

## Social Work Education and Qualification of Social Workers: Japanese Experience

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This paper was originally prepared for presentation at the International Symposium on Social Work Education in the US and Japan<sup>1</sup> in order to let Americans know of the Japanese situation in the field of social work education. It is more informative as opposed to scholarly research. Together with the paper by Dr. Baskind, readers will be aided in understanding the differences and similarities in social work education between the US and Japan.

### **A Brief History of Social Welfare Measures in Japan**

It was after World War II that Japan's social welfare systems began to develop on a full scale, though it is a widely known fact that the idea of social welfare in Japan had been developed in the sixth century by Prince Shotoku (Amenomori, 1977; JNC-ICSW, 1990). The basic framework of the existing social welfare system of our country was created in the 1940's as an emergency measure to cope with various problems at that time involving the war wounded, orphans, poverty and so on. Emergency measures were urgently required for supporting the lives of the needy, including repatriates and the unemployed. At the same time, it was necessary to implement measures for better nutrition and for preventing the spread of infectious diseases such as cholera, which is caused by degraded food and sanitary conditions. The postwar social welfare administration started mainly from the implementation of these emergency measures. Among such meas-

ures enacted were the Daily Life Security Law of 1946, which led to the establishment of a public assistance system based on the three principles of national responsibility, non-discrimination and equality, and ensuring of a minimum standard of living; the Child Welfare Law of 1947, which originated from the measures for war orphans and street children; and the Law for the Welfare of People with Physical Disabilities, which originated from measures for war invalids, providing a system to implement measures for physically disabled people including the recovery of vocational abilities. Half a century has passed since Japanese people started to rebuild their country, based on the new constitution. During this period, social welfare systems have been expanded and influenced by rapid changes in the economic conditions, and in the structure of population, which includes economic growth, rapid increase of population, drastic changes in the industrial structure, land development, movement of population, and the progress of aging, as shown in the following table and graph. Throughout those years, people made efforts to expand social welfare to respond to the diversified demands from various groups of people. Japan's present social welfare systems deal widely with diversified needs in people's lives, from their birth to death such as illness, injuries, disabilities, unemployment, care requirements, and aging.

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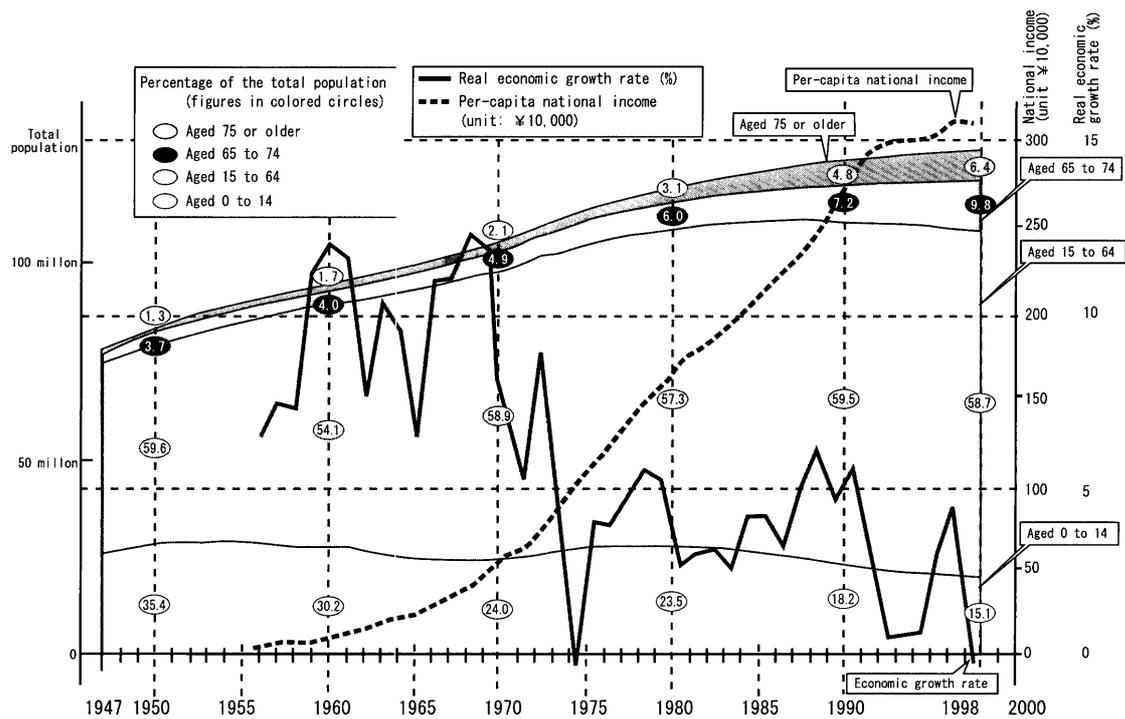
<sup>1</sup> The Symposium was hosted by the Niigata University of Health and Welfare on September 22nd, 2003 coordinated by Professor Sonoda of the University. The other panelist was Dr. Baskind, the Dean of the Virginia Commonwealth University and the President of the Council on Social Work Education.

