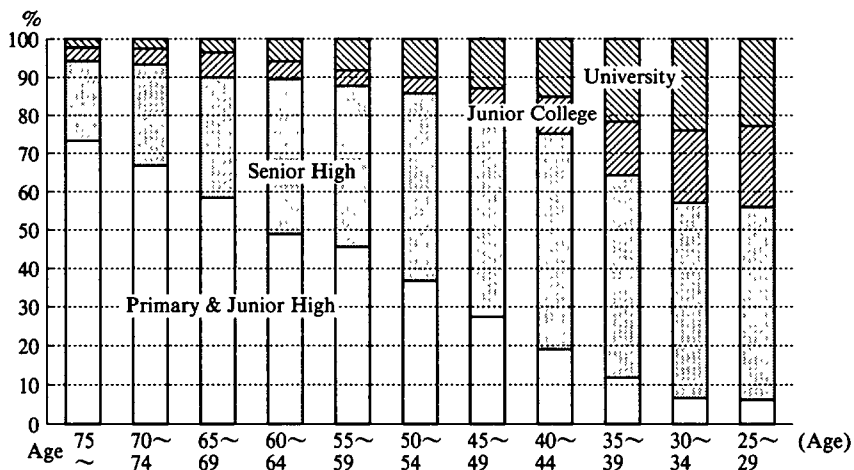
	Group Year	~24	25~29	30~34	35~39	40~44	45~49	50~54	55~59	60~
		Primary	95	2.9	11.5	15.1	20.7	19.1	13.9	8.4
	98	1.7	9.0	13.6	17.2	22.1	17.5	11.5	6.8	0.6%
Junior High	95	3.2	12.7	19.9	21.0	15.2	10.9	7.8	8.2	1.1%
	98	2.5	11.4	16.0	21.8	18.3	13.5	8.7	6.9	0.9%
Senior High	95	2.5	9.5	16.8	15.8	14.9	13.5	13.3	10.4	3.2%
	98	1.8	8.8	13.3	17.6	15.5	14.9	12.2	13.0	3.0%

Another important change in the educational demography is that many parents have reached a higher academic level in their own schooling. In Japan, from 1960 to 1975 the rate attending higher education expanded from 10% to 35% and in senior secondary level from 55% to 90% during the same period (Figure 4). Such expansion of schooling should be linked to parents' higher academic levels 20 or 30 years later (Figure 5), especially in the suburbs of large cities.

W. Waller defined teachers as "paid agents of cultural diffusion" in the local community (Waller, 1932, p. 40). If in the local community there is a small number of intelligentsia and teachers represent a sector in it, their position and role as "agents of cultural diffusion" might easily be secured. On the contrary, when parents' academic level becomes higher and that of teachers loses its scarcity value, teachers' social position would be downgraded and their intellectual authority over parents and pupils also decreases. This is the case in the 1990s, although this tendency has displayed differences according to each community.

Of course, there are other factors that influence the downgraded social position of teachers, such as, the development of "Juku" and "Yobiko" (the kind of schools where pupils mainly prepare for the entrance examinations) which captured the privileged position from

FIGURE 5. THE LEVEL OF SCHOOLING OF EACH AGE GROUP IN 1992 IN JAPAN



state schools on developing the ability of students to pass the examinations. Nevertheless, the demographic change concerning the academic level of parents is certainly an important factor in teachers' downgraded social position.

