

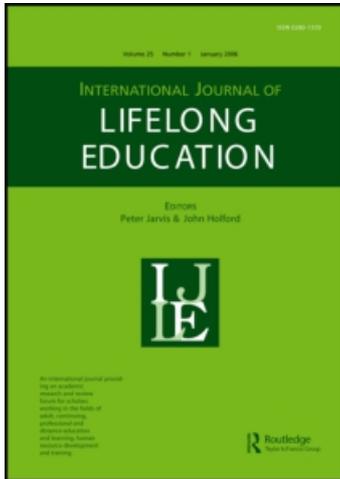
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Japan's new lifelong learning policy: exploring lessons from the European knowledge economy

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The concept of 'lifelong learning' or *shōgai gakushū* has rapidly become one of the topmost priorities in Japan's education policy agenda. This was considerably evident in December 2006 when the term 'lifelong learning' was added to Japan's educational charter, the Fundamental Law of Education. This paper explores, as a means to develop Japan's new lifelong learning policy, the lessons that can be learnt through an examination of the European countries' efforts to build a knowledge economy, where lifelong learning is regarded as the key solution in overcoming several important social and economic concerns. In this paper, I first examine the current situation of lifelong learning in Japan, employing the ethnographic data that I have collected since 2001. Second, I provide a brief review of the European lifelong learning policy, which is one of the priority guidelines in the European Union. Under the Lisbon Strategy, for example, the argument on European lifelong learning theoretically centres on developing human capital in order to survive in the global knowledge economy. Lastly, referring to the European experience over the past decade, I propose to directly connect Japan's latest policy development regarding lifelong learning with the trend of building human capital through lifelong learning in order to enhance its competitiveness in the era of globalisation.

Introduction

Lifelong learning or *shōgai gakushū* has gained prominence in political and academic circles due to its importance in creating educated and flexible workforces and improving the quality of life. Currently, it is one of the topmost priorities in Japan's policy agenda, as is evident by the addition of the term 'lifelong learning' to Japan's educational charter, the Fundamental Law of Education, in December 2006. As a concept, lifelong learning encompasses all aspects of learning, beginning at infancy right up to adult life; it includes the learning received in families, schools, vocational training institutions, universities, workplaces and communities. Lifelong learning is of crucial importance in sustaining the global knowledge economy and in promoting active citizenship, social cohesion, the quality of community life and personal development.

Japan has a rich tradition of lifelong learning. The latest statistics indicate that more than 40 million people—about one-third of the Japanese population—actively

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participate in some form of activity related to learning (Central Council for Education 2008: 84). This tradition could perhaps be attributed to the popular method of literacy through *terakoya* (temple schools) in the early modern period (cf. Rubinger 2007). Nowadays, a variety of learning opportunities related to the liberal arts, sports, fine arts, foreign languages and so on are provided across the country through government-funded programmes, libraries, museums and private lifelong-learning service providers. In the existing scholarship, Japan's lifelong learning is primarily argued as being a cultural model (cf. Schuetze and Casey 2006). It encompasses a process for each individual's life—designed to promote learning for learning's sake, oriented toward attaining cultural ends during leisure time (Kawanobe 1994; Okamoto 2001; Wilson 2001; Rausch 2004) and the enjoyment of music and sports (Watanabe 2005)—primarily in the context of an ageing society (Ogawa 2005). Furthermore, by promoting lifelong learning, the Japanese society is now shifting from an academic diploma-oriented society to a learning society (Fuwa 2001; Sawano 2007).

