

History of the Reception of Montessori Education in Japan

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the history of the reception of Montessori Education, and sheds light on the development of childhood education in Japan. From its first adoption in the 1910s until today, the Montessori style of Education has been both praised and criticised. Nevertheless, this period has seen three distinct phases of theory and practice. The first stage (1910s-1930s) saw, from its initial adoption, a rapid acceptance of Montessori Education, due to its promise of early education and new teaching methods promoting freedom for children. However, the method soon lost popularity because some educators criticized the weakness of Montessori's theory. In the second stage (1930s-post-World War II), interest in the method continued to grow, albeit gradually, and several books published on the Montessori Method in Europe and America were translated into Japanese. The third stage (1950s-present) saw the so-called «Montessori revival», in which the method caught on again with many educators. Many original works were translated, numerous studies on Montessori appeared, and the number of kindergartens and nursery schools using the Montessori Method increased. Much has been said both for and against Montessori's concept of «freedom for children». Recently, however «learning from the environment» has become an important topic in early childhood education in Japan. Montessori attaches importance to children's freedom to interact with each other and their environment, leading to a renewed interest in the Montessori method and the theory behind it. This paper seeks to clarify the transitions in the popularity of Montessori Education and analyse its value to Japan.

Keywords: history of the reception; Montessori; Montessori Education; Japan; environment; childhood education.

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1. Introduction

This study considers the history of the reception of Montessori Education in Japan (from its first adoption until today). Then, the development of childhood education in Japan is clarified.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952), an Italian physician and educator, developed an original method of education, based on scientific research into childhood learning.

She opened a day-care center for young children in a low-income housing area in the San Lorenzo district of Rome, Italy, in 1907, calling it «Casa dei Bambini» (Children's Home), and began observing the children in a «scientific» manner¹.

Her activities and work became the talk of the world, and «the Montessori Method» became widely known by those connected with early childhood education. «The Montessori movement» caught fire in the United States, England, and also Japan. This trend spread briefly throughout the world in the 1910s, however, its popularity declined under a decade for many reasons, such as criticisms from American researchers.

For example, American educator, William Heard Kilpatrick (1914) acknowledged that Montessori made her greatest contribution in establishing Casa dei Bambini, and stated that «her greatest service lies probably in the emphasis on the scientific conception of education, and in the practical utilization of liberty» (Kilpatrick, 1914, p. 67), but he also criticized her:

The sense-training which to her seems most worth while, we decline to accept except in a very modified degree [...] Her preparation for the school arts should prove very helpful in Italy. It is possible that her technique of writing will prove useful everywhere. If so, that is a contribution. With this the list closes (Kilpatrick, 1914, p. 67).

As these remarks reveal, Kilpatrick took a skeptical view of the application of the Montessori Method to early childhood education in America.

During this time, however, the movement flourished in Europe and India. In the 1960s, American educator Nancy Rambush led an initiative to renew the method, and Montessori Education spread as an independent school movement. Rambush earned a Montessori-teacher's certificate in England and then returned to her country. She tried the Montessori Method with a group of infants in New York, and then, established a Montessori school in the State of Connecticut. Her educational practice discredited the argument that the Montessori Method was not suitable for the American child (Rambush, Nancy. 1962). In parallel with this movement, Montessori Education caught on with many Japanese educators again. This was the so-called «Montessori revival».

Much has been said both for and against Montessori's key concept of «freedom for children» (Opinion is divided on this question).

In recent years, «learning from the environment» has become an important issue in early childhood education in Japan (National Curriculum Standard for Kindergartens and National Guidelines for Nursery Centers). Both the home environment and the community environment have transformed, and this situation requires us to propose a better childcare environment.

«Casa dei Bambini» («casa» means «home» in English) was designed to provide an appropriate environment for living and learning. Montessori said that

¹ Montessori started her career as a doctor and intended to establish a new educational method founded on experimental sciences in the early days of her work. Montessori tried to construct educational method from observing the fact of a child and called that «Scientific Pedagogy».

we Italians have elevated our word «casa» to the almost sacred significance of the English word «home», the enclosed temple of domestic affection, accessible only to dear ones (Montessori, 1909, p. 39).

