

# **Geographical Contents of the National Social Studies Curriculum in Japanese Primary Schools**

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## **I . Purpose of this paper and school education system in Japan**

Purpose of this paper is to introduce geographical content in the National Primary Social Studies Curriculum in Japan and to exam the curriculum from geographical education view.

The Japanese modern school education system started in 1872 and the system has been administrated rigidly by the Ministry of Education, MEXT<sup>2</sup>, and the National Curriculum for example. The current system was established in 1947. It was the period after the World War 2nd and in the system that primary school<sup>3</sup> is 6 years (6-12 years old), lower secondary school is 3 years (12-15 years old), upper secondary school is 3 years (15-18 years old), university is 4 years (18-22 years old), and primary and lower secondary are compulsory education. This system model was United States school system and, geography subject and history subject has been integrated social studies.

**Fig. 1** shows geography related subjects in Japanese school system. In primary education, social studies had been taught all school years until 1991 FY. The 1989 revised National Curriculum enacted by MEXT unified social studies with science in 1st and 2nd years into new subject Life Environment Studies, and the new subject has been practiced from 1992 FY. During from 3rd to 6th school years in primary school, geography is integrated in a subject Social Studies.

In lower secondary school, subject is Social Studies, but it has 3 fields that consisted from geography, history and civics. Geography field and history field are usually taught independently on a school timetable and a school textbook. In upper secondary school, the social studies was divided into geography and history, and civics by 1989 revision. Geography is sub-subject of geography and history. World history is compulsory Sub-subject, both of Geography and Japanese history is elective sub-subject.

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2 Current office is the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology (MEXT).

3 MEXT called elementary school.

**Fig.1: The School system and Geography related subjects in Japan**

Age	School year	School type	Compulsory subject and its field or sub-subject	Required one sub-subject	Required one sub-subject	
17-18	Y12	Upper secondary school	Geography and History	World History	Geography Japanese History	Civics Modern Society Ethics Economics and Politics
16-17	Y11					
15-16	Y10					
14-15	Y9	Lower secondary school	Social Studies	Civics field		
13-14	Y8			Geography field	History field	
12-13	Y7					
11-12	Y6	Elementary (Primary) school	Social Studies			
10-11	Y5					
9-10	Y4					
8-9	Y3					
7-8	Y2					
6-7	Y1	Life Environment Studies				

## II. Primary school curriculum

In first Japanese National Primary Social Studies Curriculum which was enacted 1947, social studies was the most important subject and was called core subject, because of its significant role for creating new democratic society that had never established in Japan yet. Therefore social studies had a lot of class hours in 1947 curriculum version, 140 hours at year 1 and 2, 175 hours at year 4 and 5, 175-210 hours at year 5 and 6. But these hours had been decrease, especially establishment of Life Environment Studies in 1989 and, Period of Integrated Study which was acted 1998 and have practiced from 2002, have the large impact on social studies education.<sup>4</sup>

**Fig. 2** shows current class ours which is ruled in the National Primary Curriculum 1998 version. Social studies have 2 or 3 class hours a week from year 3 to year 6, as demonstrated year 6 pupils' weekly timetable **Fig 3**.

4 TABE, Toshimitsu, 2004, The Japanese-American Comparison of Geographical Skills in the Initiation Term, Geographical Science, 59-3, pp.13-139.

**Fig.2: Standard Class Hours a Year in Primary School**

Subject and Field	Subject											Total Hour		
	Japanese Language	Social Studies	Arithmetic	Science	Life Environment Studies	Music	Drawing and Handicrafts	Homemaking	Physical Education	Moral Education	Special Activities		Period for Integrated Study	
School Year	Y1	272		114		102	68	68		90	34	34		782
	Y2	280		155		105	70	70		90	35	35		840
	Y3	235	70	150	70		60	60		90	35	35	105	910
	Y4	235	85	150	90		60	60		90	35	35	105	945
	Y5	180	90	150	95		50	50	60	90	35	35	110	945
	Y6	175	100	150	95		50	50	55	90	35	35	110	945

• 1 Hour is 45minutes.

• 1 Year is 35 weeks.