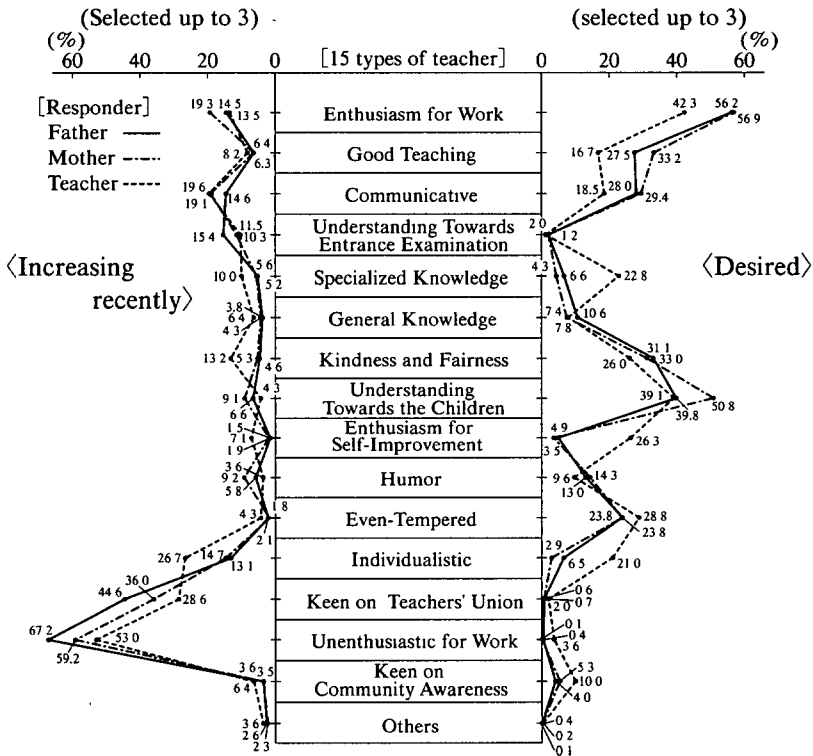
IV. "Joho-Shohi Shakai" (Information=Consuming Society) and Teachers

Another aspect of social changes is that there has been a gradual expansion of a phenomenon, so-called "Joho-Shohi Shakai" (information=consuming society) influencing our lives and especially children's lives (Nakanishi, 1998). "Joho-Shohi Shakai" means

- (1) mass information, the rapid development of new information technology, various providers of knowledge, etc.
- (2) that such information is often concentrated on one case or one theme which attracts people's interests at that time.
- (3) that such a flood of information is consumed by people for a short span of time, and then their curiosity wanes.

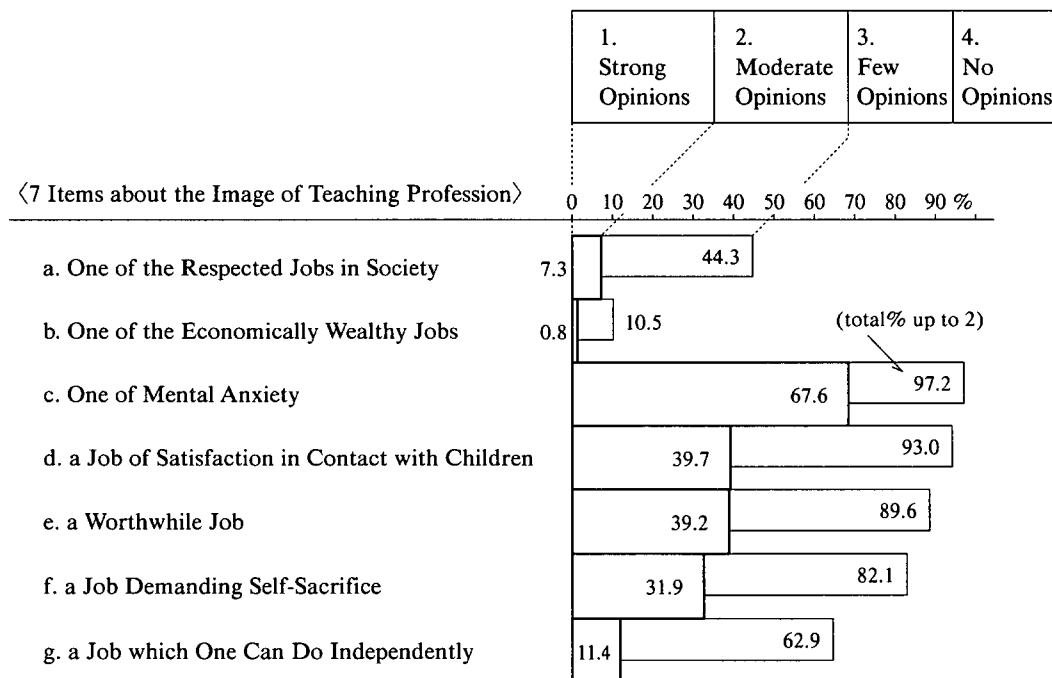
This change has had a de-structing effect on the privileged images of "teachers" and "school

FIGURE 6. THE TYPES OF TEACHERS (INCREASING [VS] DESIRED)



※ Quoted from Yano (1979)

FIGURE 7. THE IMAGE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION (BY TEACHERS)



※ quoted from Kudomi (1992)

knowledge” which had previously helped to maintain the teacher=pupil relationships.

