Gender Politics in the Familialist Welfare Regime: A Case Study of Education Reform in Japan

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the gender politics in Japan in the 2000s by investigating the revising process of the Fundamental Law of Education (FLE). The issue of education reform is located in the context of restructuring of Japan’s welfare regime, which can be characterized as a ‘familialist’ one: in this regime, citizens’ welfare had been strongly dependent on families without much help from the state, and the labour market structure along with the social security system assumed and facilitated gender division of labour.

Since the early 1990s, quite a few Japanese policy-makers have tried to restructure the gendered structure of its ‘familialist’ welfare regime based on the male-breadwinner model and to promote various policies for realizing gender equality, in prospects of declining birthrates and labour force shortage. In the mid-1990s, an idea of gender equality was linked to the expansion of care service provision outside family (Tsuji 2011). However, from 2002, a backlash against gender equality policies emerged in some local governments as well as right-wing press circles.

Controversies over gender equality in a civil society affected discussions on the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education (FLE, hereafter) in a political arena. The FLE was established in 1947, right after the World War II under the influence of US occupation, and it has been considered as the ‘constitution of education’ in Japan. Representing a restart of Japan as a liberal and pacific state, the basic tone of the FLE was penetrated by social liberalism, cosmopolitanism and pacifism. Revision of the FLE was a long-held agenda for the conservative members in the Liberal Democratic Party, who hoped to bring back nationalism and patriotic education in the FLE. However, being afraid of harsh opposition from voters, the LDP had not been able to push the agenda in the policy arena.

Then, why the revision of the FLE, such a politically controversial issue whose agenda-setting was
repressed for a long time has become a reality in the 2000s? In addition, in what ways is this agenda related to the gender politics and restructuring of the Japan’s familialist welfare regime?

Existing literature has situated the revision of the FLE, which was finalized in December 2006, within the collaboration of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism in the global as well as national politics (Saito 2010; Takayama 2008). While I agree with these analyses, I would add that the revising process of the FLE was also inspired and circumscribed by the gender politics, by which I mean political contestations on how to redefine gender roles and the state-family relations, in the context of welfare regime change.

Examining political discourses appeared in the revising process of the FLE, this paper identifies opposing ideas about the sharing/division of responsibilities between the state and family, and about the roles of men and women, and it also sheds light on the transformation of political structure since the 1990s which put the revision of the FLE into place.

I argue that (1) the agenda-setting for revision of the FLE became realized due to changes in the political opportunity structure since the 1990s, and (2) changes in institutional settings for education politics invoked the transformation of political discourses, from coordinative discourse to communicative discourse (Schmidt 2002, 2003, 2008). Through these changes, social disputes on whether and how to reform gender relations become involved in the revising process of the FLE.

This paper is divided into three sections. First, I provide background information regarding the nature and crises of Japan’s welfare regime, and situate the issue of education reform within its structural context. Secondly, I describe several changes in the political opportunity structure in the 1990s and 2000s, and analyze its effects on the process and discourses of education policy making. Finally, I investigate the relations (contestations and alliances) between different ideas and political actors revolved around the revision of the FLE, and discuss the way in which a potential conflict between neo-liberalists and conservatives was overcome.

1. Familialist Welfare Regime and Educational Reform
1-1. Familialist welfare regime and its impasse

Familialist Welfare Regime

Classification of Japan in the typologies of welfare regime has been one of the controversial issues in comparative welfare regime studies. Although there is no agreement whether Japan can be classified as a ‘conservative-corporatist’ welfare regime, or the fourth type of welfare capitalism (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999; Goodman and Peng 1996), it seems that Japan, as well as southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, at least share a certain kind of ‘familialist’ character in its composition of welfare regime (Ferrera 1996, 2002, Siaroff 1994). In Japan, families had been forced to be independent without much help either from the state, market, or the voluntary sector. Japanese welfare regime, which had been developed since 1950s and matured by the 1980s, had several characteristics: relatively low public expenditure towards families; fragmented social insurance scheme
divided and stratified by firms; strong employment protection for male workers characterized by lifetime employment and seniority wage system; strongly gendered division of labour in household and society, which was institutionally encouraged by family wages in firms and tax deductions for dependent housewives (Osawa 2011).

Under this regime, families in Japan had shouldered such a heavy burden for supporting members’ lives without help from the state, by dividing tasks of income maintenance and domestic work between husbands and wives. While husbands spend long hours at work, wives take care of their children as well as elder parent-in-laws. It was common at least until the 1980s that female workers quit their full-time jobs when they got married or pregnant, in order to do domestic work and take care of children at home, and some of them re-entered in the labour market after their children grew older. However, when these women began to work again, their job status tended to be less stable; in most cases they obtain non-regular employment such as part-time jobs. This life course for Japanese women was represented clearly by the ‘M-shape’ curve in female labour participation rates divided by age group.

Japanese government had built nursery schools for children (hoikusho) since the 1950s, especially for children of working mothers, but public childcare for children under 3 years old was extremely limited. Child allowance to low income household with more than 3 children was introduced in 1971, but its amount and coverage were also limited until the 1980s. In terms of elder care, the governments provided nursing homes for elders without resources (i.e. familial help, income, assets), financed by governmental expenditure, but again the coverage was very limited. Most of elders were cared by their family members (wives and daughter-in-laws).

