The Association between Education and Society: The Educational Struggle for Korean Identity in Japan 1945-1948

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This study attempts to elucidate the idea that education reflects the contemporary social structure. This inference is focused on the educational struggle for Korean identity led by the Korean Federation in Japan (KFJ) during 1945-1948. The KFJ disseminated the educational movement for Koreans in Japan (Zainichi). The General Head Quarters (GHQ) suppressed Korean identity education (KIE) and tried to disrupt the activities of the KFJ. KIE was identified and destroyed during the HanShin educational struggle as part of the conflict with the GHQ. However, HanShin movement survived to form the basis for the new start of the Korean educational movement in Japan and has served as the cornerstone of KIE. This case elucidates the ways in which education is strongly associated with the social structure and the status quo.

Key words: education, society, HanShin educational struggle, Korean identity education, Korean Federation in Japan

Introduction

Education is a reflection of the social structure; history is the communication between the past and present and gives birth to future directions. However, little research has been published on the issue.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the idea that education reflects the contemporary social structure and status quo. To evaluate and test this notion, the cases of the educational struggles for Korean identity, led by the Korean Federation in Japan (KFJ) from 1945 to 1948 were selected.

Approximately two million Koreans were residing in Japan as workers and students on August 15, 1945 (Wagner, 1951). Opportunities to learn to read and write in Korean during the era of Japanese imperialism during 1910 – 1945 were largely denied or absent. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, the American Military Administration (AMA) started to rule Japan. Implicit in the AMA’s early democratization program was the emancipation of Koreans from the oppressive and discriminatory controls under which they had lived in during the occupation (Wagner, 1951). Soon, they adopted the ruling idea that the social structure and system should be as the same as that under the Japanese system except for the imperial system and the issue of Korean identity education. Koreans in Japan (Zainichi Chosenjin: Zainichi) were swept up in the wave of euphoria accompanying the liberation and maintained a strong desire to implement Korean identity education. They organized the KFJ in 1945 and disseminated the Korean identity educational movement for Koreans throughout Japan. During this process, the HanShin educational movement became part of the conflict between KFJ and the General Head Quarters of the AMA (GHQ).

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In terms of Korean identity education in Japan, some results have been reported: an assimilation concept based on the historical material approach (Ozawa, 1988); a chronological approach (Kim, 2002); a field survey approach (Yang, 1994; Park, 1979; Eo, 1998); and an approach with the issue of North Korea at the fore (Cho, Ryou, & Han, 2002) have all been used.

To make a logical inference regarding the links between education and society, this interpretation is based on the holistic view of the Korean identity encompassing South and North Korea. It applies the chronological approach using previous primary materials and survey materials: the description of the administrational and societal conditions in Japan and the review of primary materials on their activities according to the three-stage concept of the KFJ (Kim, 2007).

It starts with a description of the education for Koreans in Japan before liberation, using the cessation of World War II as a backdrop. It is followed by an interpretation of the educational movement of KFJ as a sprout of Korean identity education in Japan. Finally, it is highlighted by the interpretation of the HanShin educational struggle as a major piece of evidence for the interplay between education and society.

**Education for Koreans in Japan before Liberation (before 1945)**

During the Japanese colonial period, the Japanese education system consisted mainly of public schools for an assimilation education in both Japan and Korea; it also had night schools for Korean workers in Japan. The Japanese imperialists believed that Koreans could be assimilated and remodeled by this type of education and portrayed this policy as being progressive. However, Korean nationalists and liberalists thought that night schools focused only on literacy and education for children.

**From Assimilation Education to Japanese Imperialism**

As the population of Korean children increased in Japan, problems related to education worsened. Ozawa put forth the following statement:

“According to the Primary Education Act, Article 32, the education for Korean children in Japan should be mandatory. Compared to the children in Korea, it seemed to be the complimentary treatment” (Lee, 1999, p. 96).

The number of Korean students attending these schools was very small and what they learnt was essentially how to live as Japanese rather than Koreans. The objective of this mandatory education was to prepare its students for the Japanese military and stifle any feeling of Korean nationalism (Chosen University, 1987). This form of mandatory education can be interpreted differently according to the given social structure: as military education for imperialism; as education undertaken by a dictatorship; or as citizenship education within a democracy.

**Independent Schools for Korean Workers**

As many Koreans moved to Japan to work in the 1920’s (Chosen University, 1987), night schools were established to train such workers in basic. Table 1 shows the increasing trend in the number of Korean immigrants in Japan from 1920-1950. Korean immigrants increased to one million in 1940 and were up to more than 1.9 million in 1944, because Japan was preparing for the Pacific War. Since the number of Korean families increased in 1930, the objective of the night schools became increasingly geared to the education of these immigrants’ children. There were many night schools in Tokyo, Osaka, Hyogo, Kanagawa and Fukuoka; of them all, Osaka was the most active because of the huge numbers of workers. It was speculated that night schools were built as an alternative to the regular schools, because Korean workers were not able to go to regular schools due to having no time and low incomes as well as the fact that they retained strong sentiments regarding their Korean identity. As a result of many Koreans’ moving to Japan through the KyoseiRenko process, (the forced mobilization of Korean laborers) in 1940, night schools gradually faded out. The decreasing trend of night schools indicates clearly that the social situation also influences all types of education.

Osaka night schools were both public and private. The former started in May, 1924. The Japanese Korean cooperation association (Naisenkyowagai) was organized to support Japanese Imperialists. In Osaka, Naisenkyowagai organized public schools to promote the living standards of Koreans and to ‘develop’ their character. It opened night schools along with boarding houses and help with finding jobs. The length of the course was three years; it was