Here I would like to pick up an example of a conception of teachers, as a “self-sacrificing” one. In Japan, we have had a concept of teachers as enthusiastic and considerate to pupils. In a statistical study (Figure 6), both parents and teachers were asked to select from 15 types of ‘good teacher’, and the results show that “enthusiasm for work” and “understanding towards the children” came out in the first and second place rather than “having good teaching technique” or “knowledgeable” (Yano, 1979). In other research (Figure 7), the majority of respondents (teachers) revealed the ordinary image of a teachers job as “rather poor salary, high in anxiety and self-sacrifice, but enjoyable with children and worth the effort” (Kudomi, 1992).

Some images concerning a group of people who have a similar social position compose a ‘conception’, which is linked to the self-image of the group and frames relations between them and others (Yamamura, 1970). Thus, the images above compose a conception of the ‘self-sacrificing teacher’. And therefore the conception is linked to the self-image of teachers and frames the relations between teachers and others –pupils, parents and society.

This conception was created and spread by the Government in the 1920s, when the profession of a schoolteacher was popularized in Japan (Nakauchi, 1995) and has been accepted by teachers, pupils, parents and society for about a half century. It might easily be

assumed that the sharing of the conception of the 'self-sacrificing' teacher among teachers, pupils, parents and society helped teachers to secure the trust and authority over pupils and parents.

However, this conception has been weakening since the middle of the 1970s. Nowadays it is only a kind of ideal or mirror for criticizing the teachers. One reason why such a strong conception lost ground is that there were several serious cases involving school children during the period (1975-1990s) in which Japanese teachers displayed characteristics contrary to this ideal. Another reason is that in such cases mass media presented a huge amount of information on it to the public, having nothing from the 1920s with which to compare. By the mechanism of the information=consuming society, adding to the huge amount of information, the concentratedly produced information on one case (ex. child commit suicide through being bullied), is consumed by people for a rather short span, and when the next case which attracted people's attention at that time (ex. the collapse of school order due to disruptive pupils) happened, the previous case lost its curiosity and became stale.

The weakening of the shared conception of the teacher might make it difficult for teachers to manage the teacher=pupil relationships, and so the teachers' job might become much more demanding.

Theoretically and historically school knowledge and school teachers have been given a privileged status. Whether or not pupils are interested in school knowledge, a strong power makes it accepted by pupils as worth studying.

As the privileged meaning and image of the "teacher" have been de-structured by the mechanism of the information=consuming society, so the same mechanism has de-structured the privileged status of "school knowledge" in society. Nakanishi described that pupils in recent Japan, who continuously consume mass information in their daily lives, often ask the questions, "Why must I learn these subjects at school?" or "Why aren't I allowed to have a choice in listening to teachers as I do when choosing a TV channel?" (Nakanishi, 1998, p. 121)

The information=consuming society might undermine the traditional attractiveness of academy ("the unthinkable", Bernstein, 1996) and also diminish the shared attractiveness of school knowledge which is "the thinkable" but linked to "the unthinkable".

These social changes diminish the privileged status of school knowledge, and school knowledge is the very thing which teachers make efforts to transmit to pupils and to let them acquire. Therefore, the changes also downgrade the privileged position of school teachers as "knowledge transmitter".

This situation means that the "legitimacy" of school knowledge is now getting weaker together with that of school teachers. Although the information=consuming society is not the only factor that has caused the wavering of the legitimacy of them, as a result of such weakening or wavering of the legitimacy, further more difficulties emerge in the managing of teacher=pupil relationships which is naturally not so easy. Thus the changes described in this section might be a part of the important background which lies behind the collapse of school class order in Japan even in primary schools.

V. *The Breakdown of the Bubble Economy and the Deadlock of the Pedagogy Based on Competitive Education*

Competitive education means that the value put on competition and winning covers every activity in school education. Competitive education in Japan has developed from the 1960s and made up a specific meritocratic order in the educational system until the end of the 1980s which was linked to the meritocratic order of working society (Kudomi, 1995). Its specificity showed the figures as such;

- (1) small divided strata of ranks from the top to the bottom, especially in senior secondary and higher education levels,
- (2) almost all pupils, regardless of their respective social classes or their rank in academic achievement, being attracted to the competition and being competitive within their own academic strata.

From a pedagogical viewpoint, competitive education means that in the process of 'transmission=acquisition' of school knowledge competition acts as the main stimulant.

