

The Uniqueness of the Subject of Technology as a Teaching Subject in Japan Under Regional Ties

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the relationship between the teaching of craft education in Japanese high school level schools and the region. For this purpose, this study compiles and analyzes data from the perspectives of subject matter positioning and the use status of school teaching staff based on relevant surveys and studies. The analysis revealed that there are three types of relationships between school craft programs and regions: an active regional linkage type, a potential regional cooperation type, and a fully cooperative school type.

Keywords:

Craft Education, Geographical Connectivity, Traditional Crafts, Teaching

1. The Relationship Between Craft Education and “Territory”

1.1. *The Relationship Between the Curriculum and the “Territory”*

The following is an overview of the current status of craft education in Ibaraki Prefecture prior to this study. Two schools in Ibaraki Prefecture offer craft classes as art courses, but neither emphasizes craft education in cooperation with the local community. This is because, although craft is not offered as a subject, it is an important example of integration with local crafts and industries as part of school education. Kasama High School in Ibaraki Prefecture has a pottery course within the art department rather than offering craft as a subject. In Kasama City, although there is Kasama-yaki as a traditional craft, the city did not treat it as a craft education from the beginning. In 1994, [1] when a class in the Department of Home Economics was reorganized as a general course (craft and design course), “craft and design” was established as a new subject and “ceramics” as a new subject. Regarding the background of the establishment of the subject, as recalled by the principal at the time, there was a desire to set up a related ceramics section in Kasamayaki’s hometown. In 2007, an art section was established that provided a wood room, an outdoor workshop, and other production environments, in addition to several potteries and an electric kiln. The design of one of the courses takes into account the nearby ceramics teaching

center. Part of the ceramics curriculum is taught by ceramic artists who are creative artists in the area as part-time instructors. This is another form of utilizing local human resources that are rooted in the local character of the region. [2]

In the same way, Yuki Glaze, one of the representative traditional crafts in Ibaraki Prefecture, was listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2010, and Yuki Second High School has included Yuki Glaze as a craft subject taught at the school. From 2008 to 2009, as a model school for the “Model Project for Educational Practice Respecting Japanese Traditional Culture,” research was conducted on how to practice in cooperation with social organizations. However, the early Kasama High School, although dedicated to professional education, was positioned to focus time and effort on crafting rather than on skill acquisition. This is in line with the school's identity as a flexible program. For similar reasons, other “ceramics” courses are also offered.

1.2. The Relationship Between Extracurricular Activities and “Territory”

In fact, the relationship between craft and “place” is not limited to the classroom. Twice a year at Kasama High School, students have the opportunity to sell their work made in class at local events. The aforementioned part-time potters also have booths here. Ensuring that the results go directly back to the community is also an important role of craft education. At Ibaraki Prefectural Yuki Daiichi High School in Yuki City, the “Glaze Classroom” has been established since 1982 with the help of the Yuki Glaze Cooperative. According to the purpose of its establishment in 1897, it was established as a sericulture school (with a dyeing and weaving school) with the aim of opening a new school to “apply and improve new scientific principles to promote the development of the sericulture industry” in order to meet the growing export of raw silk from overseas and the domestic demand for sponge fabrics. [3] After this, it went through the history of the Agricultural School and the School of Agriculture before changing its name to the current school in 1949. However, in 1990, the Agricultural Division came to an end with the suspension of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Horticulture. The “Glaze Classroom” was established in the process of reorganization of the department. Currently, the Glaze Department holds an annual “Glaze Preparation Experience Study” as part of the club's activities, with the aim of deepening understanding of the region. [4]

In 2013, in cooperation with the previous three schools, [5] Yuki Second High School and Onino Commercial High School, we held the “Yuki Glaze Presentation for City High School Students” event. Behind this was a concern for the preservation and protection of the technique, as silk production has declined to less than 20% of its peak due to changing lifestyles, the economic downturn, and the lack of successors. Here, the community’s expectations of the school as a place for cultural transmission are superimposed. Craft education in high schools is often influenced by the regional culture outside of the school and where traditional crafts are produced. Territorial and linked craft education in high schools, given the balance between the two, can be seen to be approached flexibly according to their respective contexts, not only in the classroom, but also in daily teaching life and community activities. They also have different objectives, depending on the school context. Given this state of affairs, we considered the items of the questionnaire.

