

The Continuity of Geography Learning Contents in Japan

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Abstract

In Japan, geography is taught in Social Studies in elementary and junior high school, and in Geography and History which is subject name in senior high school. World history has been the required course while geography has not. As a result, less than half of senior high school students learn geography now and many students only learn it in elementary and junior high school. While the learning contents have been still focused on life area in elementary school, they have been focused on “Geography of Japan and the world” in junior high school since the National Curriculum in 2009. On the other hand, some people believe geography should be the required course in senior high school because geography learning is not enough now. Some schools already set geography as the required course experimentally and the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) pays attention to the effect. In addition, the integrated education for elementary and junior high schools, and the one for junior high and senior high schools have increased in Japan. Though the impacts of this new trend are not clear now, there is a possibility that the opportunities to learn geography may be expanded because such schools have more time to teach the subjects. Moreover, the curriculum will be reconstructed according to geographical points of view and inquiry, not learning areas. It is expected that they will be more theme-centered in senior high school so that students can cultivate the geographical perspectives and thinking ability, and conduct field research more often than before.

Keywords: geography education, regional geography, the continuity of geography, required subject, Japan

Introduction

In Japan, geography is taught in Social Studies in elementary and junior high school. And in senior high school, geography is taught in subject whose name is Geography and History. The geographical contents were focused on understanding “Geography of local community” in elementary school,

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“Geography of Japan” in junior high school, and “Geography of the world” in senior high school. The fact that most students (98%) go to senior high school in Japan even if geography is not compulsory made it possible to teach such learning contents, using before 1989. However, since the National Curriculum in 1989, World history has been the required course while geography has not. As a result, only less than half of senior high school students learn geography in every year and many students only learn geography in elementary and junior high school. To adjust to this new situation, while the geographical learning contents have been still focused on “Geography of local community-life area” in elementary school, they have been focused on “Geography of Japan and the world” in junior high school since the National Curriculum in 2009.

On the other hand, the revised National Curriculum will be reconstructed according to geographical points of view and inquiry, not learning areas. In other words, while the learning contents are still focused on “Geography of local community” in geography in elementary school and “Japan and the world” in junior high school, it is expected that students can cultivate the geographical perspectives and thinking ability, and conduct field research more often than before.

The aim of this paper is to show the continuity of geography learning contents in Japan, in near future curriculum. In Japan, new geography curriculum is examined by some schools experimentally. On letting this aim accomplish, at first, school geography history of Japan is overview and the traditional geography contents are shown. Next, school geography by elementary, junior high and senior high school are examined. From these analyses, issue of school geography in Japan is explored and new plan including new subject is suggested. Many senior high school teachers and scholars such as 井上 (Inoue)・相澤(Aizawa)・戸井田(Toida)編 (1999)、村山(Murayama)編 (2003) , 山口(Yamaguchi)編 (2008) and so have appointed the issue and suggested some plans for school geography in Japan. But the plans including the continuity from elementary to senior high school have a few and there are few papers which are examined practically of the suggested plan in national level. This paper is significance from above mentioned.

Geographical Contents in School Level

1. The Trajectory of Geography Education in Japan

Within the school education system, the beginnings of geography as a subject on a nation-wide basis were in 1872 (Meiji 5) with the promulgation of the national school system. The reasons for this, according to 水内(Mizuuchi) (1994), were the nation’s citizens’ love for their native land and their curiosity about foreign countries, which had existed since before the enactment of the school system, and because geographical knowledge was thought to be useful for building a modern nation state. However, if one examines for example the curriculum guideline proposals of the time, geography instruction was done in lecture format, the instruction methods largely relied on testing about the contents written in textbooks, and the textbooks themselves were dispassionate catalogs of facts about

the various regions covered. Judging from that, 矢ヶ崎(Yagasaki) (1968) characterizes the geography instruction of that time as based largely around rote memorization, and sees geography's traditional nature as a memorization subject as having its origins during the Meiji era. The new discipline of social studies that was launched after World War II can also be seen as influenced by pre-World War II geography, and it continued to carry on the traditional nature of being a rote memory subject area. However, the nature of geography as a rote memorization subject had already been criticized during the decade of the 1880s as education consisting of a mechanical cramming of place names and facts about products (西脇(Nishiwaki), 1993). In response to those criticisms, teaching methods for direct hands-on instruction that put a high value on children's observations and experiences were advocated. However, teaching methods such as these were only carried out in the schools affiliated with normal schools (teachers' colleges) and did not spread across the country.