**Difficulties of Reproduction of Familialist Regime**

The ‘familialist’ character of Japanese welfare regime was embraced as being low-cost and efficient by the government in the 1980s, referring to it as ‘the Japanese-style welfare society’ (Nihongata Fukushi Shakai). However, at the beginning of the 1990s, reproduction of its familialist regime came to an impasse. The most visible sign of its impasse was the declining birthrates. When the government announced that the total fertility rate in 1989 was plunged to 1.57, it upset the public as well as political elites, which was called ‘1.57 shock.’ Another symptom was a difficulty of dealing with demographic aging. Families living with elder parents were being put in a predicament in providing care without help from outside families. The other side of coin was the increase of ‘social hospitalization.’ The concept of ‘social hospitalization’ represents the situation of elders who stay in beds at hospital for a long time even after their medical treatments were completed, because they did not have any other place to go. This, in turn, led to the growth of public expenditure for health insurance, most of which was spent for elders.

Debates are still continuing on the reasons why people have less and less children. Several observations are proposed as causes of declining birthrates. Firstly, the average age of first marriage and childbirth is rising, both among men and women. Secondly, it is said that a shortage of public childcare service makes working women hesitate to have children. In Japan today, the gender gap of students in higher education is small. After the Equal Employment Opportunity Act for Men and Women was passed
in the Diet in 1985, private companies can no longer discriminate female workers in their recruitment and promotion. As a result, highly-educated, well-qualified female graduates tend to enter into the labour market as employees in good standing. However, a custom of long working hours in Japanese companies, combined with poor childcare support outside family, does not allow workers to keep a balance between work and family. Opportunity costs for women of quitting a regular job is high, because they cannot expect to obtain high-quality employment after their absence from the market for more than three years, which is said to bring out women’s choice for postponement of childbearing (Schoppa 2006).

Thirdly, due to the deindustrialization and structural changes in the labour market, young male workers do no longer expect lifelong employment nor stable wage increase. The deterioration of employment leads to the hesitation or postponement of marriage among young couples. Some of them still favor the ‘traditional’ type of married life, i.e., gendered-division of work between husbands and wives, but the ratio of men who have enough income to maintain a single-earner household is decreasing, which brings down the mismatch between expectation and reality.

Fourthly, the high cost of childrearing seems to affect the choice of married couples to have fewer numbers of children. The amount of tuition for the tertiary education is the third highest among OECD countries (OECD 2011, Chart B5.1.). Annual tuition fee charged by the public university is around 4,500 USD in a 2008-2009 academic year. Attending a private university doubles in cost, and more than two thirds of undergraduate students belong to private institutions. Since educational expenses (especially expenses at the tertiary education) put pressure on household budget, some specialists pointed out it as one of the causes of declining birthrates among married couples.

Responses from the Government

Facing the crisis of social reproduction, Japanese governments have introduced various laws, plans, and programs in order to restructure its familialist welfare regime. Table 1 shows the variety and intensity of policy reforms since the late 1980s. First, they have expanded social care for elders and children (Peng 2002, 2004), by increasing the amount of care service provision outside family and passing the parental/care leave acts. Second, acts for preventing child abuse and domestic violence and for supporting victims were legislated. Thirdly, the regulation for sex discrimination in employment was strengthened. However, it should be noted that the de-regulation of employment, i.e. the expansion of irregular jobs such as dispatched workers, was promoted around the same time, which caused the deterioration of employment especially among female workers.

The revision of FLE came at the last stage in these policy reform sequences. It suggests that the agenda setting for the FLE amendment took on a reactive character to the preceding policy changes.
Table 1: Reforms of Policies regarding Gender, Families, and Children: 1989-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Laws/Plans/Programs passed/launched (policy area)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Gold Plan (elder care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Revision of eight of acts on elderly welfare (elder care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Parental Leave Act (child care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>New Gold Plan (elder care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angel Plan (child care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Basic Law for Gender Equal Society (gender equality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Angel Plan (child care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision of Equal Employment Opportunity Act (employment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Launch of Public Long-term Care Insurance system (elder care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Act on the Prevention of Child Abuse (family violence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims (family violence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amount and Coverage of Child Allowance was expanded (child care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Plus One Programs for Reversing Declining Birthrates (child care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Act for Measures to Support the Development of the Next Generation (child care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basic Act for Measures to Cope with Society with Declining Birthrate (child care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Revision of Act on the Prevention of Child Abuse (family violence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision of Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and Protection (family violence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reform of Public Pension system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Revision of the public LTCI Act (elder care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Revision of Fundamental Law of Education (education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revision of Equal Employment Opportunity Act (employment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author.

