

Comparative Education in Transition: Evaluating the Historical Development of Comparative Education in East Asia

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ABSTRACT

Today, the field of comparative education includes an international array of scholars, several academic journals, and academic departments and institutes located at colleges and universities worldwide. While the field of comparative education has historically had a strong presence in Europe and North America, it is only in the last few decades that interest in comparative education has increased in East Asia. This article examines the historical development of comparative education in East Asia and discusses how political, economic, and social factors led to the growth of the field in the region. While all the nations and territories surveyed in this article continue to have a strong presence of comparative education, the growth of the field varied by country and territory. Ultimately, economic, social, and political factors all led to the growth of the field in the region.

Keywords: Comparative Education, East Asia

Introduction

In recent decades, China, Japan, South Korea, and the Chinese territories of Hong Kong, and Taiwan have seen a growth in participation in comparative education organizations. Many scholars have attributed this growth to political, social, and economic reasons (Altbach, 1991; Bray, 2002; Shu, H., & Zhou, N., 1990). This article is not an analysis of methodology or an

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empirical study, but rather analyzes and describes the growth of comparative education in East Asia from a historical perspective while evaluating the major events that led to the field's overall growth in East Asia. It is particularly appropriate to say that the field of comparative education has to a certain degree been a success in East Asia and that the field will continue to grow in the future.

This article is divided into several sections. The first section looks at the rise of comparative education in mainland China, particularly after China's "*Open Door Policy*" in the early 1970s. The section also discusses how China looked to other systems of education when improving its school system. The following section discusses how Japan's defeat after the Second World War led that nation to reconsider education by looking at foreign systems of education and international organizations like comparative education. The section also explores how Japan became a leader in comparative education in East Asia. Like Japan, South Korea was motivated to look outside East Asia. South Korean participation in international organizations like comparative education and a reorganization of South Korea's school system were all reconsidered after the Korean War (1950-1953). Like South Korea, the Chinese territories of Hong Kong and Taiwan (described in this article as the "Two Little Giants") also looked to foreign systems of education as well as international organizations when looking to become more competitive in the world. This article concludes by finding similarities and difference in the growth of comparative education within the nations and territories covered in this article as well offers considerations for future research on the topic.

Opening the Door in China

In recent decades, the internationalization of education and schooling and the growth of comparative education societies have played an important role in China's economic success. Several important factors led to China's involvement in comparative education.

Arguably, China has had a long history of educational borrowing and lending. M. Bray and G. Qin (2001) point out that "Educational Borrowing and lending were already present in China during the Han Dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD) and the Tang Dynasty (618-906 AD)." Much of this borrowing and lending occurred between China and its neighbors. Af-

ter China's defeat in the first Opium War in 1849 by the United Kingdom and its allies, China began looking at educational systems outside of Asia (Lovell, 2015). It would not be until the early part of the twentieth century, when institutions and organizations of comparative and international education began to emerge in China. According to Jing and Zhou (1985), "...cross-cultural contact and exchanges in its educational development, the legitimation of the field has been a recent phenomenon [in China]." Two publications by Chinese scholars—the *Journal of World of Education*, published in 1901, and *Current Status of World Education*, published in 1911—both included China in their interpretations of the world's educational systems. By 1930, Beijing Normal University and Zhongshen University both established a formal course on comparative education. It was also during this time that China began to consider comparative education as a distinct area of study, separate from other fields (Jing & Zhou, 1985).

After the Communist Revolution in 1949, communist rule under Mao Zedong viewed almost anything originating from the west as potentially dangerous to Chinese society (Dikotter, 2017). As such, collaboration between Chinese and western comparative scholars was limited during this period. It would not be until the late 1970s that comparative education would reemerge in China. Relations between the United States and China began to thaw during this period, and China began to look to the west to help modernize its economy (Kissinger, 2012). Chinese leaders also began to view comparative education as a vehicle for national and economic development (Chen, 1994).

After the downfall of the Gang of Four, (who were a group of Communist Party leaders) in 1976, China experienced "...political transformation, economic development, and wide social change" (Jing & Zhou, 1985). An unprecedented number of comparative education institutes emerged at national, municipal, and university levels (Jing & Zhou, 1985). The result was an annual increase of graduate student enrollment in comparative education courses (Jing & Zhou, 1985). Between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University undertook teaching and research in comparative education. The field also was integrated into the curriculum in many teacher-training programs throughout the country (Chen, 1994).

Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in the 1970s, China's *Open Door Policy* was introduced. The policy promoted reforms in trade and encouraged international exchanges. M. Bray and G. Qin (2001) state, "[Chi-

na] has been increasingly shaped by market forces” while it “remains a socialist state.” While China’s new policy permitted academic exchanges on a wider international stage, the new policy also enhanced collaboration between Chinese scholars and international organizations like the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank (Chen, 1994).

During most of the 1970s-comparative education in China focused primarily on “...practical significance to educational development and reform” (Jing & Zhou, 1985). The topics were mostly on higher education, national development, and educational reform as well as the role education could play in modernizing the Chinese economy. At the same time, most researchers in China were merely describing educational theories and practices of foreign countries (Chen, 1994). By the early 1980s, Chinese researchers take a more comparative and analytical approach to their research by looking at what China could learn from foreign systems of education. The field is further promoted during this time by international exchanges between China and other nations and there was active collaboration between Chinese and foreign scholars on comparative education topics (Altbach, 1991).

In 1980, the Chinese Comparative Education Society (CCES) was established in Shanghai. CCES focused on increasing participation in the field in China. CCES also helped deepen China’s understanding of comparative education by exposing Chinese scholars to the work of comparative scholars from around the world (Brickman, 1977). The growth of the organization’s membership gradually increased over the next few decades. For example, in 1985 the organization claimed 340 members and by 2001 the organization was composed of 500 members (Bray & Qin, 2001). CCES held annual/biennial meetings and symposia and published books and journals on comparative education topics (Jing & Zhou, 1985).

By the 1990s Chinese scholars looked to collaborate more with their international counterparts on issues about education (Bray & Qin, 2001). For example, in 1990 China began circulating comparative education journals in Chinese and English. By the mid 1990s CCES’s journal *Comparative Education Review* exceeded the circulation of any other comparable journal in East Asia (Bray & Qin, 2001). It was also during this time that the Chinese government actively recruited experts in comparative education to help improve its national school system (Gu, 2001). Ultimately, the Chinese government looked to invest in programs that dealt with

comparative education and saw comparative education as a resource in modernizing China (Gu, 2001).

Overall, China's contribution to the field of comparative education played a significant role in promoting the field in East Asia. China's *Open Door Policy* in the later part of the twentieth century, as well as China's commitment to modernize and improve its school system led China to look more closely at other systems of education from around the world. China's active involvement in comparative education also advanced the field with respect to membership, languages used (Chinese and English) in the publication of comparative studies, as well as introducing new perspectives to the field from East Asia. Recently, the Chinese Comparative Education Society hosted the XVI World Congress of Comparative Education Societies (2016), and the field continues to grow in China. The following section looks at the historical development of comparative education in Japan and the impact that Japan has had on the field in East Asia.

Reconsidering Education in Japan

Like China, Japan has historically looked to foreign systems of education (King, 1986). As early as 1868, *The Imperial Oath of Five Articles* argued that, "Knowledge should be sought throughout the world in order that the welfare of the Empire may be promoted" (Kenne, 2005). This model continued to drive much of Japan's educational policy for much of the twentieth century (Tsuchimochi, 1982). Moreover, a strong advocacy in looking at foreign systems of education to improve Japanese schools, led to Japan's interest in comparative education (King, 1986).

After Japan's defeat in the Second World War, the United States occupied Japan as part of the peace agreement that ended the war. As one scholar notes, "Over half the wooden school buildings [in Japan] had been destroyed by fire raids. Many of the male teachers had long been conscripted for armed services" (Duke, 1966). Because of a shortage of trained teachers and school administrators as well as a lack of proper school buildings, many children did not attend school after the war. As a result, the United States, its allies, and the Japanese government restructured the country's educational system to meet the needs of a modern Japanese society. Some of the changes included 1) implementing sweeping curricula revisions at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, 2)

creating the *Mombusho* (Japan's Department of Education) and 3) establishing a system of school boards that overlooked general school operations (Duke, 1966). The new reorganization also provided students with a greater perspective about the world and an appreciation of democratic principles.

By 1952, Japan's first chair of comparative education was appointed at Kyoto University (Tsuchimochi, 1982). Following Japan's inception into the society, comparative education chairmanships opened at Kyushu University (1952), Hiroshima University (1953), Kyoto University (1965) and University of Tokyo (1967) (Tsuchimochi, 1982). Moreover, to add to a growing list of comparative education chairs, a Research Institute of Comparative Education and Culture was formed at both Kyushu and Fukuoka Universities (Brickman, 1966). Interestingly, the Japanese Comparative Education Society (JCES) would not be established until 1964, several decades after Japanese universities had been active in the field. The JCES nonetheless was the first national comparative education society in the world (Nishi, 2004).