2. Questionnaire Survey on the Current Situation of Industrial Science Using Regional Themes and Regional Talents

2.1. Territoriality in Craft Education

The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide an overall picture of the relationship between crafts and local communities at the high school level. The structure of the questionnaire can be divided into two main sections. The first one is about local subjects in craft classes and the second one is about the use of local human resources inside and outside the classroom. First, respondents were asked about the presence of traditional crafts and local industries in the school's area and how they were introduced into craft classes. If local subjects were introduced, respondents were asked to describe the content of the lesson in detail and to select the students' motivation and the purpose of the introduction. Regarding the use of local human resources, respondents were asked to respond not only to initiatives in the classroom, but also to practices outside the classroom, including club activities. In the case of utilizing local human resources in some way, respondents were asked to describe in detail the details of the utilization and to choose whether to pay incentives and the benefits of the utilization. All respondents, whether involved in such activities or not, were also asked to selectively answer questions about the challenges of utilizing local human resources. [6]

The questionnaire was mailed to 322 schools that had adopted craft textbooks and met a certain number of students. Correspondence schools were excluded from the survey in order to ask about their relationship with the local community. The response period was from February 22 to March 31, 2016, and a total of 138 responses were received (42.9% response rate). The following cross-analysis is based on the results of this survey. [7]

2.2. Analysis of Survey Results

2.2.1. Status of Craft Teachers

Of the 138 survey respondents, 95 were full-time teachers and 37 were part-time teachers (7 did not respond and 1 was a duplicate of a full-time and part-time teacher). This indicates a high percentage of full-time teachers, but it is expected that many part-time teachers were included in the non-responding schools. Of the full-time faculty, 59 were qualified to teach crafts and 30 were qualified to teach art. Although the percentages are not high, non-art teachers may be responsible with a temporary license in schools with small student populations. [8]

The term "craft" covers a wide range of fields. It covers a wide range of materials, including ceramics, woodwork, metal and glass, each with its own system of techniques. Thus, even if a teacher holds a craft license, perhaps he or she may not be familiar with all techniques. Since many responsible teachers hold a fine arts license, about 40 percent of teachers specialize in painting. This is followed by ceramics, which accounts for about 17% of the total, indicating a certain bias in the area of specialization. On the other hand, woodwork, metalwork, and glasswork, which are considered crafts, each account for less than 10% of the total. Of the 30 teachers licensed to teach art, over 60% (20) specialized in painting, while only one specialized in ceramics, metalwork, and dyeing.

In addition to the low number of schools offering crafts, the high percentage of part-time and unlicensed teachers combine to make the percentage of full-time teachers teaching crafts smaller and smaller. This situation has led to the elimination of craft subjects in many schools. Ideally, all schools offering crafts should have a full-time teacher who specializes in crafts, but the opposite is currently the case. [9] While this situation is one of the issues surrounding the subject of crafts, this study does not necessarily see it as a negative issue, but rather as a basis for promoting regional cooperation.

2.2.2. Correlation Between Craft Establishment Schools and Local Traditional Crafts and Local Industry

It has already been mentioned that there are regional differences in the number of schools offering crafts, but what do these differences stem from? One hypothesis could be related to the distribution of traditional crafts and local industries, but the survey results show no clear correlation between the two. In the questionnaire, 77 schools indicated that they had traditional crafts or local industries in their area, while 56 schools indicated that they did not (5 schools did not respond). Therefore, it cannot be said to be a necessary condition in terms of some schools that do crafts including areas where traditional crafts are prevalent. [10]

However, regional trends can be identified. In Kochi Prefecture, the highest rate of offering craft courses relative to the number of high schools, 10 schools (more than 20% of a total of 46 schools) offered these courses, and five of these schools responded that they all had traditional crafts or local industries. For Kyoto Prefecture, which had the third highest rate of offering craft courses (19 out of a total of 104 schools), six of the seven schools that responded indicated that they had traditional crafts or local industries. In Shimane Prefecture, four schools out of a total of 48 offered crafts, and all three schools that responded selected “yes”. In Okayama Prefecture, the proportion of schools offering arts and crafts was low, with two of the 88 schools offering arts and crafts indicating that they had traditional crafts related to their region (Bizen pottery); in Fukuoka Prefecture, five of the 165 schools offered arts and crafts, with all four responding schools indicating yes.

In contrast, in Kanagawa Prefecture, which has the second highest rate of offering craft courses (45 out of a total of 235 schools), 6 out of 15 responding schools indicated that traditional crafts or local industries were available. In Chiba Prefecture, where 30 of 185 schools (excluding correspondence schools) offer crafts, only one of 16 responding schools said yes; in Tokyo, where 64 of 431 schools offer crafts, 6 of 16 responding schools said yes and 8 said no (2 schools) In Osaka Prefecture, where 27 of 257 schools offer crafts, 4 of 9 responding schools selected “yes” and 5 chose “no”. In Saitama Prefecture, 14 out of 196 schools offer handicrafts, 4 out of 5 responding schools selected “No” and no schools selected “Yes” (1 school selected “No”). (no response). In this survey, the term “region” was purposely not limited in scope in order to understand teachers’ perceptions of traditional crafts and local industries. Thus, although the exact distribution may vary in some respects, it is clear that traditional crafts and local industries are not present in all locations where schools offering craft courses are located. Rather, in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, and Chiba, places with large numbers of high schools, crafts are more naturally seen as an art curriculum option alongside music, art, and calligraphy, rather than being associated with a region. [11]

2.3. Process Topics in the Course

Through this investigation, the special nature of the craft subjects has once again become apparent. As far as craftsmanship is concerned, each subject requires a high level of skill, and even those with a craft license may not be proficient in all skills. In addition, the number of class hours is limited and the subjects to be dealt with must be carefully selected. In this context, cooperation with the local community can be a way to develop the uniqueness of the “craft” subject. According to the results of the survey, the relationship between craft education and the local community was divided into three categories, each of which has its own characteristics.