1-2. Issues of educational reform and restructuring of the welfare regime

Education as a Tool for Social Reproduction

In the contemporary society, public education has been assigned several, sometime contradicting, roles. At first, public education was institutionalized along with the development of the nation-states. However, the aim of public education today is said to cultivate good citizens by transmitting such universal values as freedom, equality and respect for fundamental human rights. Equality among citizens
is a fundamental principle in a modern civil society, and the equal opportunity for education must be guaranteed for all citizens. Discrimination based on sex, class or any other reason must be prohibited. However, public education has been sometimes accused of reproducing existing social relations, especially class and sex relations (e.g. Willis 1977). Through the ‘hidden curricula,’ children learn appropriate behavior to their social positions, which would affect their academic performances and career choices. With regard to gender, it is often observed that girls tend not to pursue post-secondary education, or avoiding taking science courses (Duru-Bellat 1990=1993). Girls and boys internalize gender roles through their experiences at school, which contributes to the social reproduction of gender relations. In other words, the public education system plays contradicting roles; on the one hand, the aim of public education is to develop students’ ability as much as possible according to their will and ability; on the other hand, however, through the hidden curricula, students learn ‘appropriate’ manners and ways of living, which are often differentiated by sex (Duru-Bellat 1990=1993).

In the meantime, cultivation of qualified working force is another goal of public education. Mass education can be interpreted as an instrument to develop the working class with knowledge, skill, and discipline which are necessary for the development of industrial economy. When the industrial structure transformed in the late 20th century, the reform of public education became an agenda in many advanced countries, including the UK and the US. Governments have, for example, expanded post-secondly education and vocational skill training for the unemployed, expecting that such measures would recreate the working force suitable for the post-industrial economy. It is not clear whether the post-industrialization lead to the realization of gender equality, in exchange of the expansion of inequality between and within classes. Feminists might be able to take advantage of momentum for the education reform and try to pursue their agenda for promoting gender equality. The relationship between different motives and ideas for education reform should be examined carefully.

History of Education Reforms in Japan since the 1980s

Post-industrialization puts the strongly gender-divided society into a difficult situation. It degenerate relatively stable employment of the labour-intensive mass-production industry, which makes difficult the maintenance of a male-breadwinner household. Growing female labour market participation creates a strong demand for care services outside families. In the meantime, the population aging, increasing divorces and single-parent household require the welfare states to restructure its social security systems to cover ‘new social risks’ (Bonoli 2005; Taylor-Gobby 2005). At the same time, considering the low economic growth, governments must constrain social expenditure.

Under such a circumstance, how to reform Japanese education system became a policy agenda. The first attempt to reform Japan’s educational system appeared in the 1980s, when the Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro established the Interim Council of Education. Along with his other policy agendas based on neo-liberal thoughts, such as the privatization of the Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corporation and of the Japan National Railways, the Prime Minister Nakasone set a goal of liberalization of education system. Economist and journalists in the Interim Council of Education, who
were appointed by Nakasone, argued for the liberalization (i.e. deregulation) of education system, introduction of market competition between schools, and privatization of public schools. Based on the political ideology comprised of neo-liberalism and nationalism, Nakasone himself wished to amend the Fundamental Law of Education, because he (and other conservative members of the LDP) considered the FLE flawed as it failed to include a commitment to the nation, because (according to them) the United States’ occupation policies influenced the enactment process of the Law. However, at that time, he was afraid of a harsh opposition from the left-wing parties and voters, and refrained from pushing the agenda (Otake 1994: 164). Although the radical liberalization of primary and secondary education was not realized due to the push-back by the Ministry of Education, the Council’s recommendation for the liberalization of post-secondary education, i.e. the reform of universities, was welcomed and enacted after a short time (Otake 1994: 162-188).

After Nakasone’s attempts, education reforms in the 1990s contained two different strands. On the one hand, the Ministry of Education put into action such ideas as the relaxation of harsh competition between younger students, and the introduction of enjoyable education to cultivate students’ individuality, instead of the notable ‘cramming style education.’ On the other hand, several programs were enacted in the post-secondary education to bring up creative human resources with professional knowledge and skills, so that the Japanese (both as individuals and as a national economy) can survive in the highly competitive global market. The then Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro (1996-1998) linked the educational reforms to his main policy agendas for restructuring the post-war Japan’s political economy system, across all over policy fields including administrative, fiscal, economic, financial, and social security systems.

In sum, the education reforms during the 1980s and 1990s revolved around the issue of liberalization. In contrast, it was around 2000 that the new controversy emerged, regarding the issue of patriotic education and that of gender equality.

Gender-free education and backlash movement

Since the late 1990s, some local governments and teachers at schools have introduced ‘gender-free’ lessons on a trial basis. The main purpose of ‘gender-free’ lessons was to provide students with an opportunity to review and question the taken-for-granted norms and practices of gender, i.e. separate gender roles and gender division of labour between boys and girls, men and women. Since the 1980s, even before the concept of ‘gender-free’ education appeared, various local attempts aimed at promoting gender equality at primary and secondary schools had been pursued by concerned teachers. Such attempts included an integration of boys and girls in class roster,¹ and the introduction of sex education. These practices were linked to the new concept of ‘gender-free’ education in the late 1990s.