Following the 2006 amendment of the Fundamental Law of Education, discussions are now centred on the kind of lifelong learning policy that Japan should construct. In February 2008, the taskforce on lifelong learning at the Central Council for Education, an authoritative advisory body to the Education Minister, submitted a 131-page report stating that Japanese society needs to promote lifelong learning in order to survive in the new era (Central Council for Education 2008). First, the report mentions that lifelong learning is an important activity in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for enhancing individual employability amid fast-changing global conditions. Second, the report mentions the role of the governments at different levels in promoting lifelong learning activities, confirming the abovementioned Japanese tradition pertaining to learning activities. The second part is well examined and proposes to set up several government-funded programmes to support lifelong learning. However, the discussions on the first part apparently fail to provide any specific policy measures or theoretical rationales on employability; they primarily only reiterate the normative conceptualisation of learning activities.

In this paper, I propose to identify the current policy development in Japan with regard to lifelong learning from the context of a global, economic and social policy. Japan's involvement in developing a new lifelong learning policy should coincide more squarely with the ongoing scenario of intensified globalisation and the mobility of both labour and capital across different boundaries. In particular, I explore the lessons that can be learnt from European countries for establishing Japan's new lifelong learning policy by examining their efforts in building a knowledge economy. These countries regard lifelong learning as the key solution to overcoming several important social and economic concerns such as large-scale youth unemployment, increased migration rates and an ageing population. In a recently released European policy document, lifelong learning is defined as 'learning for personal, civic, social and employment-related purposes in and outside the formal education and training systems throughout the life and work cycle' (European Economic Area Consultative Committee 2008: 6). Over the past decade, Europe has made tremendous efforts to create a more competitive and cohesive region on a global platform. These efforts were embodied in the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, which aims at establishing the European Union (EU) as the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world and at achieving full employment by

2010. In fact, globalisation is the primary shaping force behind our system of learning as well as working.

'Knowledge economy' or *chishiki keizai* is becoming a popular term in Japan. The term first appeared in 1969 in Peter Drucker's *The Age of Discontinuity*. It is currently regaining both popular and academic attention in the context of a post-industrial society. A knowledge economy can be popularly defined as 'production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advance, as well as rapid obsolescence' (Powell and Snellman 2004: 201). One of the recent comprehensive publications on Japan's knowledge economy includes two sets of volumes titled *Japan, Moving Toward a More Advanced Knowledge Economy*, edited by Tsutomu Shibata (2006). The term 'knowledge economy' encompasses a wide array of activities and interpretations. According to Powell and Snellman (2004), at least three streams of research fall under this umbrella. The oldest approach (originally dating back to the early 1960s) focuses on the rise of new science-based industries and their role in social and economic change. Second, there has been a good deal of debate in the economics field over whether certain industries are particularly knowledge intensive. The third strand is considerably narrower and managerial in orientation, focusing on the role of learning and continuous innovation within firms. The abovementioned book falls under the third category. Meanwhile, this paper attempts to venture into a new area by analysing the broader sociological implications related to whether knowledge is codified or tacit, and the kinds of social and political arrangement that enhance knowledge generation.

The paper begins with a review of the development of Japan's lifelong learning, providing ethnographic data personally collected since 2001. The current situation of lifelong learning in fact transcends such a cultural model, as introduced earlier. Participants from the grassroots actually develop more dynamic learning activities in their local communities. The subsequent section provides an overview of the lifelong learning policy which is one of the priority guidelines in the EU. Under the Lisbon Strategy, the argument on European lifelong learning theoretically centres on developing human capital. Human capital, which is highly advocated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (see, for example, OECD 2007), connotes continuous work-related training and skill development in order to meet the needs of the economy and employers in building a qualified, flexible and adaptable workforce. Lifelong learning provides the capabilities and the self-confidence that are conducive to innovation and efficiency. Finally, at the end of this paper, I present an important lesson for Japan based on the European experience in building a knowledge economy. I argue—from the perspective of Japan, which has limited physical resources—that competition to succeed in human capital development through lifelong learning is the key to enhancing Japan's competitiveness in the ongoing process of globalisation.