At Casa dei Bambini, children live and learn in comfort, surrounded by a homelike atmosphere. Moreover, the school has various teaching tools that children can use and with which they can learn at their own pace. American Educator, Jane Roland Martin (1929–) remarked that

reading The Montessori Method eighty years after Montessori delivered her Inaugural Lecture, I found myself wondering why «Casa dei Bambini» had been translated into English as «The Children’s House» or «The House of Childhood». The more Montessori described her idea of school – the more she talked about the teacher’s relationship to the children and the children’s relationship to one another and also to their school environment – the more it sounded to me like a home, not just a house (Martin, 1995, pp. 9-10).

The material tools, and «Prepared Environment» of Montessori Education often create the impression of an overemphasis on intellectual education, but that is a one-sided view. Martin (1995) suggests that if one reads «casa» as «house», one’s attention is drawn to the exercises in dressing and washing, to the self-education, but that if one reads «casa» as «home», one perceives a moral and social dimension that transforms one’s understanding of Montessori’s idea of school (Martin, 1995, p. 10). Martin’s suggestion is stimulating in regard to thinking about the history of the reception of Montessori Education in Japan. Many people including Japanese educators (with a few exceptions like Toshio Nogami) learned about Montessori Education by being introduced to it in American education journals, or by reading Montessori’s major work, «Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica applicato all’educazione infantile nelle case di bambini (The method of scientific pedagogy applied to child education at children’s homes)» (1909) with the help of an English translation, such as «The Montessori Method» (1912) (translated from the Italian by Anne E. George, New York: Frederick A. Stokes). In the English version, «case (the plural of “casa”) di bambini» is translated as «children’s houses» (cf. Montessori, Maria 1912). However, most of this focusing on attention to Maria Montessori’s novel «method», especially to the material tools used in Montessori Education emasculated the core of Montessori Education.

For Montessori, «Casa dei Bambini» is an educational space and surrogate home. The teachers in this home were full of love, and the keepers of the environment. And based on this atmosphere, Montessori attached importance to children’s free-activity and to interaction between children and their environment.

The aim of the current childcare in Japan matches a feature of Montessori education: child-centered learning, support (indirect teaching), and a close environment, among others. Thus, there has been a revival of interest in Montessori’s Method and her theory. Therefore, the current study investigates the changes in Montessori Education and suggests its value in Japan.

2. Montessori Education

2.1. *About cultural «translation» of Montessori Education*

First, we should confirm «What is Montessori Education?» and cultural «translation» of Montessori Education. It is a progressive approach to early childhood education that appears to be growing in influence in the world to have many points in common. The main concept behind Montessori's approach is fostering children's love of learning and encouraging their independence by providing a «Prepared Environment» and materials designed for their self-directed learning activity, which children use at their own pace.

Why does Montessori, on the one hand, trust children's inner power, and, on the other hand, point out the need for a «Prepared Environment?» The Montessori Method consists of children's freedom (free from obstacles). Montessori was uneasy about schools at that time. She suggested,

The situation would be very much the same if we should place a teacher who, according to our conception of the term, is scientifically prepared, in one of the public schools where the children are repressed in the spontaneous expression of their personality till they are almost like dead beings. In such a school the children, like butterflies mounted on pins, are fastened each to his place, the desk, spreading the useless wings of barren and meaningless knowledge which they have acquired.

It is not enough, then, to prepare in our Masters the scientific spirit. We must also make ready the school for their observation. The school must permit the free, natural manifestations of the child if in the school scientific pedagogy is to be born. This is the essential reform (Montessori, 1909, p. 15).

The words «the free, natural manifestations of the child» means «being active»; therefore, «freedom» in Montessori Education means «action». Maria Montessori was influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and developed his concepts from her own independent perspective.

No one may affirm that such a principle already exists in a pedagogy and in the school. It is true that some pedagogy and in the school. It is true that some pedagogues, led by Rousseau, have given voice to impracticable principles and vague aspirations for the liberty is practically unknown to educators. They often have the same concept of liberty which animates a people in the hour of rebellion from slavery, or perhaps, the conception of social liberty, which although it is a more elevated idea is still invariably restricted. «Social liberty» signifies always one more round of Jacob's ladder. In other words, it signifies a partial liberation, the liberation of a country, of a class, or of thought (Montessori, 1909, pp. 15-16).

Montessori attached importance to observation in her Scientific Pedagogy. She felt uneasy that the concept of «true liberty» was unknown in the traditional

classroom, and considered that school should be changed from what restricted children's movements to what secured their liberty.

In early twentieth century Italy, the concept of socialism had spread, and Montessori stated about «social liberty». She thought that Rousseau's thought could give teachers knowledge about «social liberty», but she believed that the concept of liberty that must inspire pedagogy is, instead, universal.