Against such an attempt, backlash movements arose and developed in the local assemblies and

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¹ In most of the class rosters at primary and secondary schools in Japan, names of boys and girls were usually registered separately until the 1990s. Usually boys came first in the list, and girls came after. This kind of custom of sex separation was criticized by concerned teachers at a local level.
right-wing press circles. They aggressively attacked both the concept of ‘gender-free education’ and teaching practices for gender equality at schools. By sensationalizing an example of sex education at schools for disabled children, backlash protesters insisted that gender-free education is trying to destroy the morality of sexual restraint by teaching children names and functions of genitals. Using attacks to ‘gender-free’ education as leverage, they also tried to degrade policies for promoting a gender equal society. After the backlash was initiated in local assemblies and right-wing media, a few right-wing members of the LDP brought the issue in the Diet too. The most well-known one among them was Yamatani Eriko, a female member of the LDP, who established and led the Project Team for Investigation of Radical Sex Education and Gender Free Education in the LDP.

Ehara Yumiko, one of the leading feminist sociologists in Japan, summarized the main argument of backlash protesters as follows.

(1) there are significant biological gender differences between the sexes;
(2) traditional sex-defined roles (primarily the sex-defined roles whereby ”men work and women stay at home”) correspond to these biological gender differences;
(3) consequently, traditional sex-defined roles should be upheld;
(4) consequently, traditional events and social norms (such as sexual abstinence and norms of chastity) that uphold traditional sex-defined roles should be maintained;
(5) the breakdown of families and the increase in crimes and misconduct in modern society can be attributed to the spread by “extreme feminist organizations” of an ideology that stands in contradiction to the natural gender differences between the sexes and the notion of a traditional family; and
(6) the Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society was the result of a government that was deceived in the face of a plot by “extreme feminist organizations” to dismantle society (Ehara 2005: 9-10).

In sum, the frames and discourses proposed by backlash movements provided a nexus of conservative/right-wing actors in a civil society and those in the policy arena, and they also created the circumstances under which the revision of FLE was proposed and developed.

**Issue Structure of Revision of FLE in the 2000s**

A series of education reform described above allow us to understand the issue structure regarding education policies. Although discussion on the revision of the FLE contained various ideas and discourses, I classified them along two axes. There are two dimensions of controversies, and each dimension contains two issues (see Table 2).

First dimension concerns the privatization of education system, which can be divided into the two issues. The first issue, issue (a), is regarding the provider of education: whether to promote the commercialization of education, or to maintain the state’s responsibility for providing public education.
The issue (b) is about the ‘education at home’ (katei kyouiku). Conservative actors argued that the most important educator to children is their parents and that students behave inadequately or perform poorly at school when parents do not care nor discipline their children at home. Those who oppose this enunciation insisted that blaming parents for lack of home education does not resolve the problem and that it is the state’s responsibility to arrange the environment in which parents can take care of their children, by providing, for example, childcare support and school expense subsidies to the low-income household.

Table 2: Two Dimensions and Four Issues on Educational Reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Orientation of Policy Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(I) Privatization of Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Market vs. State</td>
<td>Promote commercialization of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Family vs. State</td>
<td>Emphasize the importance of education at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(II) Social Reproduction of ‘Tradition’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Patriotism</td>
<td>Cultivate love for the nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Gender Roles</td>
<td>Embrace Japanese culture/tradition which assigns separate gender roles to men and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect freedom of thought. Refrain from intervening into personal values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Try to reform gender division in Japanese society and promote gender equality through education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second dimension concerns the social reproduction of ‘tradition.’ The issue (c), patriotism, was the most controversial theme in the revising process of the FLE. The proponent, who initiated agenda-setting for the FLE amendment, insisted that the public education should induce children to cultivate love for the nation, so that they would grow to be full members of society who have a public-mindedness and contribute to society. In contrast, those who support for the principles of the old FLE share respects for freedom of thought and individuality, and warned about the blunt intervention into personal values by the public authority in charge of education. Finally, the issue (d) is regarding the separate gender roles in the Japanese society. Backlash actors tend to link the issue (d) to (c), and argue that it is important to protect Japanese culture and tradition in which separate gender roles have been embedded. They also
link this issue to the emphasis on the ‘home education,’ suggesting that fathers should teach men’s role and mothers should teach women’s role at home. Those who opposed this idea, some of them experimented gender-free education at schools, hoped to reform gender division of labour in Japanese society through education.

It should be noted that the concept of ‘gender-free’ does not necessarily deny cultural events which sometimes implicate the separation of gender inherited in Japanese tradition. While the backlash protesters accused ‘gender-free’ teaching practices of destroying the Japanese culture, the advocates of ‘gender-free’ wanted to transform the stereotypical norms and practices based on gender among students as well as teachers, such as assigning the role of class leader to a male student and that of sub-leader to a female, or mocking someone for their behavior which does not fit the gendered stereotypes, which might prevent the full development of personal capacity.

1-3. Revised Version of the FLE

Revision of the Fundamental Law on Education was discussed for more than 6 years since 2000 and was finally passed in the Diet in December 2006.