岩田(Iwata) (2003), in looking at geography education in Japan from the Meiji era up until the Second World War, divides it into five periods based on shifting emphases, beginning with the period of instruction in 'geographic information,' the period of emphasis on 'awareness of the homeland' during the second decade of Meiji; the period of 'geographical knowledge' beginning in the mid-Meiji era; a period of experimentation in 'overall geographic awareness' during the Taisho era, and the period emphasizing 'awareness of man-land correlations' beginning in the early Showa era. In addition, he does not dismiss the geography of the pre- Second World War era as being simply education that was a catalog of facts, but points out that there were also valuable elements in it that still have relevance today.

Table 1 Contents of school geography before World War II

Yera	1905	1933	1941
contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan geography -including Taiwan, Korea, and Karafuto- • World geography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan geography -including South pacific-- • Asia • Europe • Africa • North America • South America • Pacific • World and Japan • Surface of earth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map of Japan • Japan geography • East Asia • India • Australia • Mongolia • China • West and Central Asia • Pacific islands <p style="text-align: center;">etc</p> <p>-America and Europe were not studied because of enemy countries.</p>

(making from 奥田(Okuda)監修 (1985))

On the other hand, if one looks at the instructional content of geography education, its core consisted of regional descriptive geography of Japan and of the world. Table 1 shows the instructional

content of geography in the years 1905, 1933, and 1941, and in each case the contents are regional descriptive geography, dealing with the descriptive geography of Japan and of the world. The descriptions were divided by regions and topics that reflected the colonial rule of the times. In the world descriptive regional geography of 1941, America and Europe were not included, which was based on the wartime policy of not studying the geography of enemy countries. In this way, in Japanese geography education before World War II, while changes can be seen in teaching methods and viewpoints of consideration, the instructional content was consistently made up of regional descriptive geography.

After World War II, the divisions of elementary school, junior school, and senior high school were created, and geography became a part of Social Studies. In Social Studies, problem-solving oriented learning was adopted, but in senior high schools human geography in social studies was composed largely of regional descriptive geography content. However, in the midst of dizzying changes in societal conditions, there were manifold criticisms of social studies for ‘the decline in basic scholastic abilities’ and ‘neglect of the leadership needed to press forward systematic learning and social science thought,’ making reforms inevitable, and beginning in 1955 systematic learning was adopted which clarified the sequencing of instruction. Due to systematic learning being adopted in this fashion, systematic knowledge came to be emphasized and knowledge-injection style instruction came to be recognized. Nevertheless, under influences from America during the 1960s, there were calls to make education more modern and more scientific, but because the system was too mired in tradition they did not spread widely (谷川, 1988). Conceptually, major changes did occur, but in terms of content, in both junior schools and senior high schools descriptive regional geography instruction was emphasized.

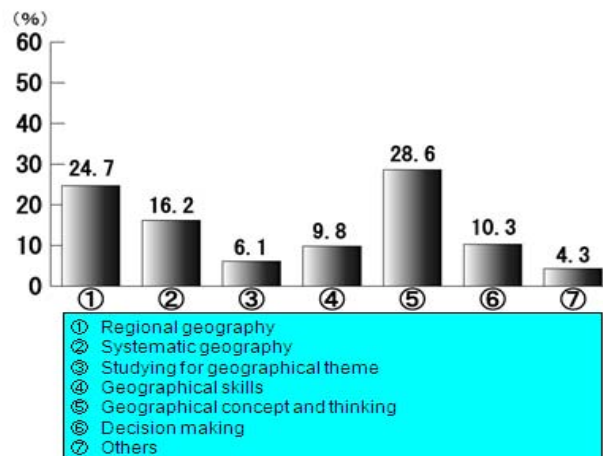


Fig. 1 The item teachers desire students study more.