Many scholars contend that a turning point in Japanese involvement in the field occurred in 1980 (Ninomiya, 2008; Masemann et. al. 2008). At the 1977 World Congress of Comparative and International Education, held in London, England, the Congress approved Tokyo, Japan to hold the Fourth World Congress 1980. The Congress also elected Masunri Hiratsuka as the council's third chairman and the theme of the Tokyo conference was "Tradition and Innovation in Education." JCES was also one of five societies that took part in creating the WCCES in Ottawa, Canada in 1970 (Mochida, 2001). Japan's memberships in the Congress also gradually increased over time. One observer noted that "...two-thirds of the participants [at the Congress] were from only three Countries: Japan (32 percent), the United Kingdom (19 percent), and the United States (16 percent)" (Epstein, 1981). In addition, the Japanese delegates at the Congress were second to the United Kingdom in terms of length of membership in a comparative education society (Epstein, 1981).

Interest in comparative education in Japan was also attributed to Japan's desire to become a global leader in manufacturing and technology. In the late 1970s one scholar noted that, "Japan may be described as the world's pathfinder into a technological world of the twenty first century" (King, 1986). Many in Japan saw education as a social force that not only shaped the nation's culture, values, goals, and aspirations, but also qua-

ranted Japan's success in the world. Japan thus looked to schooling and education as a means of preparing its citizens for a constantly changing global world (Beauchamp, 2014).

By the early 1980s, scholars from around the world were interested on the role that Japan's school system played in leading the country toward economic success (Cummings, 1989). A plethora of studies were produced during this time on various topics about Japanese education. Much of the literature set out to determine what the world could learn from Japan's school system (Cummings, 1989). A rigorous K-12 curriculum, as well as government and parental support in education were the main factors that led to Japan's success.

The JCES has been an active participant in comparative education for over fifty years. In 1980, JCES completed a bibliography of publication. The bibliography reported 1,941 books and articles by 160 of JCES's 394 members (Tsuchimochi, 1982). As of 2016, JCES claims to have nearly 1,000 registered members. On the JCES website, the society says it holds annual conferences, publishes a journal *Comparative Education*, issues a newsletter to its members, collaborates with other international societies such as the WCCES, operates a research institute called Research Information for International and Comparative Education (RICE), maintains a website, and gives an annual award to one of its members for distinguished work in the field of comparative education (JCES Website, http://www.soc.nii.ac.jp/jces/index_en.html).

With a long history in the WCCES and active participation with other comparative education societies, Japan has been a major contributor to the field of comparative education in East Asia. The following section looks at the development of comparative education in South Korea and how the field has helped in that nation's success.

Becoming Competitive in South Korea

Like China and Japan, South Korea has been interested in foreign systems of education for much of its history. As early as 372 A.D., the National Confucian Academy became the first state sponsored educational institution in Korea (Sorensen, 1994). The Academy was based on Chinese Confucian ideals with a strong emphasis on family structure and education. During the greater part of the Joseon Kingdom (1392-1897) contact with foreign

nations was restricted. That ended in 1882 with the signing of the Sino-Korean Trade Regulation Act, which opened trade between Korea and China. Several missionary schools were also opened during this period, which ostensibly exposed Korea to other forms of education (Dittrich, 2013). During the turn of the twentieth century the Korean government began taking steps in modernizing its school system. Shortly after however that was put to a halt after Japan colonized Korea in 1910. While the Japanese colonial administration (1910-1945) provided a modern form of education, much of it was designed to assure Korean loyalty to Japan (Ha, et. al., 2013).

It would not be until after the Korean War (1950-1953) that South Korea's educational system is drastically restructured (Seth, 2002). After the Korean War, Korea was divided between North Korea and South Korea. A newly appointed South Korean government took control of education from local school boards and placed it within the purview of the Ministry of Education. South Korea also looked outside of East Asia to other school systems and organizations when reconsidering its national school system during this period. Several sweeping changes were made to South Korea's education system. Some of these included: 1) Re-training teachers to consider a politically democratic South Korea, 2) providing free and compulsory education for all citizens at the elementary level, 3) lowering functional illiteracy by educating adults, 4) restoring the Korean language for technical terminology, and 5) expanding educational programs at various academic institutions (Seth, 2002).