The revised version of FLE contains various ideas, and its clauses are open to contradicting interpretation. First, the ideology of patriotism is added in the preamble and the clause 2. Although the controversial word of ‘patriotism’ itself was excluded from the clauses, such words were inserted as ‘tradition,’ ‘culture,’ and ‘love for the country and region which nurtured people.’ This is the reflection of the idea of the conservative member of the LDP, who strongly pushed the agenda of the amendment of the FLE. Secondly, the role of education in developing human resources suitable for post-industrial society is emphasized in the Law by using such phrases as ‘rich humanity and creativity,’ ‘open the way to the future.’

With regard to the issue of education at home, the newly added clause 10 stipulates that “mothers, fathers, and other guardians, having the primary responsibility for their children’s education, shall endeavor to teach them the habits necessary for life, encourage a spirit of independence, and nurture the balanced development of their bodies and minds.” Rather than designating the governmental responsibility for education, this clause prescribes that parents have the primary responsibility for their children’s education, and also specifies what the parents should teach their children at home.

Finally, in terms of gender equality, the result was ambiguous. On the one hand, the clause of coeducation between sexes was deleted. The essence of the coeducation clause was to guarantee the equal opportunity for education between girls and boys, considering the fact that it was common before 1945 that girls and boys attended separate schools, and girls were not welcomed to the post-secondary education. Since the situation changed dramatically and the coeducation became a norm today, the clause was deleted. Instead, after a tug and pull between political actors, the ‘equality between men and women’ was added as an aim of education in the clause 2 (See Appendix 1). Conservative members of the LDP insisted that the education should cultivate ‘love, respect, and collaboration between men and women,’
implies maintaining different but complementary gender roles, but it was not realized. On the other hand, some female members in the Central Council for Education supported the idea of including the statement that public education must contribute to the realization of gender equal society. The outcome was a middle ground between the two, which seems to be the position the MEXT preferred.

2. Changes in the Political Opportunity Structure and Education Politics

Japan experienced a regime shift in the early 1990s. In this section, I describe the outline of the transformation as well as alteration of main political parties, and the institutional settings for education politics.

2-1. Party System Change

The Japan’s party system has radically changed in the 1990s. Until the 1980s, Japan’s politics was characterized by the so-called ‘1955 political regime.’ The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has been a governing party for 38 years since 1955. The biggest opposition party, Japan Socialist Party (JSP) has never beaten the LDP in the national elections for both houses. There were other several small parties, such as Japan Communist Party and the Komei Party, and party leaders of opposition parties have attempted to form a coalition to fight against the LDP a couple of times, but it never took place.

In 1993, a couple of groups in the LDP, being unsatisfied with the party executives’ reluctance to promote electoral reform, left the party, which pushed the LDP into the minority in the Lower House. Political scientists identified this as the end of the 1955 regime. Since then, a lot of new parties were built and scrapped. The new coalition government was established by eight parties including the JSP in August 1994, but the coalition government was short-lived due to the internal discord and the exposure of a minor scandal of the then Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro. After ten months, the LDP came back to power by building a coalition government with the JSP and New Party Sakigake. However, the seats of JSP have fallen drastically in the 1996 election, and the coalition between three parties was dissolved. After that, the JSP has never recovered. Instead of the JSP, the Democratic Party of Japan, which incorporated defectors of the LDP in 1998, became the largest opposition party.

After 2000, the Japan’s party system seems restored some stability. It seems that the two-party system has emerged, in which the LDP and Komei have maintained the coalition government together from 2000 to 2009, and the DPJ has taken the opposite seats. It has been pointed out that the ideological distance between the governing and opposition parties has shrunk due to the party system change. A significant portion of the DPJ members, especially the founders of the party, originated from the LDP. The DPJ also contains some defectors from Japan Socialist Party. Therefore, the DPJ members differ a lot in their ideological orientation as well as constituencies. In 2009, the DPJ beat the LDP for the first time in the national election. A shift of political power through the election took place at last.
Figure 1. Japan’s party system, past and the present

1955 political regime: one dominant party system

Notes: This figure does not include several small parties which emerged and/or disappeared since 1993 to the present, such as New Conservative Party, Liberal Party, and People’s New Party. Some of them were absorbed by LDP or DPJ, or have made a cooperative relationship with either one of the two. For more detailed information, see Rosenbluth and Thies (2010: 102).

In what ways did party system changes affect the education politics in Japan? First and foremost, the fall of the JSP led to the relaxation of contestation around education policies. In the 1955 regime, the Japan Teachers’ Union (JTU) was one of the reliable support organizations for the JSP. Education policies were one of the issues which shaped the harsh confrontation between the LDP and the JSP, in the Diet as well as outside the policy arena. Although JSP had never obtained the majority in the Diet, the JTU had implicit veto power at the local level, since local education boards as well as local governments were afraid of having trouble with on-site teachers (Schoppa 1991=1993). Under such a circumstance, the LDP had restrained itself from pushing an agenda for the revision of FLE.

The breakdown of the JTU in 1989 and the creation of a new union named All Japan Teachers and Staff Union in 1991 lost their organizational power to fight against the Ministry of Education (MOE). When the JTU and the MOE reached a ‘historic reconciliation’ in 1995, they agreed to appoint a
representative of the JTU as a member of the Central Council for Education.