This educational reform requires a change in the role of teachers. Montessori considered that the transformation in schools must be contemporaneous with the preparation of the teacher; therefore, we must make it possible for teachers to observe and experiment in school (Montessori, 1909, p. 25). She suggested,

If we are to develop a system of scientific pedagogy, we must, then, proceed along lines very different from those which have been followed up to the present time. [...] The fundamental principle of scientific pedagogy must be, indeed, the liberty of the pupil; –such liberty as shall permit a development of individual, spontaneous manifestations of the children's the study of the individual, such study must occupy itself with the observation of free children (Montessori, 1909, p. 25).

Montessori thought that the teacher should be an observer not a teaching professional. She also suggested that the teacher should educate through observing children, and suggested that «we must proceed by a method which shall tend to make possible to the child complete liberty» (Montessori, 1909, p. 26). Moreover, she believed, «This we must do if we are to draw from the observation of his spontaneous manifestations conclusions which shall lead to the establishment of a truly scientific child psychology» (Montessori, 1909, p. 26). She emphasized free activities, but «freedom» does not mean the principle of «leaving alone». Children at Casa dei Bambini grow, enjoying free activity, and then acquire independence/autonomy, supported by an environment appropriate for their body and spirit. Thus through concentrated activity, children can gain inner discipline and peace.

2.2. Three Meanings of «environment» in Montessori Education

In Montessori's approach, children are viewed as active authors of their own development, strongly influenced by natural, domestic forces within themselves, which open the way toward growth and learning.

The teachers (Montessori often called the teachers, «direttrice»,) play the role of unobtrusive director in the classroom as children individually or in small groups engage in self-directed activity. The teacher employs carefully prepared, aesthetically pleasing environments as material tools, which provide deep messages about the curriculum and convey trust for the children. The children progress at their own pace and rhythm, according to their individual capabilities.

The Montessori concept of «environment» contains three meanings (1) the human environment: teacher, (2) the physical environment: material tools, and (3) the spiritual environment: love and attention (cf. Yonezu, 2013).

(1) human environment: teacher

In Montessori Education, the teacher is considered to one of the «environment». Montessori changed the title «teacher» to that of «directress». In her method, the teacher teaches little and observes a lot, and, above all, it is the teacher's function to direct the psychic activity of the children and their physiological development (Montessori, 1909, pp. 135-136). This does not mean that teachers have nothing to do at Casa dei Bambini. Preparing an environment suited for children is an important task for Montessori teachers, and they should become familiar with details of the classroom and material tools to support children. Teachers watch over the children fondly, with love, and get to them quickly as necessary at Casa dei Bambini, where the children feel at home.

The Montessori teacher is considered as a facilitator in the child's development. Montessori suggested that we should achieve «liberation from the prison and the desert».

The steps towards development are the steps of freedom. But at the earliest stages the child is virtually in prison. He cannot walk or go where he wants to go. He is incapable of expressing his needs. He cannot feed himself. He is confined to a prison of flesh. When he begins to walk, when he can express his needs, or is able to feed himself, he is becoming independent in those respects.

Thus, growth is a successive breaking of the bonds which hold the child down in dependence upon others. [...]

By giving care and attention to the child according to the needs of each special period from the very beginning, and by liberating him from what we have figuratively called the Prison of the Desert, the intelligence of the child will become a great energy, in fact the greatest energy in the world (Montessori, 1966 (1948), pp. 55-63).

Not only everything necessary for the child's physical comforts and needs but also affection and attention are required for the child to develop himself/herself. Montessori also suggests that we should consider appropriate support for children (Montessori, 1966 (1948), p. 55). She believed that we must provide children with service that assists in their development and not service that obstructs their development. A child needs to be independent, so a Montessori teacher should be aware that the most important need is to support the child in helping himself/herself.

(2) physical environment: classroom and material tools

The classroom at Casa dei Bambini is maintained in harmony and beauty. The material tools of Montessori Education have three features: beauty, order, and control of error. Each material is made beautifully and in an orderly way, and the materials attract children's interests, corresponding with the inner order of children. What, then, is «control of error?» Let us imagine the material tools, «Cylinder Blocks», shown below (Figure 1). Cylinder blocks structurally include «control of error». Children try to fit the cylinder into its correct hole, and if they choose the wrong place, or if more

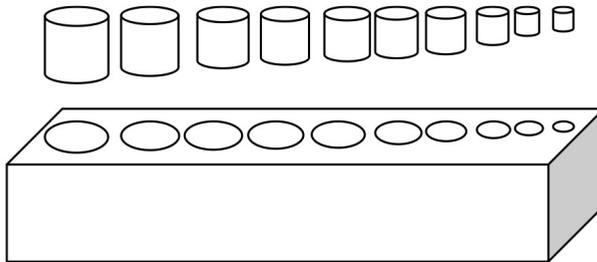
than one cylinder is left, they can notice the mistake themselves. Children can thus discriminate visually and bodily that their action is correct or incorrect. Interacting with such tools, children are therefore able to work independently.