In this way, geography education in Japan developed alongside learning in descriptive regional geography. In a survey of 185 geography teachers taken in 2007, many teachers cited descriptive regional geography as the content they would want the students to study more of (Figure 1). From this

result as well, it can be seen that descriptive regional geography education is emphasized as the core of geography study in Japan. Moreover, if we examine the makeup of Geography B (4 units) in senior high schools (Figure 2), it is understood that the position occupied within geography by regional geography education is dominant. On the other hand, the tendency for descriptive regional geography to turn geography into a ‘rote memorization subject’ is deeply rooted. In these circumstances, it is a major issue how Japan’s geography education will be able to deal with the world’s directions geography education while it continues to emphasize traditional descriptive regional geography.

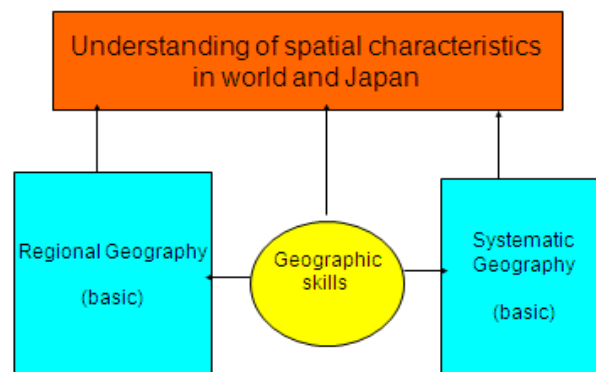


Fig. 2 Concept of Geography B

2. Comparison of Geography Instruction in Different Schools

(1) Changes

Table 2 shows the content related to geography in Social Studies in 1970, 1989, and 2009 (in senior high schools, from 1989 on this is Geography and History). If one looks at the content of geography education from 1970 onward from elementary schools through senior high schools, in elementary schools the core content was ‘life area’ or nearby surroundings, in junior school it was Japan geography (Japanese descriptive regional geography), and in senior high schools, foreign geography (world descriptive regional geography). However, in 1970, for geography in senior high schools, the schools were to choose either ‘Geography A’ which was systematic geography studies or ‘Geography B’ which was based on regional geography studies. At that time, it is presumed that more schools had chosen ‘Geography B’.

Table 2 National curriculum, geography part in Social Studies and Geography and History

	1970	1989	2009
Elementary school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life area • Japanese industry • Connecting with world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life area • Japanese industry • Connecting with world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life area • Land and industry of Japan • Continental and nations
Junior high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life area • Japan geography • World geography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World geography • Japan geography -main learning- • Japan in World 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World geography • Japan geography • Fieldwork in life area
Senior high school	Geography A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic geography Geography B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional geography 	Geography A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill, life and culture, and global issue Geography B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill, systematic and regional geography, and geography issues in the world. 	Geography A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill, life and culture of world and life area Geography B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill, Systematic and regional geography

In 1989, there were major changes in the National Curriculum, and instruction became 'learning how to learn.' In response to that, in geography as well, in both junior high schools and senior high schools, descriptive regional geography instruction came to consist of studying example cases. Also, although in junior high schools they offered world descriptive regional geography, junior high school instruction in world descriptive regional geography was situated based on the premise that the students would first study Japanese descriptive regional geography, in the same way that was done in 1970, and thus junior high school geography (descriptive regional geography) was centered on Japan. However, in terms of content, many of the students learned only about example case countries, deterioration in basic scholastic abilities came to be recognized, and in 2009, the system changed so that students would learn an outline overview of world regional geography in both junior high schools and senior high schools. Moreover, even in junior high school, they would learn not only about Japan, but rather instruction in world regional geography education came to be given equal weight with Japanese regional geography education.