In addition, the emergence of the DPJ as the largest opposition party blurred the ideological differences between the governing and opposition parties, and it was particularly true on education policies. Some of the members of the DPJ are supported by the JTU and opposed the idea for the revision of the FLE, but many other members in the DPJ wanted to amend it. During the time that the revising procedure had been delayed because of the opposition from the Komei Party, voluntary members of the LDP and the DPJ established the Committee for Promoting the Revision of the FLE in 2004, to put pressure on other Diet members as well as the MOE. In sum, the ideological affinity in two parties provided the environment in which the revision of the FLE was proposed and promoted.

2-2. Changes in Education Policy Making

Observers of education politics in Japan point out that the policy-making processes have transformed since the late 1990s. The venue for initial policy-making has shifted from the Ministry of Education to the Prime Minister’s Office/Cabinet Office, which caused some changes in terms of participants in and the nature of deliberation on education policies.

Under the 1955 political regime, education policies were usually formed by closed-door negotiations between the LDP members, Ministry of Education, and representatives of education industry, boards of education, and scholars (Figure 2). These actors were different in terms of ideological orientation, in that the LDP members in the Education Committee shared a conservative/nationalist ideology but most members of Central Council for Education were social liberals. At the same time, they basically agreed on the protection and regulation of public education system by the state (against which the Japan Teachers Union had fought aggressively in courts and at the local level). Basic institutions of public education system, including governmental subsidy for public education and government’s authorization of textbooks, had been maintained under such institutional settings.

Through the closed-door negotiation, the Ministry of Education and representatives of education industry had accepted the LDP members’ nationalist requests to a certain degree. For example, the MOE agreed to write in some traditionalist contents into official curriculum guidelines.

It should be noted that there had been harsh confrontations in the 1950 and 1960s between teachers and the state authority regarding the legitimacy of state control vs. teachers’ independence on deciding the content and method of public education. The Japan Teacher’s Union was one of main supporters of the Japan Socialist Party, and this issue was one of the main points of contention of Japan’s party politics between the LDP and SPJ, along with the issues of rearmament and national security policy. However, after the Supreme Court made a somewhat eclectic adjudication on this issue in 1976 (concerning the introduction of mandatory national achievement exam in the junior high schools), the dispute has settled.
It was in 2000 that the closed nature of education policy making was challenged. The Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo, who had expressed his concern for the revision of the FLE during his campaign for the presidency of the LDP, established the National Assembly for Education Reform in January 2000 after he was re-elected to the Prime Minister under the parliamentary system. Obuchi said that it is time to consider the revision of FLE since the Japanese society had experienced a structural change and there is a mismatch between the FLE enacted in 1947 and the today’s situation surrounding schools and students.

The National Assembly for Education Reform was built as a private advisory panel to the prime minister, and the Prime Minister’s Office appointed its members. Stating that educational reform must be based on the nation-wide discussion, Obuchi and his office appointed some ‘amateurs’ of education policies as its members, including a famous novelist Sone Ayako. Some of them expressed nationalist ideas for educational reform, and emphasized the importance of moral education and the role of parents in disciplining their children. Although the 17 proposals submitted by the National Assembly had no legal force, the bottom line of education reform was prescribed there. Deliberation in the formal institutions (i.e., deliberation in the Central Council for Education, drafting of the new bill by the
Ministry,\(^3\) and negotiation between the LDP and Komei) followed the basic tenet proposed by the National Assembly (Figure 3).

Although the National Assembly dissolved after it submitted the proposal to the prime minister, the nature of education policy-making has changed toward more top-down one. Takayama (2008) concludes that under pressures from the alliance of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, the MOE shifted their stance on the patriotic education and the amendment of FLE in order to ensure its political legitimacy as “the evaluative state agency and to secure its funding and administrative authorities” (Takayama 2008: 143).

I would add that the institutional changes in education policy-making have been accompanied by a discursive change in education policy. I will explain it in the next section.

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\(^3\) Ministry of Education was reorganized into the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter, MEXT) in 2001.
3. Ideas and Discourses on Gender and Family Relations

3-1. Alliance of ideas and actors

As described above, due to the party system change, ideological difference between parties has blurred. It does not necessarily mean that most members of LDP and DPJ share ideological orientations, but rather that both parties now contain ideologically diverse members and there is a chance that political alliance would be established across parties. Although this potential is not actualized in most cases since parties have powers to command the floor votes of its members in exchange of money, post and party endorsement at elections, we can observe potential alliances of ideas and actors across party lines, by looking at their arguments within and outside the Diet.

Figure 4 shows ideas and positions of various actors across two dimensions of disputes. It was the ideas and actors in the upper right quadrant which initiated and led the process of reforming the FLE since 2000. ‘Backlash’ protesters, who advocated the maintenance/reinforcement of separation of gender roles, did not participated in formal deliberation process of policy formation, but their backlash campaigns outside the Diet provided a pretext for justifying the nationalist agenda to the political actors. The ‘backlash’ discourse also helped to attract ordinary citizens’ attention to the agenda of educational reform.