Children can gain knowledge about size and also acquire feelings of satisfaction through the activities they engaged in. Moreover, the material tools and their features, and «control of error» lead children to auto-education (self-education). Regarding material tools, Montessori said,

No teacher can furnish the child with the agility which he acquires through gymnastic exercises: it is necessary that the pupil perfect himself through his own efforts. It is very much the same with the education of the senses [...].

In fact, when the child educates himself, and when the control and correction of errors is yielded to the didactic material, there remains for the teacher nothing but to observe. She must then be more of a psychologist than a teacher (Montessori, 1909, p. 135).

Figure 1. An example of «Cylinder Blocks».



(3) spiritual environment: love and attention

The Montessori teacher's direction is much more profound and important than that which is commonly understood, for this kind of teacher directs the life and soul (Montessori, 1909, p. 136). Montessori uses the word «environment» in the hope that children should be given gentle, all-encompassing love. Regarding Casa dei Bambini, Montessori said,

It does not consist of walls alone, though these walls be the pure and shining guardians of that intimacy which is the sacred symbol of the family. The home shall become more than this. It lives! It has a soul. It may be said to embrace its inmates with the tender, consoling arms of woman. It is the giver of moral life, of blessings; it cares for, it educates and feeds the little ones (Montessori, 1909, p. 48).

In Montessori Education, the physical and the human environment are considered important, in addition to the spiritual environment: love and attention are regarded as essential elements.

2.3. *The Argument for Montessori Education*

Pedagogues and educators have debated Montessori's main concept: «Prepared Environment» or «freedom for children».

A lot has been said both for and against Montessori Education over many years. This method is highly debatable. However, research that shows Montessori Education usually focuses on the first adoption (e.g., Nishikawa, 2000; Tsuchiyama, Asano & Matsuda, 1993) and on its factual history (e.g., Yoshioka, 1999a, 2000)². There are few studies that interpret the process of reception of Montessori Education in Japan. Following these accumulation of research, this paper especially clarifies the points below.

Why is opinion always divided on this type of education? What is the Montessori movement (or revival)? Let us consider the history of the reception of Montessori Education in Japan up to the present by discussing the relationship between the development of Montessori Education and educational policy in those days(1910s-present). These works will be the analysis of modernization of education with the question, how Japanese pedagogy dealt with the Western educational theory and practices.

3. Montessori Education in Japan

In Japan, the earliest introduction of Montessori Education was in an article that appeared in the newspaper *Yorozuyoho* on January 11, 1912. Many educators paid attention to this new method, and it came into fashion rapidly in Japanese childhood education. But the first Montessori movement soon returned to normal due to criticism of and maladjustment in the classroom situation at that time. Apparently, the attention seems to be disappeared, but the seed of interest to Montessori Method was continuing. About 20 years after the method was first adopted, some educators calmly but steadily conducted a study of the Montessori Method. After World War II, Montessori Education received attention again and, starting in the mid-1960s, the «Montessori revival» spread. Thus, after many twists and turns, Montessori Education was reexamined from the perspectives of both theory and practice as an effective form of early childhood education.

In brief, from its first adoption in the 1910s until today, Montessori Education received a double assessment in terms of both praise and criticism. However, little attention has been paid to the relationship between the «rise and the decline» of Montessori education and the transition in education policy in Japan. In the present

² In this paper, I referred not only to the article about Montessori or the history of Montessori Education but also to the article of the history about childcare in Japan (e.g., Kobayashi, Keiko. 1983) Then tried to see the reception process of Montessori among the historical flow including educational history or political movement.

study, I divide the period between the 1910s and today into three phases based on two perspectives: theory and practice. Let us consider the relationship between the development of the Montessori Method and education policy during that period, in three phases (the first stage, the second stage, and the third stage).