Generally, in the modern school system, it is normal for people to be attracted to schools with competitive and meritocratic incentives, whether strong or weak these incentives correspond to a particular era, nation and class, etc. That is to say, competitive education is one of the types of modern education, but also to say it's an exceptional type.

For the last four decades in Japan, pupils have studied under the pedagogy based on competitive education. Most pupils have concentrated their interest in competition in education and the entrance examinations, and lost their genuine interest in school knowledge in each subject itself.

According to the International Test on Mathematics and Science by I.E.A. , Japanese pupils showed the top rank of achievement among about 40 countries. But at the same time, they showed the bottom rank in terms of a positive attitude about the subjects, such as, "to like it (the subject)", "to think that it is important in life" and "to want to do some job using it". Here we can see a curious result –an unbalance between high ability and low attitude –which was produced by a specific pedagogy unique to Japan and South Korea, compared with other countries in the world.

However the focus of this paper is not to analyze such competitive education itself, but to refer to the newly emerging conditions in the 1990s in which competitive education and its pedagogy are facing deadlock.

Competitive education in Japan was linked to and supported by the highly productive "Kigyo Shakai" (a society strongly ruled by big enterprises). In the 1990s in Japan, the bubble economy collapsed and an economic depression has continued. Japanese "Kigyo Shakai" has lost its high productivity and its order has been wavering in many respects. Firstly, the depression and the ensuing unemployment have generally suppressed parents' ability to pay the extra fees required by "Juku" and private schools. Furthermore, frequent re-structuring in many big companies and the dismissal of many, particularly among the middle aged, white-colour workers have brought about a weakening in the story, a long-standing belief, that being employed in large enterprises implied life-long stability and social status.

Another factor is the tendency to have fewer children. In the 1990s in Japan, the T.F.R. (total fertility rate) decreased to under 1.5 and is still falling (1.38 in 1998).

All these factors have an effect on weakening a pressure and stimulation of competition in education. Such stimulation still remains, but is confined to the top ranks of the meritocratic order in school system. However, the remaining 80-90% show little competitive initiative. So it might be said that the specific figures of the meritocratic order under competitive education in Japan, mentioned above, have changed their characteristics.

And sadly to say, though the competitive attitude has subsided in the bracket among the mainly (80-90%) of pupils, there has been no revival of pupils' actual interest in individual subject material, which has been suppressed by competitive education for a long time.

Most importantly in this situation, there is occurring a wide spread phenomenon of "students' losing the will to study", such as, their ignoring class teaching in class lesson - physically they are attending, but mentally they are not. They can not find or feel the meaning to study the subjects in the school curriculum. The classroom disorder is characteristic one of the problems facing education in Japan.

Outside school, they similarly escape from studying. The average number of hours spent on homework by Japanese pupils is shorter than that of pupils in the U. S. A. according to an international comparative survey in 1995 (Somucho, 1996). According to our survey in Tokyo in 1998, 60% of Junior Secondary School pupils do not do homework as a custom, although they are often asked to do it by teachers. Furthermore, the rate of attending "Juku" has for the first time in four decades shown a decrease in numbers.

One of the most important educational issues currently debated in Japan is the lowered academic ability of Japanese students in universities and schools.

It can therefore be summarized that this problem means a deadlock of pedagogy based on competitive education. Japan is now keen to find a new mode of pedagogy, instead of the old one which is based on competition, but the shifts we are making have not been successful yet.

VI. *The change of pedagogy under the Education Reform and Confusion and Conflicts among School Teachers*

All the points previously mentioned are contexts in which recent social and institutional changes have occurred and to which the difficulties of teachers are linked. We can see that the difficulties focus on the level of pedagogy.

On the pedagogic level, another phenomenon we might consider in the 1990s in Japan is the recent education reform. The reform is in a sense 'offensive', that is, Government policy has brought up the relevant pedagogy to all schools and teachers.

The 1990s in Japan brought changes in the curriculum and evaluation policy implemented by the Government. The rhetoric of the reform included such saying as "not the amount of knowledge but creativity", "from uniformity to individuality" or "no undue emphasis on knowledge but pupils' interests and motivation".

Applying the concepts of Basil Bernstein, this can be described as a shift from +C / +F [strong classification and strong framing] to -C / -F [weak classification and weak framing] in ORF[official recontextualizing field].

There is not only rhetoric, but there is in fact an emphasis on pupils' interests, motivation and attitudes in pedagogic practices and assessment, and there is also a substantial introduction of the "Sogo-teki Gakushu" (inclusive learning -the typical mode of [-C]) into the school curriculum.