In senior high schools, the 2-unit Geography A and the 4-unit Geography B were established beginning in 1989. The content of Geography A was composed of various contemporary geography-related issues, and Geography B was composed of systematic geography and descriptive regional geography. In 2009, the contents basically continued to be maintained, but Geography B, as Figure 2 shows, was made into a simplified learning structure of regional geography and systematic geography education.

(2) Elementary school

Geography in elementary school is summarized following, by 井田(Ida)他(2012). Geography is

taught mainly in the form of two integrated subjects in Japanese elementary schools. One is Life Environmental Studies and another is Social Studies. The former is devised for students in the first and second grades and the latter for the third to sixth grades. Instruction is provided in accordance with the so-called expanding environments curriculum, which is based on a concentric circle type of study theory. Life area is taught about first, then towns and cities all over Japan. Areas near the school are studied in lower grades, and distant areas in higher grades. In the sixth grade, students can start learning about the geography of foreign countries. In this curriculum, greater significance is given to developing desired citizenship abilities for the discussion of contemporary issues, rather than to acquiring geographic skill and knowledge. Moreover, physical geography is nearly absent from the curriculum.

As above mentioned, elementary school students learn life area and Japanese geography in Japan. Though we don't have enough to learn map skills, students have chance to learn basic knowledge of various place names in Japan and in the world.

(3) Junior high school

Geography in junior high school is summarized following, by 井田(Ida)他(2012). Geography is one section of Social Studies. Social Studies of Japanese junior high school is consisted of three parts which are geography, history and civics. The important point of National Curriculum is that learning in regional geography education, where students learn about the geographical characteristics of the various regions of the world and of Japan have been strengthened in geography. Additionally, in the survey of the local area that is positioned at the end of the geography section, students mandate investigative learning that incorporate a perspective of social participation. In order to respond to the learning activities, the active promotion of well planned training for educational administrative bodies, schools, and for the teachers of social studies themselves in their respective positions will be needed.

As above mentioned, students learn the regional geography of Japan and world in junior high school. In addition, fieldwork is promoted by National Curriculum, though it is said that execution of fieldwork is difficult for almost Social Studies teachers because of traffic safety, the short of time and their specialties. Specialty of many social studies teachers is not geography.

(4) Senior high school

Geography in senior high school is summarized following, by 井田(Ida)他(2012). Geography is one sub-subject of Geography and History. Geography and History consists Geography A, Geography B, Japanese history A, Japanese history B, World history A and World history B. Not all senior high school students are necessarily studying geography current day. They study geographical consideration of characteristics, various problems of the contemporary world and geographical consideration of various environmental issues in Geography A. They also study all kinds of maps and geographic skills, systematic geographic consideration of the contemporary world and regional geography of the contemporary world in Geography B.

As above mentioned, Geography includes geographical consideration and geographical skills. It looks like to connection of geography learning with geography sector of junior high school. But in

Japan, geography is not required subject on senior high school. World history is required. Table 3 is shown textbook supply ratios about Geography and History. By this table, the ratio of student who takes geography is less than 50% of total senior high school student. Actually, many students have not chance to develop geographical thinking, skills in senior high school. In 2011, the number of supplied textbook is 440 thousands for Geography A, and it is 265 thousands for Geography B. In short, Less than 50 % of senior high school students takes geography and the students who take Geography B are much less than ones of Geography A which is smaller units than Geography B. It is one of big problem in Japanese geography education. Now it is examined that every students could have chance to take geography in senior high school.