3.1. *The first stage (1910s-1930s)*

From its initial adoption, Montessori Education was accepted rapidly based on expectations for early education and new teaching methods that give children a great deal of freedom: the freedom of activity, choice, time, and so on. However, within a short time, the method began to decline in popularity because some educators criticized the weakness of the theory behind it. In this section, the first reception and the subsequent setback is discussed in detail.

As stated above, Montessori Education was introduced in *Yorozutyoho* (in a front-page article titled «Montessori Education») on January 11, in 1912, and it contained criticism of the rigid approach to Japanese education:

In this method, children are taught to be active, not to be silent: not to rear children on the «let-alone» principle, but to rear children who are able to stand alone (*Yorozutyoho*, 1912).

Following this initial introduction, Montessori Education was reviewed by a Japanese famous educator, Sozo Kurahashi in *Fujin to Kodomo* («Woman and Child»), by Kiyomaru Kono in *Hachidai Kyoiku Hihan* (Eight big educational criticisms), and by Toshio Nogami in the journal *Kyoiku Gakujutsu Kai* («The Educational Art and Science World»).

In the Taisho period (July 30, 1912 - December 25, 1926), many new experiments in education were carried out in Japan, in an atmosphere of freedom under Taisho democracy. In Japan, «New Education», or the so-called «Taisho New Education», flourished from the Taisho period to the early Showa period (the Showa period was from December 25, 1926 - January 7, 1989). On July 31, 1911, «The Enforcement Regulations on Primary School Order» (*Shogakko Rei*) were revised, and they enabled teachers to practice free childcare and education for children. Because the standard for kindergarten in the Enforcement Regulations relaxed restrictions, teachers were able to teach freely (cf. Kobayashi, 1983, p. 46). In this reform, the prescriber of the content of child-care items was reduced and teachers were permitted to be flexible with nursery time, so kindergartens began to have the characteristics of a nursery school. Kindergartens then became popular, and people started to have high regard for free childcare (cf. Kobayashi, 1983, pp. 46-47). In this new wave, Montessori Education received attention from many Japanese educators.

Sozo Kurahashi discussed Montessori Education in *Shinrigaku Kenkyu* («The Journal of Psychological Research») in 1912:

As for the recent topic of education, [...] and Montessori's Montessori Method in Italy. [...] Montessori Education is also born from the needs of the times. The method is based on psychology, that is, she trusts and investigates

children's spontaneity. And she tries to treat children's spontaneity with care (Kurahashi, 1912, p. 304).

Kurahashi introduced Maria Montessori and Montessori Education to the Japanese, having read the American magazine, «McClure's» in 1911 (in May and December) and the journal «Pedagogical Seminary» in 1911. He stated that Montessori was referred to in articles by Theodate L. Smith in that magazine and journal (cf. Kurahashi, 1912, p. 310). He stated the following regarding Montessori Education:

There are some promises in Montessori Education. First, we should respect children's freedom and support children to show their spontaneity. According to Montessori, a well-trained child is an independent child. That is the child who can decide by himself/herself (does not rely on other's people's help) when he/she should follow some norms that he/she may meet with in his/her life. But freedom should be restricted when it will be harmful to others. Expect that, child's freedom must be permit. Or, more precisely, teachers should observe child's freedom. Teachers should be tolerant of a child's spontaneity, and also should be interested in child of that. By Montessori, interfering in a child's spontaneity means checking the growth in a child's life. Because of the above, a child's training should be in the development of the child's independence. Nevertheless, he/she is still dependent and he/she does not get true liberty, because he/she cannot dress himself/herself, and because he/she cannot eat by himself/herself, and because he/she lives in dependent on others. Montessori says, by the age of three, however, the child should be able to render himself/herself to a great extent independent and free. To teach a child to feed himself, to dress himself/herself is much more tedious and difficult work than feeding and dressing the child oneself. But the former is the work of an educator, and the latter is the easy and inferior work of a servant (Kurahashi, 1912, pp. 306-307).

In this passage, the theory of «independence» and of a child's spontaneity in Montessori Education are introduced, and there is some discussion on Montessori's work «Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nelle case dei bambini, 1909». But Kurahashi (1912) says, «I cannot read writings which were published in 1909 and 1910. The German translation of "Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica" is now progressing and the English translation will be published soon» (Kurahashi, 1912, p. 310) Thus, I presume that Kurahashi learned about Montessori Education though being introduced to it by an American educator such as Smith, not from Montessori's original writings nor even from English translations of her work. In this period, to know, to learn, and to consider Montessori Education was thus a challenging task for Japanese Educators³.