Japan's lifelong learning: beyond a cultural model

Lifelong learning has been deeply institutionalised in Japanese society. In the post-World War II period, the Japanese government enacted the Social Education Law (*Shakai kyōiku hō*) of 1949, which created a solid foundation for lifelong learning in Japan. The law articulates the concept that lifelong learning is a legal right

of the Japanese people. For instance, this law states that both the national and the municipal governments are required to make every effort to set up and operate public facilities for lifelong learning so that all may enhance their lives by cultivating themselves. Further, it stipulates that the state and local public bodies should endeavour to attain the objectives of education by establishing institutions such as citizens' public halls (*kōminkan*), libraries, museums and so on. In 1990, the government enacted the Law for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning (*Shogai gakushū shinkō hō*). This law prescribes measures such as the establishment of lifelong learning councils at the national and prefectural levels for the local promotion of lifelong learning, a provision for the development of lifelong learning in designated communities, and surveys for assessing the learning demands and needs of prefecture residents (see Kawanobe 1994).

Since 2001, I have been documenting a civic group that promotes lifelong learning in an eastern Tokyo community (Ogawa, 2009). The civic group, referred to as SLG (a pseudonym) in this paper, is a third-sector organisation known as a non-profit organisation (NPO) which was established under the so-called NPO Law (formally known as the Law to Promote Specified Non-profit Activities, which was enacted in 1998). Over the years, SLG has offered a variety of lifelong learning opportunities to local residents. For example, the group offered a total of nearly 200 individual courses over two years from 2001 to 2003. The course list was representative of the concept of lifelong learning pursued by SLG. The list included activities in various areas such as career development, foreign languages, dance and sports, and was not restricted to cultural activities and hobbies. Individuals were offered the opportunity to attend these classes on their own initiative in order to enrich and improve their lives. SLG classified its courses into eight categories: community studies (focusing on history and culture in the neighbourhood); career development (computers, bookkeeping, etc.); languages; children's courses (English for children, rhythmic storytelling, etc.); liberal arts (literature, history, art history, etc.); hobbies (drawing, ceramic arts, cooking, etc.); sports; and special events. Liberal arts subjects—including Japanese literature, world history and foreign languages (English and Chinese, in particular)—and drawing were the most popular of all subjects. These courses were in high demand among the local residents, and several applications for these courses were received as soon as they were advertised via a monthly newsletter published by SLG. Most of the courses had sessions every week or every other week and lasted for three to six months. SLG offered these courses to local residents as well as to non-residents who worked in the municipality. During the fiscal year 2003 (from April 2003 through to March 2004), 1814 local residents registered for SLG courses. The course participants spanned all generations, from minors to seniors. However, the majority of the participants (65%) were over 50 years of age and 78% (1411) of the total (1814) were women.

Some might argue that the kind of lifelong learning opportunities that SLG offers could probably be provided by university extension (non-degree) programmes, language schools and culture centres (*karuchā sentā* in Japanese, most of which are operated by newspaper publishers and department stores). Many lifelong learning opportunities are available in Japan. However, my case does not simply support a cultural model, which was introduced at the beginning of this paper. The reason SLG stands out from among the other lifelong learning providers (and what impressed me throughout my fieldwork) is that the

organisation's operations were performed primarily by ordinary local-resident volunteers within the framework of an NPO. Volunteer participants planned and implemented courses, distributed information on and promoted the virtue of lifelong learning in the community. These activities were conducted on an unpaid, voluntary basis. As of 31 March 2003, SLG had a total of 102 registered volunteers, 68% of whom were women and 32% of whom were men. More than half of the volunteers were over 50 years of age, and housewives were the most active volunteer participants. It should be noted that this local service was primarily established as a social service provider in place of the government—and its role defined by the laws—as an attempt to reduce costs. After the enactment of the NPO Law, many governments across the country adopted similar means as SLG as part of the devolution of social services or the withdrawal of the state from social services—a key feature of neo-liberal governmentality (Dean 1999). SLG activities were fully funded by the municipal government. However, as a result of mobilising volunteers, the administrative cost was almost half of what it was when the same administrative work was previously performed by the municipal government.