Table 3 Textbook supply ratios about Geography and History (%)

Year	World history	Japanese history	Geography
2012	41.2	28.9	20.7
2010	41.1	28.3	20.6
2006	39.6	27.1	20.9

(MEXT, website information)

Consistency of the Geography through Elementary and Secondary School Education in Japan

1. Issues in Geography Education in Japan

One major issue in geography education in Japan is that although the systematization of learning content is mentioned in the National Curriculum guidelines, with regards to the geographic skills that would support that, such as the use of maps, the use of geographic information including GIS, and field work, etc., nothing is spelled out in terms of stages. One reason for this may be that in Japan the sequencing of learning content is emphasized, and moreover that the core is composed of learning about descriptive regional geography. In descriptive regional geography instruction, understanding the content is strongly emphasized, and that has come to be related to geography's image as a rote memorization subject. On the other hand, geography in Japan has traditionally been made up of learning content that is chiefly descriptive regional geography, and the fact is that many people have obtained their knowledge of geographical phenomena in Japan and the world, and had their understanding advanced, through geography. And many people, including teachers, expect that geography will provide geographic knowledge for Japan and the world through regional geography education.

If one looks at worldwide trends, rather than descriptive regional geography, the fostering of geographic skills such as local area surveys, geographic methods of inquiry, geographic critical ability, and geographic imagination have come to be emphasized. The questions used in the International Geography Olympiad are classic examples of this. In the midst of this, the following can be cited as issues in Japanese geography education: First of all, the study of regional geography is an accumulation

of unrelated facts and is the reason that geography is thought of as a rote memorization subject. The second issue is that while geographical skills are emphasized, they are not cited in an orderly step-by-step manner. And the third issue is that the learning content of geography is not connected to geographical inquiry, geographical critical abilities, or to decision making. With these issues in mind, I would like to suggest some points for the improvement of Japanese geography education.

2. Framework Proposals

In the currently existing Japanese geography instruction, geographic knowledge and facts are learned independently, and it is difficult to connect the relationships between such factual knowledge. Thus, conceptually, there is a need to construct relationships between these facts. Figure 3 shows a comparison between the existing instructional framework of geography education and the instructional framework that is proposed in this paper. As shown in Figure 3, it is necessary to have learning activities that establish the relationship between the bits of factual knowledge obtained in studying regional geography, and based on that knowledge, connections should be made that ties it together with geographic inquiry, critical abilities, and decision making. Since Japan has traditionally emphasized learning descriptive regional geography, knowledge about regional geography should probably be secured while making use of the output of regional geography education. Inquire in figure.3 is the concept which includes geographical comparison, interpretation and assessments. Japan has placed a great weight on learning content, but from now on it is necessary to create a framework, and consider learning content that is aligned with that framework.

In order to bring that framework to realization, we should survey the entire content of geography education from elementary school through senior high school, and think about continuity within geography education. However, in senior high school geography has become an elective subject, and fewer than 50% of students register for it. In the university courses for obtaining a teaching license as a teacher of junior and secondary school geography-history classes, fewer than 20% of the students took geography when they were in senior high school. In circumstances such as these, trying to put together consistent educational content for geography from elementary school through high school is impossible. To deal with that, next I will discuss the movement to make senior high school geography into a compulsory subject, and in that indicate the learning content for senior high school geography, and it is indicated the direction for a consistent geography curriculum from elementary school through senior high school.