**Fig.3: Primary School Weekly Timetable;**

Y6 class case in 2006 FY 3rd term

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
8:25- 8:35	Home Room				
8:35- 9:20	Moral Education	Arithmetic	Arithmetic	Social Studies	Japanese
9:20- 9:25	Break				
9:25-10:10	Music	Drawing and Handicrafts	Physical Education	Homemaking	Science
10:10-10:30	Break				
10:30-11:15	Physical Education	Japanese	Music	Science	Arithmetic
11:15-11:20	Break				
11:20-12:05	Japanese	Social Studies	Japanese	Arithmetic	Social Studies
12:05-12:45	Lunch				
12:45-13:30	Break				
13:30-13:50	Cleaning				
13:50-14:35	Science	Integrated Study	Integrated Study	Japanese/Calligraphy	Physical Education
14:35-14:40	Break				
14:40-15:25			Integrated Study	Home Room	
School Club Activities					

### III. The National Primary Social Studies Curriculum and geography

#### 1. Objectives of Primary School Social Studies

The National Curriculum for each subject which is called The Course of Study by MEXT prescribe over all objectives, objectives and contents for each school year, and treatment of the contents. Objectives of Primary School Social Studies are follows.<sup>5</sup>

##### 1) Overall objectives

- ① Develop an understanding of life in society
- ② Develop an understanding and devotion for the land and history of Japan
- ③ Foster the basic attribute as a citizen and a nation that is necessary for whom live in international society and create democratic peaceful nation and society

These objectives consist of understandings of society (①), understandings of Japanese geography and history (②), and skills, values and attitudes (③). This structure is same in each year objectives, and the last goal of social studies is fostering the basic attribute as a citizen and a nation.<sup>6</sup>

##### 2) Objectives for each school year

The current Course of Study for Social Studies put year 3 and year 4 together.

###### Year 3 and 4

- ① Understand industries and consumes in pupil's local community, understand activities which keep people' health and safety in the local community, and make pupil's consciousness as a local community member.
- ② Understand the geographical environment of pupil's local community, understand the change of life style and the accomplishment of ancestors who had made efforts for developing the local community, And foster pupil's pride and devotion for the local community
- ③ Observe and investigate into the social phenomena in pupil's local community, use maps and various specifically materials effectively for investigation and presenting the result, and foster pupil's ability to think the characters of social phenomena and the relationships among them in the local community.

###### Year 5

- ① Understand activities of industries in Japan and the relationship between the industries and the pupil's life, and develop pupil's interest to the development of industries.
- ② Understand features of the land of Japan, develop pupil's interest to the importance of conserving physical environment, and foster devotion for the land of Japan.
- ③ Investigate into the social phenomena specifically, use various specifically materials such as maps and statistic effectively for investigation and presenting the result, And foster pupil's ability to think the role and importance of the social phenomena.

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<sup>5</sup> There is no English version of The Course of Study in Social Studies that authorized by MEXT. Follows are translation by author.

<sup>6</sup> The last goals of secondary school subjects, Social Studies, Geography and History, and Civics, are almost same.

## Year 6

①develop pupil's concern, interest and understanding to the accomplishment of ancestors who had made efforts for developing the nation and society and excellent cultural heritage, foster attitude that cherish Japanese history and tradition, devotion for their nation.

②understand the idea and function of Japanese politics on everyday life, the life of people in the nations that have special relationship with Japan, and the role of Japan in the international society, and make pupil's consciousness what living with other nation people in the world, as Japanese who hoping peace is important.

③Investigate into the social phenomena specifically, use various fundamental materials such as maps and chronological table effectively for investigation and presenting the result, and foster pupil's ability to think the role and importance of the social phenomena from broader point of view

These reveal that year 3 and 4 concentrate upon pupil's community studies, year 5 upon geography of Japan and year 6 upon Japanese history and politics.

### 3) Contents for each school year

Differences in each school year are explicit in contents. Fig. 4 shows overall contents in Social Studies Curriculum. In this Fig., column is divided into geographical, historical and civic. Approximately, this division tell that year 3 and 4 is like geographically and civic, year 5 is like geographically, year 6 is historically and civic. But we must pay attention that clearly division is impossible, part of year 5 industries studies are civic, for example.

Geographical field is divided place, theme and skill. We can read following futures from these columns.

A place is expanding from pupil's local community in year 3, to pupil's own prefecture in year 4 around, to own country Japan in year 5 and 6. This is based on expanding horizon (environment) curriculum theory or widening horizon curriculum theory which is adapted generally in Japanese Social Studies curriculum development.

Sequence of theme is organized below briefly.

- ①land and economic activities in pupil's local community (year 3)
- ②geography of pupil's prefecture (year 4)
- ③industries, agriculture, fishery, manufacturing and communication, in Japan (year 5)
- ④geography of Japan (year 5)

This sequence follows expanding horizon (environment) curriculum theory rigidly.

Skill is prescribed most detailed in year 3 and 4. But, globe has not prescribed until year 5. And Atlas is distributed from year 4 and it will be used until graduation of primary school.