While observing the activities of SLG, I noticed the volunteers' independent approaches and sensibilities in moulding community-oriented learning. Their learning was considerably enhanced through volunteer activities which were aimed at activating the local community as well as nurturing independent and individual learning activities. It became evident that their style in fact transcended that of a cultural model in two major respects. The first was observed in the community studies programme. With respect to the people at SLG, their programme development is what made the organisation different from that of other lifelong learning providers. For both course takers and course planners, the programme implemented at SLG generated reflections on the community and fostered community development sensitivity through lifelong learning activities. In addition to the regular courses, SLG organised several special one-day events and lectures every year. On the first day of the summer vacation in July, SLG held a summer festival targeting local children. Several activities were prepared to introduce traditional Japanese handicrafts and toys such as *koma* (tops), *kendama* (cups and balls), *kusabue* (grass reed), *takeuma* (stilts) and *origami* (paper folding). On this occasion, local senior residents invited from neighbourhood associations and parent teacher associations (PTAs) served as instructors, teaching the children how to make toys and play with them. The second difference, with which I was primarily impressed during my fieldwork, was that the SLG volunteers recognised their involvement in the process of course planning and implementation as part of their own experience of lifelong learning. This is evident, for example, in Ms Minami's comment when she shared her own experiences with some new volunteers. Ms Minami is a piano instructor in her early 40s who designed an introductory course on opera after volunteering for one year in the course planning department. 'I planned a course on opera, responding to a request from a local resident. Currently, I am happy to help with the course. Every week, I become obsessed with course preparation, though. While working as a piano teacher, it occurred to me how much I could help the course participants understand opera music as an instructor. I believe in being involved in this process; I make efforts to achieve something that is definitely a part of my own lifelong learning. I appreciate volunteering at SLG. It gives me a chance to enhance myself in such a way'.

Japan's lifelong learning: an analysis of government reports

On 19 February 2008, the Central Council for Education submitted a report to the Education Minister Kisaburo Tokai. The report provides several basic perspectives on the development of Japan's new lifelong learning policy.

The very beginning of the report states the key conceptual framework of lifelong learning in Japan:

Learning is an individual activity based on his/her own interests and motivations. Promoting such learning activities makes it possible for people to have healthy, sound lives. Also, acquiring and updating skills and knowledge for a working life makes it possible to have an economically stable life. At the same time, this kind of learning activity will contribute to develop individuals' abilities, which can support and develop society. Those individuals will ultimately contribute to activate the overall society and the sustainable development of this country. Considering Japan's current situation and future, it is necessary and important to achieve a lifelong learning society. (Central Council for Education 2008: 3)

One of the new major points is that the report locates Japan's lifelong learning activities from the perspective of developing 'comprehensive knowledge' or *sōgōtekina chi* (Central Council for Education 2008: 3). Such knowledge is described as something inevitable in dynamic social changes under the ongoing globalisation. The report states the following with regard to knowledge:

In order to respond to the current dynamic changes, we need to develop 'comprehensive knowledge'. The knowledge is not simple knowledge or skills in narrow terms. It refers to abilities to identify problems as well as to think about things flexibly. The knowledge plays a significant role in negotiating the complexities of everyday life and establishing networks with others. Such knowledge is based on rich human nature. (Central Council for Education 2008: 3)

The report continues further:

In particular, considering the recent economic bifurcation among nations and the growth in unemployment, it is necessary that each individual responds to social changes and develops employability over his/her lifetime, while updating knowledge and skills ... It has become an urgent agenda to prepare environments for continuing learning activities. We need to develop policy measures in order to ensure that such learning opportunities are equally provided. (Central Council for Education 2008: 4)

In fact, the governments at both the national and municipal levels are expected to support lifelong learning in a considerably positive manner. Furthermore, supporting lifelong learning contributes to building a safety net for society. The report also asserts that opportunities for re-learning should always be available; thus, the Japanese people will have the opportunity to re-build their lives at any point in time based on the various choices available. Given the development of advanced

information technology, e-learning is mentioned as an alternative to conventional learning.