2.3.1. Active Geographical Connectivity

Teachers are aware that there are traditional crafts and local industries in the area for integration while also working with the local community. Community-based craft education can be achieved by seeking understanding and collaboration beyond the school, rather than leaving craft expertise to one teacher. It is envisioned that such an initiative may have been taken at the request of the local community, but this model was not common in this study. What teachers responsible for this type of craft need is knowledge of craft resources (objects, places, people, etc.) in the vicinity of the school and a role as a coordinator to incorporate them into educational activities. [13]

As a concrete example, Shizuoka High School has partnered with a local museum to provide education on crafts. Along with traditional crafts such as bamboo strips, hinoki dolls, hinoki utensils and maki-e, Keisuke Serizawa can be said to be associated with crafts in Shizuoka Prefecture.

Based on the local characteristics of the school’s alumni, the first-year crafts students are asked to make tumblers using the stencil-dyeing technique. In the first stage, students create their own original designs as an expression class, without explaining about Keisuke Serizawa. When the tumblers are completed, a lecture and critique will be given by the curator in cooperation with the Serizawa Keisuke Museum of Art. In the critique, the curator will explain the characteristics of the design, such as repetition and simplification, while comparing the students’ work with Serizawa’s work. This educational practice, which began after the current faculty member was appointed to this position, is part of the museum’s educational outreach program, so the museum does not receive any budget from the school. In addition, the students visit Shizuoka Sengen Shrine, located within walking distance from the school, to appreciate the architecture of the shrine and the shrine carvings. This is positioned as a form of craft education that connects resources scattered throughout the region and makes use of this network. [14]

2.3.2. Potential Geographically Contiguous

Some groups recognize that there are traditional crafts and local industries in the region, but have difficulty incorporating them. Three factors can be cited as inhibiting factors: time constraints, budget constraints, and environmental constraints. Of course, these are not issues that can be easily resolved, but we categorized them as potential regional collaborations in the sense that there is potential to develop craft education in collaboration with the local community.

Regarding the time factor, it is often difficult to secure the number of hours to invite local personnel to conduct classes. In addition, since many of the teachers in charge of crafts are part-time lecturers, there are limits to the number of classes that can be

conducted in collaboration with outside parties that need to be coordinated outside of class hours. Some of them answered that they are practicing networking by taking advantage of their light footwork as part-time instructors, but it is necessary to consider a system that does not only rely on the enthusiasm of the instructors.

As for the budgetary factor, while educational practices in collaboration with local communities are sometimes carried out through subsidies, [15] it is difficult to implement them on a continuous basis. For example, schools that invited local potters, etc. as part of the “Practical Model Project for Education Respecting Traditional Japanese Culture” have not continued to do so after the project ended. In addition, the cost of materials when using local materials is also a hindrance to the use of local themes.

The third factor is environmental. In this survey, there were many cases where traditional crafts and local industries existed in the region but could not be handled by the school facilities. In the case of crafts, specialized tools and equipment are needed for ceramics, woodwork, metalwork, glass, etc., and these cannot be used in the classroom unless they are in good condition. Classrooms are often used in combination with art classrooms, and securing storage space for artworks is also a problem. These issues are also deeply related to the budget problem mentioned above.

2.3.3. Potential Geographically Contiguous

Of course, not all schools offering crafts are aware of traditional crafts and local industries related to the region. For this reason, there are many schools that do not place emphasis on regional cooperation, but instead provide craft education that is completed solely within the school. In such cases, the uniqueness of crafts is often found in the production of everyday objects. However, there are some who fear that crafts will be incorporated into the “fine arts”, and finding the differences between the two is an issue for future research.

3. Conclusions

Through this study, we were able to organize basic issues regarding the status of regional cooperation in high school arts and crafts. Although there have been historical studies on the establishment of arts and crafts education and studies on individual class practices, studies to grasp the overall picture of arts and crafts education in the same period have been largely unattended. Therefore, an attempt was made to derive the uniqueness of craft education by conducting a questionnaire survey focusing on the perspective of “region”. Nevertheless, the survey revealed that many of the teachers in charge of arts and crafts, regardless of whether or not they are involved in regional cooperation, feel a sense of crisis regarding arts and crafts as a subject.

In response to this situation, there is room for reconsideration of the position of arts and crafts as a subject. In this paper, we would like to point out the role of a coordinator between the community and the school as a specialty for future crafts teachers. Having contact with the actual local community is an effective means of achieving the objectives of the subject as a subject that is related to daily life. In this case, there is great potential in utilizing local human resources in order to expand awareness of the significance of the subject of crafts to the creation of the “community” and “society” that is the background of craftsmanship. In the future, we

would like to conduct qualitative research through classroom observation and interview surveys by visiting actual sites of craft education in various regions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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