**Fig.4: Content in the National Primary Social Studies Curriculum**

	Geographical			Historical	Civic
	place	theme	skill		
Y3 & Y4	pupil's local area(city,town,village)	landform,landuse and traffic situation	observation,investigation,blank map,think the differences of features by places		public utilities
		activities of productions and sales by people in local community and its relationship with other area in Japan			supplement of water, electricity and gas, and management of waste
				change of life style and the accomplishment of ancestors	activities keeping safe from disaster and accident
	pupil's prefecture	characteristics of prefecture and its relationship with other area in Japan and foreign country	think the characteristics of prefecture		
Y5	pupil's country, Japan	agriculture and fishery in Japan, its role of food supply, its relationship with physical environment	map,globe, various kind of materials,visitings		agriculture and fishery in Japan, its role of food supply, its relationship with physical environment
		manufacturing industries in Japan and its role for our life			manufacturing industries in Japan and its role for our life
		communication industries in Japan and its influence on our life			communication industries in Japan and its influence on our life
		land of Japan , and relationship between physical environment of the land and people's life and industries			
Y6			(map)	main historical matters through accomplishment of ancestors and excellent cultural heritages	
					the Constitution and function of Japanese politics
					the role of Japan in the international society

#### 4) School textbook for Social Studies

It is enacted in the School Education Law that primary and secondary classes must use school textbooks which are authorized by MEXT. These textbooks are written and edited by private sector publishers, and the Minister approves them in accordance with the course of study. Textbooks for the compulsory education level are offered to pupils free of charge, each primary Social Studies book is almost 420 Japanese Yen, 2 GBP.

In primary social studies on 2006 FY, there are 5 publishers' textbook series and 2 publishers student atlas. Atlases are authorized by MEXT and free too, but offered on Year 4

(9-10 years old) when 2nd year of social studies learning and will used same an atlas until Year 6 (11-12 years old).

One of the most popular social studies school textbook contents are follows.

**For Year 3/4: New Society: revised version (2004)**

- Vol. 1
- 1: My City, Our City
    - 1) Locality around the school
    - 2) Features of our city
  - 2: People's works and our life
    - 1) Workers in a supermarket
    - 2) Works in a farm
  - 3: Protect our life
    - 1) If a fire broke out
    - 2) If accident or incident occurred
    - 3) For a city where we can live in peace
- Vol. 2
- 4: Make a good life
    - 1) A treatment of wastes and a reuse
    - 2) Where is drinking water from?
  - 5: Wishes that descend in home area
    - 1) The past tools and lives in the old days
    - 2) Irrigation canal in the foot of a mountain
    - 3) Matters that we wish to descent and leave
  - 6: Our prefecture
    - 1) Features of our prefecture
    - 2) Features of lives and land use in our prefecture
    - 3) Traditional manufacture that make use of characteristics of the area
    - 4) A development of our prefecture and city

**For Year 5: New Society: revised version (2004)**

- Vol. 1
- 1: Our life and food production
    - 1) Syonai plain in Yamagata prefecture: a thriving rice cropping
    - 2) Makurazaki city in Kagoshima prefecture: a thriving fishery
    - 3) Future food supply and us
  - 2: Our life and industrial production
    - 1) Industries for vehicles production
    - 2) Industrial production and industrial area
    - 3) Industrial production and trade
- Vol. 2
- 3: Our life and information
    - 1) Functions of broadcasting center
    - 2) Information and society
  - 4: Our land and environment
    - 1) Various nature and lives

2) Our life and environment

3) Our life and forest

**For Year 6: New Society: revised version (2004)**

Vol. 1

1: Japanese History

1) From a rice cropping village to a country with ancient tomb

2) SYOUMU emperor and the great Buddha of Nara

3) MINAMOTO NO YORITOMO and the Kamakura Shogun ate

4) Three generals and unity of Japan

5) TOKUGAWA IEMITSU and the Edo Shogun ate

6) The people who created culture in Edo era

7) The people who built the Meiji Revolution

8) Japan that begin to step toward the world

9) War that days were lengthening and people's lives in those days

10) Toward new Japan and peaceful Japan

Vol. 2

2: Our life and politics

1) Politics that realize our hopes

2) Our life and the Constitution of Japan

3: Japan in the world

1) Some foreign nations that have many relationships with Japan

2) Peace of the world and the role of Japan

**For Year 3/4/5/6: Primary Pupil's Atlas for Joyful learning: revised version (2004)**

Part 1: What is map? How to read map?

Part 2: Maps of Japan

Part 3: Maps of the world

Part 4: Thematic maps and statistics

**IV. Characteristics and issues**

**1) Distance Place learning**

Primary social studies curriculum sequence follows expanding horizon (environment) curriculum theory rigidly. Therefore, pupil never study geography of Japan until end of year 5, unit Our Land and Environment, and not study geography of the world as globe in primary period. World geography learning is on secondary school curriculum as shown in Fig. 5.