In contrast, actors in the upper left (neo-liberalists and employers) and in the lower left (CP, female members, feminists, and teachers) were not interested in the revision of FLE at first. Before the agenda was set, neo-liberalists did not seem to really care the FLE because they could (and actually did since the 1990s) obtain substantive policy outputs without revising the FLE, because the old FLE stipulated anything more than fundamental principles of public education but not a detail of institutional rules. Other actors positioned in the lower left (especially leftist parties and teachers outside the Diet) as well as in the lower middle (MEXT and Komei Party) have strongly supported the old FLE, on the grounds that the FLE represented the spirit of liberalism and democracy proclaimed in the Japanese Constitution.

While the old FLE was located at the lower-middle, the position of the revised version of FLE is at one or two steps closer to the upper right. At the same time, it seems that the MEXT, Komei, and other political actors in the lower left did succeeded in preventing the revision from going too much in that direction.
3-2. Reproduction of ‘Tradition’ and Recreation of strong family and nation

Figure 4 also indicates that theoretically neo-liberals in the upper left can build a coalition with either one of the other two groups. Neo-liberals do not necessarily oppose the promotion of gender equality, since they support an idea that all adults should work regardless of their sex. In fact, an idea for the privatization of education and that for the reinforcement of patriotic education have a potential for conflict, because the former might bring up independent, sometimes self-seeking, citizens, who will not commit to their nation. There was a case of education politics in 1980s that neo-liberals challenged the public education system but did not win. Neo-liberals at that time argued for the commercialization of mandatory education (i.e. commercialization of primary and secondary education). In contrast, the Ministry of Education, a group of LDP members specialized in education policies, and members of the Central Council for Education who were representatives of interests of education industries have opposed the neo-liberalist idea and emphasized the state’s responsibility for providing (and regulating) public education.

However, this potential for conflict between neo-liberals and other actors has never come to the surface in the case of revision of the FLE. In fact, employer’s associations made statements in 2004 that they support the revision of the FLE which would emphasize the importance of patriotism and home education. Why?
I argue that the discourse employed by ‘backlash’ protesters gave a juncture of a traditional value and the privatization of education.

The idea of ‘home education’ had in fact a slightly different flavor from the commercialization of education. Advocates of ‘home education’ blamed the ignorance and selfishness of ‘today’s parents’ for emergence of social problems such as child abuse, school bullying, school absenteeism and insisted that parents should teach disciplines to children at home. Some of them also criticized childcare policies for prioritizing working parents’ interests over children’s interests, implicating that mothers should stay at home while their children are young because childcare at home is very important for their mental development.

Advocates of ‘home education’ also supported the separate gender roles in the family and society. They insisted that the parents naturally hand on the ‘appropriate’ gender roles to their children through home education. Thus, the familialization of education was linked to the emphasis of separate gender roles.

The idea of ‘home education’ functioned as a glue to compromise the potential tension between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. By emphasizing the importance of family in child education, it could contribute to the reproduction of highly qualified workforce, as demanded by neo-liberals. At the same time, by reinforcing family’s roles in transmitting the ‘Japanese tradition’ to following generation, it could contribute to the maintenance of separate gender roles and patriotism. This is convenient not only for conservatives but also for the neo-liberals, since it is expected to facilitate the recreation of ‘traditional family,’ i.e., self-sustained family that do not depend on the government in raising their children nor taking care of old parents. The role of ‘home education’ in compromising the potential conflict between neo-liberalism and conservatism is reflected in the article 10 of new FLE. Article 10 stipulates about home education as follows:

(1) Mothers, fathers, and other guardians, having the primary responsibility for their children’s education, shall endeavor to teach them the habits necessary for life, encourage a spirit of independence, and nurture the balanced development of their bodies and minds.

(2) The national and local governments shall endeavor to take necessary measures supporting education in the family, by providing guardians with opportunities to learn, relevant information, and other means, while respecting family autonomy in education.

Here, parents are required to teach their children ‘a spirit of independence,’ so that they can survive in the highly competitive world. Although it is stipulated that the state (national and local governments) must support parents, suggested measures to realize its purpose are just providing information to parents, but not providing costly public services or benefits to child-raising families. Promotion of ‘home education’ is, in other words, a low-budget policy to resolve the tension between traditionalism and neo-liberalism.
3-3. Discursive Battles on Education in the Society and the Policy Arena

Vivien Schmidt (2002, 2003, 2008) proposed a ‘discursive institutionalism’ approach to investigate the relationship between political institutions and discourses employed by political actors pursuing policy changes. In multi-actor systems in which many actors negotiate and coordinate each other in designing policies, coordinative discourse dominate a policy arena. In contrast, in single-actor systems where powers are concentrated in the executive of government, leaders tend to employ communicative discourse to legitimize their policy choices to the public (Schmidt 2002: 240-243).

Revising process of the FLE can be analyzed by this framework. Education policy formation under the 1955 regime was characterized by closed-door negotiations among actors who had vested interests in education industries. Under such an institutional setting, dominant discourses employed by actors were coordinative ones, other than the protest by the Japan Teachers Union outside the policy arena.