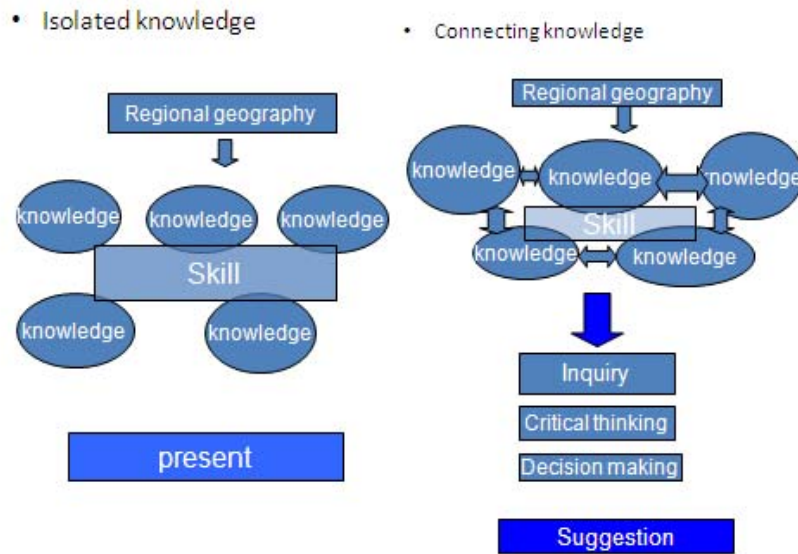


Fig. 3 Present and suggestion for geography framework in Japan

3. Consistency of the Geography

If 'Basic geography' becomes the required subject in senior high school education in 20xx year, the rearranging of the coherent contents from elementary school to senior high school should be enabled. But the structure of coherent contents is different from the concentric structure of the learning contents which have been executed in Japan. In other words, by the geographical contents in elementary school, the life area for students and Japanese geography become a target of the learning, and local observation and the acquisition of geographical knowledge about Japan are main contents. At junior high school, regional geography education of Japan and world is main content and it is important not only geographical knowledge, but geographical perspective and thinking. In 'Basic geography' of senior high school, a geographical thinking based on the conceptual knowledge of geography which is learned in elementary and junior high school is developed by geography classes. Besides, geography with deeper inquire is learned as elective subject in senior high school.

Students learn not only the knowledge but also the skill in consistency of the geography. For example, we have the entrance of regional survey and analog map making by the observation in elementary level. In junior high school level, the investigation of life area and the utilization of the digital map are introduced. Senior high school students are educated the skill such as the geographical future design based on regional investigation and map making with using GIS. Figure 4 shows the comparing the consistency of geography in 2013 and that in future.

School	Geography in 2013 (Expanding area)	Geography in 20xx(future) (Advancement of skill)
Elementary	Life area and Japan geography	Life area and Japan geography Geography with pleasure. Fantastic geography for students (Skill and knowledge)
Junior high	Japan and world geography	Japan and world geography Geographical skills Gathering and depth geographical knowledge through regional geography (Learning)
Senior high	Regional geography of world Systematic geography <i>From elementary to senior</i> <i>Expanding area</i> <i>Mainly regional geography education</i>	Systematic geography Geographical thinking and inquiry connected with regional geography. Contribution to Society. (Studying)

Fig. 4 Present and proposed framework for learning geography

The Experiment of Geography as Required Subject in Senior High School

1. The Plan of 'Basic Geography' as Required Subject

It was appointed that, in 2006, 'the problem of students not studying world history' was taken up by the mass media, and it became a big issue by scholars such as 油井(Yui)、(2011), 碓井(Usui)(2011) and so. In order to examine solutions to this problem, the Subcommittee on Senior High School Geography and History Education was set up by the Science Council of Japan in 2007. Committees for history, regional studies, geography and pedagogy were combined to present new sub-subjects for Geography and History of senior high school. By this subcommittee, 'Basic geography' which was named as temporary sub-subject name was presented as required subject in senior high school, after committee of geography education has examined 'Basic geography'. 'Basic geography' has supported by many geographers and geography educators.

'Basic geography' would be subject whose aim is to make students understanding the relation with nature and human. And 'Basic geography' would be composed of fundamental geographical knowledge, geographical skill and the way to geographical thinking. In addition, this subject would be based on Social Studies in junior high school. The concept of 'Basic geography' is not simply about facts. It also considers the relationships between nature and human beings and its basics include the learning process, which begins from the gaining of geographic perspectives and knowledge, such as geographic ways of viewing and thinking, and ends in its application in real life.

'Basic geography' consists two main parts. One part is constructed at a global point of view surveying the world. In second part, student study their own life area with local view point. It is

important to make progress in geographical skill, and to study physical, economical and social geography from global point shown in table 4. Some themes are studied as case studies. In study of life area, students would present the theme and make the plan of local area based on the theme. The object of this studying is to participate in local society which students live. This content is shown in table 5. The content is included in the characteristic of region, environment, disaster prevention and industry. It is adapted the inquiry and the problem solving as learning method, in 'Basic geography'.