But other subjects classes and textbooks in primary school treat geography of Japan and world, and purple have great interests to geography of Japan and the world too, especially year 4/5/6. There is gap between the curriculum and surrounding situation. I think it is better that use multi core expanding horizon (environment) curriculum.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Multi core expanding horizon (environment) principle in this paper I used, I defined as a principle that pupil study some distance place locality as cores in addition to home locality as a core on global perspective, and will study more widen scale area gradually.



**Fig.5: Geographical Content in the National Secondary School Curriculum**

	Subject	place	theme	skill
Lower secondary school	Social Studies (Geography field)	Japan viewed from the world	(area divisions of Japan and the world)	research method for various scale area
Upper secondary school	Geography A (2hours/week)	the world	contemporary issues in the world	geographical skill
	Geography B (4hours/week)	the world	think the world systematical geographically  think the world regional geographically  think the contemporary issues in the world geographically	(geographical skill)

## 2) Sequence of map learning

Social studies practice had been unified with science into new subject Life Environment Studies in 1st and 2nd years after 1992 FY. Social studies curriculum in 1st and 2nd years had fundamental contents for map learning, picture map, plan view, model building etc. But those fundamental contents have not been inherited adequately in Life Environment Studies practice. These fundamental contents concentrate beginning of year 3, and this makes congested lesson plan with shortage of class times. In these results, early map learning is insufficient.

In addition, Atlas that describes fundamental contents for map learning is distributed from year 4, not year 3 when social studies start. And pupil use same contents atlas from year 4 to year 6. These cause many lessons that learn geographical matters without map. Map learning curriculum sequence and system that based on fruits of research of pupil's map learning development reference to development psychology study, like graphicacy<sup>8</sup>, is desirable.

8 SHIMURA, Takashi 2006 The Bibliographical Study of the Concept of Graphicacy in British Geography Education. *Map: Science of Spatial Representation*, 44-2, pp.1-12

### 3) Placeless lessons without maps and sense of place

Primary teacher majored geography at university or high school is a few in Japan. Therefore, Major of primary teachers tends to practice historical or civic type lesson than geographical lesson, that type lesson dose not use atlas and I think that is placeless lesson without sense of place.

There are many geographical contents in social studies curriculum, in Life Environment Studies and Period of Integrated Study too. Geographical skill and thinking geographically are very valuable for these contents studies. Social studies teacher training and in-service training system is important for improvement these lessons.

## V. Conclusion

The last goal of primary social studies is fostering the basic attribute as a citizen and a nation. Therefore geographical education in social studies is medium for the last goal, and geography can fulfill an important role for the last goal. In a class, appropriate proportion with geographical, historical and civic teaching-learning is essential in order to achieve of fostering the basic attribute as a citizen and a nation, especially citizen as living in global society.

### 解説

本拙稿は、2007年2月23日から25日にかけて英国オックスフォード郊外のチャーニーマナーで開催された第10回チャーニーマナーコンフェレンスにおいて発表した内容である。

チャーニーマナーコンフェレンスは、英国地理教育研究者・実践者が集う著名な研究集会であり、現地の地理教育辞典(Butt, G, 2000, *Continuum Guide to Geography Education*, Continuum, p.27)にも立項・解説されている。起源は、「新しい地理学」の地理教育導入を語りあった1970年の集会にさかのぼり、その会議内容は Walford, R., ed. (1973) *New Directions in Geography Teaching, Papers from the 1970 Charney Manor conference*, Longman, 197p. として出版され「新しい地理教育」の普及に大きな影響を与えた。

その後も1980年の会議の内容が Walford, R., ed. (1981) *Signposts for Geography Teaching; Papers from the 1980 Charney Manor conference*, Longman, 222p. に、1990年の会議が Walford, R. ed. (1991) *Viewpoints on Geography Teaching; The Charney Manor conference papers 1990*, Longman, 127p. に、1993年の会議が Walford, R. and Machon, P. ed. *Challenging Times: Implementing the National Curriculum in Geography; Papers from the Charney Manor conference 1993*, Chambridge Publishing Service, 99p としてそれぞれ出版されている。

1995年以降は Walford に替わり Simon Catling (Oxford Brookes University 教授) が主催する初等地理教育を主対象とした会議となり、今回は記念すべき第10回大会であった。筆者は、英国地理教育調査を通じて Catling 教授と面識を持ち、今回の参加・発表となったものであり、Catling 教授に深く感謝する。