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**Table 1 Changes in the Number of Children Born and Total Fertility Rate**

Year	Number of children born	Total fertility rate	Year	Number of children born	Total fertility rate
1950	2,337,507	3.65	1980	1,576,889	1.75
1955	1,730,692	2.37	1985	1,431,577	1.76
1960	1,606,041	2.00	1990	1,221,585	1.54
1965	1,823,697	2.14	1995	1,187,064	1.42
1970	1,934,239	2.13	2000	1,190,547	1.36

**Figure 1. Changes in the Total Population, Economic Growth Rates, and Improved National Income**



Source: 1. For population, "National Census" by the Management and Coordination Agency  
 2. For the real economic growth rate and the per-capita national income, "National Economic Accounts" (fiscal values) by the Economic Planning Agency

(Source: <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/wp/wp-hw/vol1/p1c1s1.html>)

### Social Changes and Needs for Qualified Social Workers

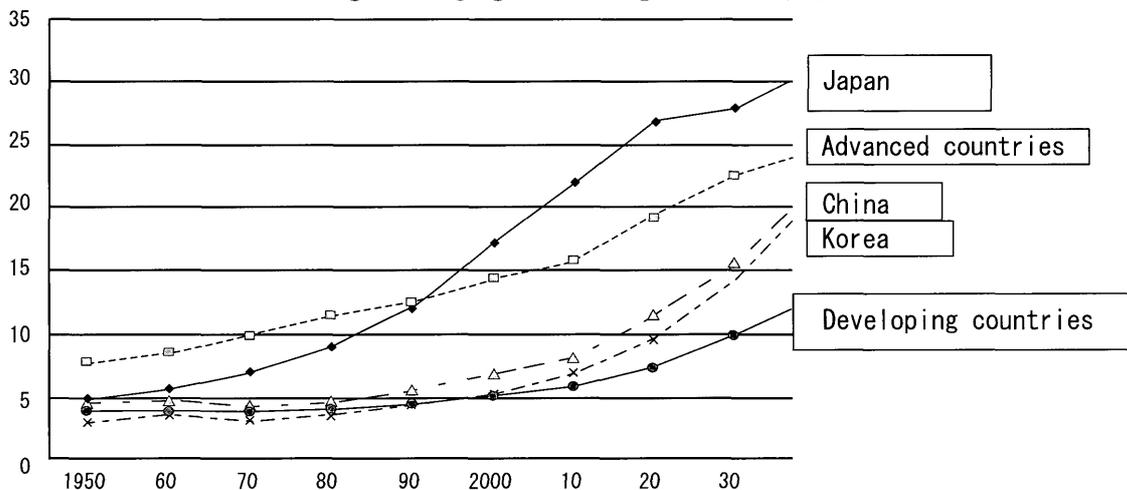
The birth rate decline and the aging of the population in Japan is proceeding at a speed unprecedented in other nations. The population of people age 65 or older in 2000 was 17.2%; it is predicted that this will be the highest percentage of anywhere in the world by 2010. At the same time, the total fertility rate (which indicates the number of children borne to a woman throughout her lifetime) had fallen to 1.34 in 1999. The form of the family is undergoing a transformation, with women's participation in society, and the scaling down of the family. In the midst of this transformation, the role which social welfare will play is expected to grow to include support for long-term care needs for the aged and child care.