A globally competitive South Korea also meant looking to international organizations. Among those organization considered were comparative education societies from around the world. In 1964, the Korean Comparative Education Society (KCES) was established (Sorensen, 1994). Tensions between North and South Korea also ran high during this period and organizations like KCES provided South Korea with a link to its western allies. Four years later, the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) was established in which the KCES was one of five comparative societies to help found the organization (Masemann et. al. 2008).

By the late 1990s, South Korea becomes a leader in education. Just two generations before South Korea had one of the lowest standards of living in the world, and was at the bottom of the Programme for International Assessment (PISA) (Schleicher, 2012). Many scholars were intrigued by South Korea's rise in the world. South Korea's educational system was a

major factor for its success. Many scholars attributed this success to 1) a system of tracking student performance into a higher education track or vocational track after high school, 2) regulating the output of professionals in certain fields, and 3) maintaining close educational and economic ties with Japan and the United States (Jang et al, 2004; Seth, 2002). South Korea's educational success was further recognized globally at the turn of the twenty-first century because almost every South Korean student completed high school and South Korea ranked at the top of PISA (Schleicher, 2012).

In 2001, the Korean Comparative Education Society hosted the WCCES Conference in Chungbuk, South Korea. There were 29 member societies that attended the conference. Earlier in 1999 Seoul National University launched the *Asia Pacific Education Review Journal* that focused explicitly on comparison (Bray, 2002). M. Bray also noted that the South Korean membership had grown to more than 300 members (Bray, 2002). This exceeded the memberships of Britain and Canada respectively. The language of reporting council business was also conducted in Korean. While South Korean comparative scholars focused most of their research attention on East Asia, by the 1990s South Korean scholars began examining other systems of education worldwide (Masemann et. al. 2008.)

Comparative education has a long history in South Korea, which also played a pioneering role in the founding of the WCCES in 1970. South Korea's success in comparative education has been brought about by a complex interplay of values, customs, institutions, and a desire to improve South Korea's economy and educational system. South Korea's continued influence in the field is seen today in South Korea's active participation in the field. The following section looks at the development of comparative education in Hong Kong and Taiwan and the impact those territories have had on the field in East Asia.

Two Little Giants: Hong Kong and Taiwan

Both Hong Kong and Taiwan have played significant roles in the development of comparative education in East Asia. For much of their histories Western forms of education influenced both Hong Kong and Taiwan (Shih & Jones, 2014). Hong Kong became a British colony in 1842. During British colonial rule Hong Kong was exposed to western forms of education. At

first, it was from Protestant and Catholic missionaries and later the British colonial government set up a school system modeled after the schools in England (Bray & Koo, 1999).

The British colonial schools taught both in English and Cantonese and both languages would later become the official languages of Hong Kong. By the 1960s, Hong Kong developed a strong sense of a unique national identity distinct from both China and its British colonial rulers (Hughes & Stone, 1999). Education was moreover seen as a way to help shape a Hong Kong national identity (Hughes & Stone, 1999). By the early 1980s an economic boom in Hong Kong attracted immigrants from South and East Asia. It was also during this time that Hong Kong becomes increasingly interested in comparative education (Bray & Koo, 1999).

In 1989, the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK) was established. Three years later, CESHK becomes a member of the WCCES. Over the past few decades, Hong Kong is the focus of several comparative studies. Many of these studies look at the link between education and political transition (Sweeting, 2001). Most of the CESHK publications still appear in English and Hong Kong's contribution to the literature of comparative education has been acknowledged as "...the top English-language publications in the field and in the Chinese-language journal with the largest circulation" (Bray & Quinn 2001). After China assumed control of Hong Kong in 1997, the field continued to flourish in Hong Kong. English continued to be the dominant language for most of the comparative education journals in Hong Kong, but Chinese was also becoming increasingly popular (Bray & Quinn 2001). This raised the question what language would be used for the publication of studies on comparative education. *The International Journal of Comparative Education and Development* (IJCED), which is the former journal of CESHK also contributed considerably to the scholarship of comparative education topics by including a sizable knowledge base and a broad focus on comparative education topics.