The report also emphasises the role of local communities in supporting individual learning activities (Central Council for Education 2008: 3). On this point, the interim report, which was submitted to the Education Minister in January 2007, provides extremely relevant insights (Central Council for Education 2007a). Interestingly enough, it became evident that the report emphasises a public or *kōkyō* point of view with regard to lifelong learning activities. It discusses a distinctive view on Japan's new lifelong learning:

It is now expected that people who have knowledge, skills, and experiences spontaneously and actively participate in agenda-setting and problem-solving activities in local communities; in order to facilitate those activities, the government needs to support learning about history and culture in the communities. Also, in collaboration with schools, public lifelong-learning facilities, businesses, and NPOs, local residents are expected to develop their own learning toward problem-solving activities. The government needs to support this. (Central Council for Education 2007b)

In the above quote, lifelong learning is regarded as a tool for active participation in the Japanese social and political spheres. Through lifelong learning activities, Japanese people are expected to be involved with something positive for improving society. This is in line with the currently revised Fundamental Law of Education, which newly advocates the purpose of education as follows: 'nurturing attitudes, which spontaneously participate in society and contribute to its development, based on the spirit of public'.

Lifelong learning is not limited to subjects related to hobbies and liberal arts. The interim report (Central Council for Education 2007c) specifically identifies nine subject areas with regard to lifelong learning: (1) declining birth rate and ageing; (2) gender equality; (3) environment; (4) law; (5) consumer education; (6) crime prevention; (7) nutrition; (8) technology; and (9) career development. Furthermore, the report makes the following claim:

The government is expected to increase courses offering both quantitatively and qualitatively on these 'socially demanding' subjects, and local residents are expected to mould the 'public' in their community, on the basis of what they learn. For this purpose, public lifelong-learning facilities such as citizens' public halls should function as the centre for such learning activities.

The report continues,

It is important to offer learning opportunities aiming to nurture responsibility for society through *hō shi* (roughly translated as volunteering in English) activities, as well as knowledge and skills for spontaneously participating in and contributing to the society.

In fact, Japanese lifelong learning planned by the national government is expected to produce a disciplinary set of knowledge and skills for bettering the state and society.

In this context, SLG is a frontrunner in Japanese lifelong learning. Presented below is the government's internal document, acquired during my fieldwork, which justifies volunteer mobilisation. The English translation of the document title is 'On learning activities and volunteering':

The basic principle of the lifelong learning policy is self-learning by residents themselves. The learning activities should be operated through the residents' spontaneous will. However, such opportunity for learning could be strategically arranged and intentionally organized by the municipal government. In this project, the residents can be both students and teachers. They can learn from each other. The residents are expected to not only acquire new knowledge and skills but also to enhance themselves and improve the quality of their lives through involvement in this project. Thus, the proposed project of lifelong learning can be 'hand-made' by the volunteer-residents ... Lifelong learning is a positive learning activity in a community, one where independent residents build their own learning promotion system and provide learning opportunities for the residents. That is, lifelong learning is independent, self-directed volunteering activities by the residents themselves.

SLG, a community-oriented lifelong learning NPO, is engaged in creating and supporting the 'public' at the grassroots level through volunteer activities which actually lead to participants' learning. This is in line with the recommendation suggested by the interim report emphasising the 'public' through lifelong learning activities. As of 31 March 2008, nearly half of the NPOs established under the 1998 NPO Law registered in the area of lifelong education; it is the second most popular area among the 17 designated areas following social welfare (Cabinet Office 2008).