Table 4 The global point of views in 'Basic geography'

Topics	Subtopics	Case
The view of global, The thinking for global	The earth The connections among regions in the world	
Diversification of natures and cultures in regions	Diversification of regions from the view of natural environments Diversification of regions from the view of ordinary life and culture Diversification of regions from the view of variety of areas judging from life, culture Diversification of regions from the view of the relation with nature and human life.	Some areas-the view of regional geography education
The economy and society in world	Economic system in world Population, agriculture and food The industrialization and regional disparity Urban problem	Some areas-the view of regional geography education

(Ida(2011))

Table 5 The local viewpoints in 'Basic geography'

1	The improvement of local area based on conservation and utilization of natural resources
2	The improvement of local area based on natural disaster prevention
3	The improvement of local area based on preservation and utilization of historical resources
4	The improvement of local area aiming at improvements of environment and water circulation
5	The improvement of local area aiming at improvements of production, employment and selling
6	The improvement of local area for healthy and welfare society
7	The improvement of local area with efficiency of energy using
8	The improvement of local area for comfortable transportation system
9	The improvement of local area to prevent person from accidents and crimes

Some among the theme mentioned above would be selected and executed.

(Ida(2011))

Geography skill concerned with fieldwork and map would be more importance in 'Basic geography'. The importance of GIS would be increased with the development of information and computerization of the education. So GIS would be included in 'Basic geography'. The usefulness of geography would be shown in the society and world. In other words, students who have acquired

geographical skill would contribute to making peaceful, democratic and sustainable society and world. In addition, it is important view of regional geography. Regional geography education includes the cases of sub-topic and the local view point.

2. Practice ‘Basic Geography’

Characteristics of ‘Basic geography’ are summarized in the four points below:

- ① Making things that are actually occurring and things that actually exist the starting point of considerations
- ② Giving close consideration to place, space, and time
- ③ Presenting the natural environment and social/cultural issues in a comprehensive and integrated manner by undertaking specific case studies
- ④ Conducting examinations by employing maps and GIS

Geography education plays a role in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which fosters ‘individuals who are conscious of their relationship with others, their relationship with society, and their relationship with the natural environment, and who are able to highly value relations and connections’. ‘Basic geography’ offers content that is conscious of this ESD concept.

As a pre-stage to change National Curriculum, MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) appointed the experiment school which tried ‘Basic Geography’. Two schools were appointed as an experiment school in 2013. These schools have operated curriculum along ‘Basic geography’ which was proposed by the Science Council of Japan, including the contents which these schools needed. When the result of the class in these schools will be inspected, the setting of ‘Basic geography’ would realize. In addition, ‘Basic history’ is installed with ‘Basic geography’, and these two subjects would become the required subject. In senior high school, geography would be learned by all students in near future, Japan.

Conclusion

In this paper, the importance of the continuity of geography from elementary to senior high schools is appealed. So the framework and consistencies of geography are proposed. Now geography in senior high school is optional subject. In this circumstance, the continuity of geography wouldn’t release and students couldn’t study geography enough. So investigated geography curriculum based on these considerations is executed in some schools. These schools already set geography as the required course experimentally(日本橋女学館高等学校(Nihonbashi Zyogakukan Koutougakko) (2013) and the MEXT pays attention to the effect. In addition, the integrated education for elementary and junior high schools, and the one for junior high and senior high schools have increased in Japan. Though the impacts of this new trend are not clear now, there is a possibility that the opportunities to learn geography may be expanded because such schools have more time to teach the subjects. In next stage, geography

curriculum in senior high school would be re-arranged. In other words, we must discuss not only 'Basic geography' as required subject but geography as optional subject which is based on 'Basic geography'.

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投稿日期：102年8月30日

修正日期：102年9月30日

接受日期：102年10月2日