In order to respond to social changes, adjustment of the entire social welfare systems, including a review of the ways to share burdens and benefits among different generations, is needed. Social welfare systems are becoming more important such as social support given to the lives of individuals that tend to be unstable due to pressure for reform of Japan's traditional economic system. At the same time, it is also necessary to pursue more efficiency in social welfare systems

which have been expanding their scale in response to the national economy. Today, welfare administration is promoted mainly by local municipalities for their residents. The ideas of "user orientation" and "self-support" were accepted. Furthermore, the government began to utilize the abilities of private entities. In response to the needs of the times, efforts have been made to reinforce a series of measures in individual areas of welfare, which are designed to promote respect for users' options in welfare services, such as the establishment of a nursing care insurance system.

Therefore, the government considers it vital to implement a drastic reform, based on the idea that the future of social welfare lies in helping individuals become independent and live a worthwhile life with dignity as human beings in their homes and communities, regardless of their handicaps and ages. The purposes of the reform are; (1) realization of user-oriented social welfare; (2) improvement of welfare services that fully meet the needs of the times; and (3) promotion of comprehensive regional welfare. The government has been energetically tackling the reform of the basic structure of social welfare since the summer of 1997. A reform bill was sub-

Figure 2 Aging rate among countries (%)



(Source: UN, World Population Prospects: 1998)

mitted to the Diet in March, 2000 and passed in May of the same year.

According to the national government's paper entitled "The Whole Image of the Basic Structural Reform of Social Welfare", the framework of the reform is as following:

#### 1. The Purpose of the Reform

The purpose of this reform is to review the system of common foundations for social welfare, including social welfare services, social welfare foundations and the sochi-seido, which have not been largely revised since the establishment of the Social Welfare Service Law in 1951, in order to deal with people's demands for social welfare which are expected to increase and diversify in the future. The measures peculiar to individual social welfare fields will be further promoted based on this reform.

#### 2. The Idea of the Reform

This reform will be promoted based on the idea of social welfare support so that individuals can lead an independent life, suitable for each of them, with dignity.

The direction of concrete reform is;

- (1) To establish a system which respects individuals' choices
- (2) To expand high-quality welfare services
- (3) To improve regional welfare in giving comprehensive support to achieve individuals' independent lives.

#### 3. The Direction of the Reform is

Ⓐ the establishment of a User-Oriented Social Welfare System:

(1) the systematizing the use of welfare services; The content of services are decided by the administrative offices through administrative measures (sochi-seido). Users choose their services based on the equal relation between service users and providers (riyo-seido).

\*1 Regarding financial aid at the expense of public money, the current level will be maintained.

\*2 Regarding systems that do not adjust to the riyo-seido, the sochi-seido will continue to be

applied.

(2) Establishing a User Protection System:

a) System for Protecting the Rights in Regional Welfare:

This system is established as a complement to the System of Guardianship of Legal Majority, in order to help people with a weakened ability to decide by themselves, use welfare services.

b) A mechanism is required to handle complaints from the standpoint of promoting solutions through voluntary discussions between the parties concerned, to promote the handling of complaints in the presence of a third party within facilities, and to establish third party organizations in each prefecture.

Ⓑ Improvement of the Service Quality;

(1) Fostering and securing personnel resources to support high-quality welfare services:

A Consideration of the ideal curriculum, practice and after-graduation continued education aimed at obtaining the knowledge, technique and humanity which are suitable for welfare specialists, is required.

(2) Introducing the evaluation of service quality by a third party to secure the quality of welfare services and establishing a third party organization to evaluate services.

(3) Ensuring the transparency of services in order to ensure the transparency of service operation, service users' choice and sense of security, making it an obligation to disclose the content of services and management information, and establishing an information provision system by municipalities and the Social Welfare and Medical Service Corporation

Ⓒ Diversifying and Activating Social Welfare Services;

(1) Expanding the extent of social welfare services in response to diversified demands for social welfare, the following services will be added:

Consultation and assistance service to protect

rights;

Service to facilitate communication for people with disabilities.

(2) To ease the requirements for establishing social welfare corporations to promote careful activities in communities, the following requirements will be eased:

Asset requirements;

Requirements for commuting sheltered workshops.

(3) Promoting participation by various players of welfare services: considering the participation by various players, paying attention to the characteristics of services and players, as well as considering the quality of services and the security of service continuity and security.

(4) Making the operation of social welfare corporations flexible: easing the restrictions of corporations' financial and accounting systems so that social welfare corporations will actively play an expected role.