Enhance competitiveness: building the European knowledge economy

Meanwhile, even in Europe, lifelong learning is regarded as a key policy. However, their lifelong learning activities have been developed under a philosophy that is considerably different from that of Japan. In the European policy context, the debate of lifelong learning is treated in a more utilitarian manner. It is more focused on knowledge production in globalizing social and economic life, making serious efforts to identify the kind of knowledge appropriate for economic and social developments. It is considered as the foundation for competing in the globally expanding knowledge economy. Lifelong learning is squarely connected to success and to the individuals' employment strategy in the knowledge economy, since the current labour market demands ever-changing profiles of skills, qualifications and experiences.

Since the 1990s, along with the international economic restructuring, the EU placed a high priority on the need to raise the skill levels across European countries. In Europe, lifelong learning centring on vocational education and training is primarily regarded by the EU policymakers as being significant in the employment strategy for creating a highly skilled workforce capable of adapting to European as well as global demands in an environment of intensified competition. The White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, and Jobs, issued by President Jacques Delors in 1993, was a milestone in setting up an EU policy for lifelong learning, which was necessary for improving the significant unemployment situation in Europe. The

follow-up came at the Luxemburg Summit in 1997, which was held to determine the development of an employment strategy for the EU. Since then, as Jones (2005: 248) points out, successive European summits took active measures on five key structural issues: (1) developing job-intensive growth; (2) the reduction of non-wage labour costs; (3) the introduction of more active labour market measures; (4) targeting help for long-term unemployed individuals; and (5) investment in human resources. Increasing concern among Europeans contributed to the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997, which asked the member states to commit to 'the development of a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce and labour markets responsive to economic change'.

In the 1990s, the idea of lifelong learning was indeed reconsidered for the first time since the early 1970s, when UNESCO promoted the idea of lifelong learning, or rather lifelong education, propounded by the Faure report, *Learning to Be* (1972). At the time, although the OECD placed emphasis on recurrent education as a strategy for promoting lifelong education (Tuijnman and Boström 2002: 99), it also actively promoted lifelong learning. While UNESCO provided a broad use of the concept, the OECD narrowed lifelong learning to the human capital theory, which refers to the stock of productive skills and knowledge in labour (Schultz 1961; Mincer 1962; Becker 1964). In line with the OECD's policymaking, the EU translated lifelong learning into the educational policies of the sovereign state and beyond. With regard to this policy move, Borg and Mayo (2005: 207–208) state the following: 'Its re-emergence in this context, and in the context of the OECD, has to be seen against the backdrop of a world economic system characterised by the intensification of globalisation and the emergence of the neo-liberal ideology'.

In more recent policy developments, lifelong learning was actively embodied as an integral policy in the Lisbon Strategy toward the global knowledge economy. Meeting in Lisbon, Portugal, in March 2000, the European Council set for the EU a new and ambitious goal: to become, by 2010, 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Commission 2006: 38). In particular, the strategy emphasised the demand to adapt oneself to changes in the information society and to boost research and development. Consequently, the European Council published a key policy document—*A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*—on the basis of the conclusions reached during the 1996 European Year of Lifelong Learning. This policy document provided a key conceptual framework to the current education policy discourse in Europe. In the memorandum, the council adopts, on its very first page, the following definition of lifelong learning:

[A]ll purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence. (European Commission 2000: 3)

Further, it mentions the following:

Lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision. All those living in Europe, without exception, should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change and to participate actively in the shaping of Europe's future. (European Commission 2000: 3)

Lifelong learning is positively and clearly defined as something that everyone should be involved in to enrich their quality of lives, referring to four broad objectives of learning: personal fulfilment; active citizenship; social inclusion; and employability/adaptability (European Commission 2001: 9). Nevertheless, in a very practical way, it proposes one crucial aim: promoting employability. In fact, toward achieving the Lisbon objective, there is a convergence in economic, industrial and productive policies.

The policy report highlights enhancing human capital, which leads directly to employability, throughout lifelong learning in the knowledge economy. The memorandum justifies the reason for putting lifelong learning into practice as a top priority for Europe.