Like Hong Kong, Taiwan was colonized by Japan (1895-1945). During Japanese colonial rule a Japanese form of education was used in Taiwan (Tsurumi, 1984). After Japanese colonial rule Taiwan began to look at comparative education. The Taiwanese Comparative Society (CCES-T) was established in 1974. By 1990 CCES-T becomes a member of WCCES. Today Taiwan sees itself separate from China while China claims that Taiwan is part of greater China. The Taiwanese Comparative Society is

distinct from the mainland Chinese Society, calling itself Chinese Comparative Education Society-Taipei (CCES-T). It was established five years prior to the creation of the Chinese Comparative Society. According to the CCES-T website, its main purpose is to “1) to collect educational data in developed countries; 2) to introduce the recent educational trends of the developed countries; 3) to facilitate comparative educational scholarship and to improve instruction of comparative education; 4) to enhance international understanding and academic cooperation in the field of comparative education; 5) to provide the policy makers with the research-based evidences as the references for educational innovations in Taiwan” (Chinese Comparative Education Society Taipei, <http://ctceseng.weebly.com/about-ctces.html>). In 1983 CCES-T launched a newsletter, which later became *The Journal of Comparative Education*. The journal has been active since 1997 producing articles on issues on comparative education on East Asia and around the world.

Both Hong Kong and Taiwan have provided comparative scholars from around the world with new insights into how theoretical and methodological development of comparative education as a distinct field interacts with “social, economic, political, and cultural forces” within and societies of today (Templeton, 1958). Both territories have contributed to the growth of comparative education in East Asia and their participation in the field has been influenced by their past experiences.

Conclusion and Agenda

Surveyed in this article was the historical development of comparative education in East Asia. While all the nations and territories examined in this article (China, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan) continue to have a strong presence of comparative education, the ultimate growth of the field varied by country and territory. In all five cases, the field was introduced to the East Asia by the west, first during European colonialism in the region (mostly by Great Britain), and later through U.S. intervention in the region, during the Second World War and Korean War. A desire to modernize and reconsider education in East Asia furthered interest in comparative education.

Ultimately however, the dynamic interplay between expanding economic, political and social imperatives in the East Asian region and inter-

actions between nations and territories in East Asia led to a continued growth of the field. Over time however several issues arose, such as what type of language would be used in the publication of studies in the field. Would it be Chinese in mainland China? Would Hong Kong and Taiwan use English? Would Japan and Korea use both their national languages and English? Or would it be a facsimile of many languages? Another question that emerged was what direction the field should take in East Asia? Should scholars from East Asia for example only look at the educational systems in East Asia or should scholars also examine education systems worldwide?

The development of the field also varied by country and territory. In the case of Japan and South Korea, Japan ruled South Korea for much of the twentieth century. During this time, Japan imposed a limited form of education on South Korea that mostly sought to assure Korean loyalty to Japan. It was not until after the Second World War for Japan, and the Korean War for South Korea, that both nations looked to outside organizations in improving their school systems. Important to both nations were a strong national educational system that would lead to economic prosperity and political stability. Both nations became leaders in comparative education in East Asia and both nations' educational systems were viewed as models of how a strong educational system could lead to national prosperity. Comparative education societies were also important to Japan and South Korea and both nations became early pioneers in the founding of comparative education organizations.

China the largest of the nations examined in this article was first hesitant to look to outside organizations for inspiration. China began looking at comparative education only after China began to modernize in the 1970s. Like Japan and South Korea, however (who had earlier reorganized their school systems) China saw education and organizations like comparative education important to its national development. Overall, China provided the greatest opportunity for the growth in comparative education membership partly because of its size of population, and partly because of its ever-growing influence in the East Asian region. As discussed in this article, today China continues to provide the greatest opportunity for the growth of comparative education in East Asia. Many universities in China are increasingly adopting courses in comparative education and Chinese scholars are collaborating more and more with scholars from around the world on comparative education topics.

In the case of Hong Kong and Taiwan both nations were influenced by the English-speaking world, Hong Kong by Great Britain and Taiwan by both Great Britain and the United States. Hong Kong was reintegrated into China in 1997, while Taiwan still sees itself independent from China. Both nations have been active in the field of comparative education and their participation in the field has increased in both these territories.

Overall, the consideration discussed in this article of the development of comparative education phenomenon in East Asia raised as many questions as it answered. While it is evident that participation in comparative education has increased in East Asia, a broader study of comparative education societies in other parts of Asia or even Oceania, would serve to confirm or challenge this article's conclusions. For example, how would the development of comparative education differ in Japan from Australia and what could we learn from the field's development in these two nations? Or what are some of the ensuing intellectual discourses emerging from the interaction between comparative societies in the various nations and territories in East Asia? Here I signal the importance of posing these questions without the scope of answering them. That would be the challenge for future research on the development of comparative education in East Asia.

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