Due to the changes of political opportunity structure caused by party system changes as well as the administrative reforms for concentrating powers on the cabinet since the 1990s, a part of institutional settings for education policy making experienced a transformation, which prompted a change of discourses. Powers of the Prime Ministers and his/her cabinets in directing policy changes have been increased by a series of administrative reforms since the late 1990s. Establishing the National Assembly for Education Reform by his initiative, the Prime Minister Obuchi (and Mori who succeeded him) created a space where communicative discourses become dominant, instead of coordinative discourses. While it enabled them to set the agenda for revising the FLE, it also resulted in inviting popular discourses emerged in a civil society, especially patriotism and backlash discourses, into policy deliberations.

At the same time, because of the setback by the Komei Party in consultations with the LDP, not only the revision was delayed but also the degree of change was restrained. The revising process of the FLE was thus a combination of single-actor and multi-actor systems, containing both communicative and coordinative discourses.

Concluding Remarks

This paper examined gender politics emerged around the issue of education reform, situating it in the context of restructuring of Japanese welfare regime, characterized by strongly familialist nature. Facing with the dysfunction of the familialist welfare regime, such as declining birthrates and ‘care crises’ for the elderly, the Japanese government expanded care provision outside families since the 1990s, and encouraged female labour force participation by promoting gender equality policies. Some of these policies were also influenced by neo-liberal ideologies; the governments encouraged the privatization of public nurseries schools, and introduced some measures to facilitate the competition between care providers and to increase accountability of care providers to clients. At the same time, the deregulation of employment was pressed forward since the late 1990s, which has deteriorated the quality and stability
of jobs.

Gender politics on education occurred in such a context. On the one hand, there was an attempt to promote gender equality through education at a local level. On the other hand, backlash movements arose in some local governments and right-wing press circles. The battle on the ‘gender-free’ education implicates that a question of how to re/produce Japanese society is unsettled, at the time of incommensurability on norms and practices of marriage, parenting, and caring.

A case study of revising process of the FLE shows that the structural change in Japan’s political regime provided an opportunity to push a controversial issue on the policy agenda, and it also altered the institutional settings for education policy making. A change of institutional settings also transformed the types of discourses employed by political actors. In other words, it is because of the transformation of political opportunity structure and discursive structure that the gender politics at a societal level got involved in the policy deliberation.

Public education, which was considered as a key to realize a pacific and democratic society in 1947, is now expected to become a vehicle to revitalize national economy and to reproduce the ‘nation’ itself. Partially allying with neo-liberals, conservatives who advocated patriotic education, ‘home education,’ and separate gender roles, are trying to re-create the ‘strong family.’ Strong families are, managed by parents playing stereotypical gender roles at home, expected to contribute to the social reproduction of the ‘nation’ by voluntarily procreating highly qualified future workforce without asking help from the state. In other words, their idea is an attempt to resolve the impasse of the familialist welfare regime by re-injecting a familialist ideology into citizens’ minds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old FLE (March 31, 1947)</th>
<th>New FLE (December 22, 2006)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preamble</strong> (2nd paragraph)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We shall esteem individual dignity and endeavor to bring up people who long for truth and peace, while promoting spread far and wide an education aimed at the creation of a culture of universal and of great individuality.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Preamble</strong> (2nd paragraph)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“To realize these ideals, we shall esteem individual dignity, and endeavor to bring up people who long for truth and justice, honor the public spirit, and are rich in humanity and creativity, while promoting an education which transmits tradition and aims at the creation of a new culture.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Article 1. Aim of Education</strong></td>
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<td>“Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people as builders of a peaceful state and society, who are sound in mind and body, love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and responsibility, and are imbued with the independent spirit.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Article 2. Aim of Education</strong></td>
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| “To realize the aforementioned aims, education shall be carried out in such a way as to achieve the following objectives, while respecting academic freedom: 
   (1) to foster an attitude to acquire wide-ranging knowledge and culture, and to seek the truth, cultivate a rich sensibility and sense of morality, while developing a healthy body.
   (2) to develop the abilities of individuals while respecting their value; cultivate their creativity; foster a spirit of autonomy and independence; and foster an attitude to value labor while emphasizing the connections with career and practical life.
   (3) to foster an attitude to value justice, responsibility, equality between men and women, mutual respect and cooperation, and actively contribute, in the public spirit, to the building and development of society.
   (4) to foster an attitude to respect life, care for nature, and contribute to the protection of the environment.
   (5) to foster an attitude to respect our traditions and culture, love the country and region that nurtured them, together with respect for other countries and a desire to contribute to world peace and the development of the international community.” |
| **Article 5. Coeducation** |
| “Men and women shall esteem and cooperate with each other.
   “Coeducation, therefore, shall be recognized in education.” |
| The clause of coeducation was deleted. |
| **Article 10. Education in the Family** (newly added) |
| “(1)Mothers, fathers, and other guardians, having the primary responsibility for their children’s” |
education, shall endeavor to teach them the habits necessary for life, encourage a spirit of independence, and nurture the balanced development of their bodies and minds.

(2) The national and local governments shall endeavor to take necessary measures supporting education in the family, by providing guardians with opportunities to learn, relevant information, and other means, while respecting family autonomy in education.”

References


Minutes of Diet Deliberation. (http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/)