More than ever before, access to up-to-date information and knowledge, together with the motivation and skills to use these resources intelligently on behalf of oneself and the community as a whole, are becoming the key to strengthening Europe's competitiveness and improving the employability and adaptability of the workforce. (European Commission 2000: 5)

The report emphasises that a comprehensive and coherent lifelong learning strategy for Europe should aim to 'guarantee universal and continuing access to learning for gaining and renewing the skills needed for sustained participation in the knowledge society' (European Commission 2000: 10). Economic and social change are modifying and upgrading the profile of basic skills that everyone should have as a minimum entitlement. The report mentions five skills as the 'new basic skills' (European Commission 2000: 10–11), such as: (1) IT skills, (2) foreign languages, (3) technological culture, (4) entrepreneurship, and (5) social skills. IT skills suggest digital literacy, which are genuinely new. Foreign languages are now becoming important for a larger number of people than they were in the past. Further, social skills such as self-confidence, self-direction and risk-taking are becoming important since people are expected to be able to behave much more autonomously than in the past. The follow-up report titled *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* (published in November 2001) claims political commitment on this purpose, stating the foundations for lifelong learning must be provided by governments through compulsory schooling, but adults who dropped out of school with ongoing literacy, numeracy and other basic skills needs should also be encouraged to participate in compensatory learning (European Commission 2001: 22).

Lifelong learning encourages people to participate in all spheres of social and economic life, which include the opportunities and risks they face in trying to do so and therefore the extent to which they feel that they belong to and have a fair say in the society they live. According to a report, which was prepared for the EU spring council in 2007, over the past decade, most of the new jobs across European countries have come from the expansion of the knowledge economy (Work Foundation 2007: 9). In fact, between 1995 and 2005 employment across the knowledge-based industries rose by 24%, significantly erasing income inequality in Europe. The reports point out that there is no evidence that the considerable growth in the knowledge-based industries over the past decade has widened income inequality at the EU level (measured by the Gini-coefficient) or in most national economies (Work Foundation 2007: 25).

Key lesson for Japan's lifelong learning

Thus far, I have analysed two completely unique styles of lifelong learning in Japan and Europe. Each case presents an interesting model: one is the Japanese model which regards lifelong learning as a tool to actively participate in social and political spheres, primarily highlighting 'public' as a keyword; the other is the European model which seeks to develop human capital toward the global knowledge economy, pursuing 'employability'. In the ongoing discussion toward building a new lifelong learning policy in Japan, I would like to suggest one point as a lesson that can be learnt from the European lifelong learning discourse. Although this point has not been mentioned in the reports submitted to the Education Minister, I believe that it is extremely important in spurring Japan's lifelong learning to something more relevant in this globalising world.

The key lesson that can be learnt from the European experience is that Japan's latest policy development with regard to lifelong learning should be considered as a dynamic effort to directly connect it to the global trend of building human capital in the knowledge economy. The two Japanese reports I examined earlier have not considered the Japanese model of lifelong learning from the perspective of a social policy, utilitarian dimensions or, for that matter, from the global perspective. The major difference between Japan and Europe is that the European lifelong learning policy is directly linked to the labour market strategy. The European Employment Strategy, the integrated guidelines for growth and employment in the EU since 1997, features specific guidelines that focus on the employment and labour market through lifelong learning.

