Controversy and Change: School Rules in Postmodern Japan

Yuichi Tamura
University of Kansas

Dissertation Summary

School rules in Japan are consequential in prescribing socially accepted patterns of students' lifestyles (appearance, behavior, interaction) both within and outside schools. This dissertation explores the transformation of Japanese school rules during the last few decades. Japanese schools experienced two major shifts in the nature of school rules: hyperregulation in the 1970s and the early 1980s, and deregulation in the late 1980s and the 1990s.

This dissertation is about meanings of school rule change. I examine school rules, educational policies, and the ideological apparatus of the state in order to understand how national identity as Japanese has changed. School rules are the significant medium for socialization of youth. Their changes is therefore reflective of a shifting conception of what Japanese identity entails. This dissertation documents one manifestation of changing national identity in postmodern Japan.

This dissertation is also about causes and conditions of change. I analyze the case from a multi-layered perspective. Major explanations of educational change focus on socio-historical and institutional conditions and underexamine local dynamics involved in the process of change. A multi-layered perspective is designed to be sensitive to local contingencies of educational change without dismissing macro-level conditions. I study actions, discourse and organizational processes in local contexts. I also examine the effects of changing youth culture and bureaucratic arrangements in education on school rule change. Drawing on the voices of people involved locally in the school rule issues, this dissertation provides insights on significance of local initiatives for educational change and assess how macro-level conditions are expressed in local settings.