We can detect in these trends of education reform the Government's aim to get over the weakness of the 'pedagogy based on competitive education' and its outcome (students' ability and identity), which has so well fitted the Japanese "Kigyo Shakai" for many years. The weak points of the pedagogy and its outcome have been masked by the suitability to this order and now exposure among the wavering of the order.

In turn, these changes in the curriculum and evaluation constitute a very large and fundamental shift in pedagogy. In order to realize such a shift, not only drastic change in the pedagogic position of teachers but also the provision of requisite conditions are required for this shift, that is, "the costs of competence model" as described by Bernstein (1996). Table 6 shows that the 'competence model' is a pedagogy of $[-C / -F]$ and the 'performance model' is that of $[+C / +F]$. Then applying these new concepts of Basil Bernstein, the shift in Japan this decade can be described as a shift 'from the performance model to the competence model' in ORF. The competence model requires a high autonomy of teachers, because the teacher conducts the pedagogy under weak classification and weak framing, and "operates with a theory of reading through the product the acquirer offers (or does not offer) to the teacher" (p. 61). Furthermore, the costs of this model are high. The examples of "high cost" in Table 6 refer to the costs of training the teachers to study the theoretical base of the competence model, and to "hidden costs if the competence model is to be successful in its own term. The hidden costs are time based." (pp. 62-63) The time based hidden costs are required to construct teachers' own pedagogic resources, to establish the profile of each acquirer, and to discuss projects with groups, etc. If these conditions are not provided, it may give rise to "the fatigue of teachers" (p. 63).

From the view of such costs, the pedagogic shift in the 1990s in Japan, which Government policy has brought up, has been proceeding without considering the cost conditions. In particular, the limit of class size is still 40. High autonomy of teachers has not been secured, but can be said to have decreased. A further aspect of education reform, the competition and accountability model of Neo-liberalism, opposes the new pedagogic model. This is because in the competence model evaluation is not explicit. Therefore it is difficult for schools or teachers to be competitive or accountable.

It is naturally a demanding task for teachers to adopt the new pedagogic procedures.

TABLE 6. RECONTEXTUALIZED KNOWLEDGE

	Competence models	Performance models
1. Categories:		
Spece	Weakly Classified	Strongly Classified
Time		
Discourse		
2. Evaluation Orientation	Presences	Absences
3. Control	Implicit	Explicit
4. Pedagogic Text	Acquirer	Performance
5. Autonomy	High	Low/High
6. Economy	High Cost	Low Cost

* Quoted from Bernstein (1996)

Furthermore they lack the physical conditions for such new pedagogy. In this respect there might occur some confusion and conflicts among Japanese schools and teachers.

Although there are other factors causing such confusion, the very factor that education reform, which is expected to cope with the difficulties in schools, amplifies the confusion and conflicts among school teachers is important and decisive.

VII. Conclusion

This paper analysed difficult situations experienced by Japanese schools and teachers. Many points suggested that the school difficulties revolve around teachers' work and their pedagogy. The 'Era of Hardship' for Japanese teachers may indeed be called the era of "confusion concerning school pedagogy".

We clearly have to overcome the old-fashioned pedagogy based on competition. However ironically and unfortunately before having overcome this pedagogy and taking a new direction the competitive pedagogy itself has already faced a deadlock. We are experiencing a situation as confusion where there is no dominant or relevant pedagogy at either the primary or secondary levels of education. Teachers are unable to secure effective, relevant resources and procedures to conduct the transmission=acquisition process in their school lessons.

One aspect of major importance in education reform is the alleviation of the pressure on teachers. This is one focus of education policy and reform in Japan.

Another aspect is more complex. We should not return to the competitive pedagogy, but we should overcome the traditional [+C / +F] mode of pedagogy, which is the most familiar type with the competitive pedagogy, and is also the typical pedagogic style in the latterly modernizing countries. This type has for many years been dominant in Japan. But we can not shift to the pure [-C / -F] so swiftly for several reasons. Both explicit and implicit pedagogic theories among the academy, teachers and people still do not fit into the competence mode ([-C / -F]), and we lack the conditions and resources required for this pedagogic mode, as mentioned above. Moreover, whether the pure [-C / -F] itself is good or not for public schooling is still an unsolved issue.

Among the confusion, we will endeavour to find a new direction of pedagogy.

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