The European efforts have accelerated following the announcement of the midterm review of the Lisbon Strategy in the so-called Kok Report (European Commission 2004), which calls for more effective investment in human capital. In the report, the following statement is made in the section entitled 'Building an inclusive labour market for stronger social cohesion':

If Europe is to compete in the global knowledge society, it must also invest more in its most precious asset—its people ... Yet at present, far from enough is being done in Europe to equip people with the tools they need to adapt to an evolving labour market, and this applies to high- and low-skilled positions and to both manufacturing and services. (European Commission 2004: 33)

In order to produce a 'highly educated, creative and mobile workforce', the report asks the member states to make lifelong learning schemes available to all—all must be encouraged to take part in them (European Commission 2004: 33). A report (European Commission 2005) following the midterm review further states:

The modernisation and reform of Europe's education and training systems is mainly the responsibility of Member States. However, there are certain key actions that must be taken at European level to facilitate and contribute to this process ... The Community will contribute to the objective of more and better jobs by mobilising its expenditure policies. (European Commission 2005: 29)

In 2005, the Mutual Learning Programme was launched for increasing the adaptability of workers and enterprises and investing in an increasingly effective manner

in human capital (European Commission Employment and Social Affairs 2008). The programme was implemented in 2008 as a priority, given the increasing labour supply, by focusing on the people who are at the periphery of the labour market (Mutual Learning Programme 2008). Meanwhile, the European Investment Bank is to mobilise a sum of EUR 50 billion over the debate (European Investment Bank 2008). The bank focuses on the following three objectives paving the way for technological modernisation and the tailoring of human capital to the European economy: (1) improving access to quality education and training; (2) supporting excellence in research, development and innovation; and (3) promoting the diffusion of information and communications technology networks, including audiovisual activities. Such funding obviously targets masses of unemployed youth, increased migration rates and an ageing population; all these issues are currently echoed in Japan as well.

Learning is a continuous process spanning a lifetime and is intended at improving and adjusting oneself to society. I would like to point out that lifelong learning is a central part of European educational policy discourse. In fact, the flagship 'Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–2013' was introduced in order to integrate all of the existing programmes in the education field into one overall framework programme. On 10 March 2008, an EU-wide conference titled 'University and Lifelong Learning' was held, with the welcome address given by Mojca Kucler Dolinar, the Slovenian Minister for Higher Education, Science, and Technology. It confirmed the above point:

When we speak about lifelong learning as a twenty-first century educational approach, we often forget that lifelong learning is not a separate process conducted in parallel to formal education; lifelong learning must be acknowledged and incorporated into formal education. In this present-day age of rapidly changing technologies and organisations, the individual's capacity to learn and to adapt to the needs of the environment in terms of new skills and knowledge is increasingly appreciated. The simple ability to learn is no longer enough. (European Union 2008)

Learning can occur across the full range of our lives and at any stage. Europeans believe that this comprehensive education strategy allows for social equity and ultimately helps in attaining the goal of a knowledge economy.

Conclusion

This paper argues the latest developments in lifelong learning, primarily comparing the European lifelong learning policy with that of Japan. Both Japan and Europe are active in promoting lifelong learning. However, there has been a significant difference in their lifelong learning strategies. Europe has effectively institutionalised lifelong learning, going ahead of Japan in developing it as a continuous training system appropriate for upholding the global knowledge economy. A well-educated and flexible workforce is considered to be a prerequisite for industrial innovativeness and international competitiveness in contemporary advanced capitalist societies. Meanwhile, Japan's policy development reveals an interesting aspect, introducing the concept of 'public' in its learning activities. While there is nothing wrong with

such an approach, comparatively speaking, in the expanding knowledge economy, it is inevitable that this style will make Japan less competitive than Europe where serious efforts have been made to try and succeed in the intensified global trend. Indeed, European lifelong learning is inclined to promote the economic empowerment of individuals through improving their human capital. Meanwhile, personal, civic and social aspects should be better considered in terms of enhancing the quality of life through learning. Now, however, the question that arises is simply as follows: why is Japan not actively connecting such a rich tradition of lifelong learning to the production of human capital to compete in the global knowledge economy? If it manages to do so, it will probably be one of the most effective ways in which Japan can maintain a high level of economic prosperity, galvanising the persistently sluggish social atmosphere after the burst of the so-called 'bubble' economy in the late 1980s. I conclude that Japan has much to learn from Europe.

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