④ Improvement of Regional Welfare;

(1) Formulating regional welfare plans:

Regional welfare plans will be made at prefectures and municipalities for the purpose of promoting the establishment of foundations comprehensively and systematically, and linking residents' voluntary activities with public services;

(2) To activate the councils of social welfare, welfare volunteers, child welfare volunteers and the Community Chest from the standpoint of the change in social environment and strengthening service foundations, reviewing the idea of systems, purposes, and the content of services.<sup>2</sup>

### **Establishment of Certified Social Worker and Care Worker Systems**

Using these circumstances for the social welfare environment, and for seeing a demographic change, the government's concern has become providing manpower for new social welfare programs.

The success of various social welfare measures depends on how well we can provide adequate staff for the programs. In other words, if we cannot provide enough qualified social workers for these programs, they will not attain their goals, thus professional social workers with qualifications has become an important feature in the chain of welfare reform. Manpower policy, especially with respect to qualifying professional social workers, has been one of the keys to welfare reform and improvement of the level of quality of social welfare services.

It has been fifteen years since the law of Certified Social Workers and Care Workers was enacted. Certified social workers now number more than 48,000, and nearly 8000 are added every year. Before the creation of the law, we had, and still have, some regulations for qualifying social workers. When the Social Welfare Services Law was enacted in 1951, we had few social workers professionally trained. The law set minimum standards for social workers who worked in public institutions that provided various social welfare services. When the new Daily Life Security Law was enacted in 1950, the law required that all municipal social welfare offices have qualified social workers to meet regulations based on the law. The central and local governments set up training courses for qualified social workers. The Japan College of Social Work was founded for that purpose, for example. However, it became clear that it would be impossible to im-

<sup>2</sup> This explanation can be seen from the web

<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/wp/wp-hw/vol1/p2c4s1.html>

Table 4-1-2. "The Whole Image of the Basic Structural Reform of Social Welfare"

plement the goals. The public social welfare agencies needed more qualified social workers than were available. The government had to concede that they had no choice other than to allow the qualification level for social workers in the public social welfare agencies to decline. We call those social workers, “*shakaifukushi-shuji*”, “three subjects' workers”, because they had to have completed more than three subjects, such as sociology, economics, and psychology, as stated in the regulation issued by the Ministry while they were in colleges or universities.

Before the creation of certified social workers system, we did not have very many faculties or departments of social welfare in universities or colleges in Japan. Many people, holding a BA degree, have taken the courses of psychology, sociology and economics etc., which are required for this qualification. Despite the low level of requirement, “*shakaifukushi-shuji*” social workers played a great role in raising the level of professional quality of social workers, at least until the early 1960s.

However, as I mentioned before, the environment surrounding social welfare has changed. Various research in the 1980s indicated a large demographic change in our society in the near future. The prospect of this social phenomenon seemed to indicate that a large amount of manpower would be required in the field of social welfare to meet new needs which would be created by the emergence of an ageing society with fewer children. Recent trends in user-oriented social welfare, the inclusion of the private sector into social welfare services, requirements for improved social welfare services and the promotion of comprehensive regional welfare for clients with diversified and difficult problems demand the implementation of standards for safe, professional practice of social work throughout the country. That is why the Certified Social Work-

ers and Care Workers Law was created. And 10 years later, with other requirements, the Psychiatric Social Workers Law was enacted in December 1997.

### Consequence

Since the creation of Certified Social Workers, more and more universities and colleges have established departments or faculties of social welfare. Students also have shown a tendency to take the courses that are required for the national examination for certified social workers. The examination requires both foundation and intensive courses in the following thirteen subjects: Theories on social security; Public assistance; Principles of social welfare; Community work; Jurisprudence; Sociology; General Medicine; Psychology; Social welfare for the handicapped; Child welfare; Social welfare for the aged; Issues on human care; and Social work knowledge and skills. The four years' study by students in universities or colleges is devoted to those subjects the examination requires. However, this creates difficulties for universities wishing to build an advanced curriculum at the master's level.

Now we have more master's degree programs than ever before, and the number is still increasing. The problem we face is what we should teach in the undergraduate program and what in the master's program, and how we should define a difference between them in order to make the aims of these programs clear.

### References

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- JNC-ICSW (Japan National Committee-International Council of Social Welfare). 1990. *Social welfare services in Japan*. Tokyo: JNC-ICSW.