³ A few people like Toshio Nogami tried to decipher Montessori's original writing (ex. Nogami, Toshio (1912): A new trial about Kindergarten: To read Montessori's Scientific Pedagogy. *The Educational Art and Science World*, 25(5)).

Nevertheless, in spite of such difficulties (the difficulty of understanding the theory of education in foreign country, the cause of the problem of language and distribution), Kurahashi (1912) stated a significant point. And even now, it may be important for us to try to adopt a foreign country's educational methods:

Now, the Montessori Method has gradually spread as a fashion in education in the world. In Japan, not only specialists in education but also the person who adopts a let-alone policy in bringing are interested in the Montessori Method since the first introduction of it in *Yorozutyoho*. However, we should not forget these two important attitudes when we adopt all the new educational phenomena: if we approve of a new educational phenomenon in the aspect of study, we should maintain a careful attitude when we try to practice or use it in our country. I must also say, in addition, as one of the introducers of Montessori Education,

(1) I agree the Montessori concept, «respect for children's spontaneity», and I also agree that the concept may be practicable in children's education.

(2) However, the concept «respect for children's spontaneity» is often misunderstood, so we should separate her concept from the concept of a let-alone policy.

(3) That is, I agree that the application is not separated from Montessori's spirit. However, we should beware of a superficial application that tries to use only the method, without consideration for the spirit of its inventor (Kurahashi, 1912, p. 312).

In this article, Kurahashi acknowledged Montessori's achievement: she realized a form of education that respects a child's spontaneity, not ending the dream. He also raised a significant point when we think about the reception of an educational method from a foreign country. We should review our reception whenever we can: we are truly able to use and accept methods based on consideration of the spirit of the inventor.

In addition, Kurahashi included two photographs with this article: «Montessori and children», and «the situation that children write a letter». He said that he reproduced these pictures from the American newspaper the «New York Times» (Kurahashi, 1912, p. 310). He also observed that he learned about «Children's House» from Anne E. George, which was the only school for Montessori Education in the United States at that time, and that he was not able to have knowledge of the current situation of Montessori Education in Italy or about various attempts at using this method that were made in Switzerland or in other countries. In this period, there was little information about Montessori's work and practice, but educators tried to understand and absorb new, fascinating educational methods.

Many Japanese educators showed an interest in Montessori Education for the expectation of early education and demonstrated empathy with the concrete methods of realizing children's freedom. At that time, curriculum-centered education was receiving criticism and, for this reason, Montessori's child-centered education, in which the role of the teacher was changed, attracted the attention of educators.

When it was first introduced, Montessori Education was accepted as a method intended for elementary school, but as a practice, the method was accepted in

kindergartens and nursery schools. As previously stated, Kurahashi encountered the Montessori Method in an article in *Yorozutyoho*, and studied the method as it was discussed in American journals and newspapers. Based on that knowledge, he gave lectures in a training session and in a lecture for people involved in education. Kurahashi's lecture in 1912 drew people connected with childcare in the Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe area. While the idea of the Montessori Method was gaining in favor, the first kindergarten that adopted the Montessori Method came out in Kobe: Kobe Kindergarten. In addition, a Montessori course and a lecture on Montessori Education were held in the Kansai Region in 1912-1914. Moreover, Take Zen, a teacher at Osaka Edo Hori Kindergarten, interpreted Montessori Education. Zen (1915) observed in an article entitled «A Childcare Community in Kansai Area and an Idea of Montessori Education»,

That was the first time we knew Montessori's name: in May 1912, in Kobe, when a «Meeting on Overall Children's Education in the Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe Area» (Keihanshin Sogo Hoiku Kai) was held, and Mr. Kurahashi introduced Montessori to us. In a Meeting on Overall Children's Education, Mr. Kurahashi told about «freedom» and about an Italian educator, Montessori (Zen, 1915, p. 151).

In this article, Zen observed that she would like to know more about Montessori Education, but at that particular time, that involved hard work, so her study of it did not go as smoothly as she expected and time was just passing. But through great luck, Kuni Mochizuki, who studied Montessori, recommended and lent Zen an article by Toshio Nogami that discussed Montessori's «Scientific Pedagogy» in detail. Zen and teachers at Osaka Edo Hori Kindergarten read the article carefully and learned about Montessori's career and Children's House. But there was another obstacle. They understood the general framework of Montessori Education and about Montessori herself, but they had not seen the actual material tools, and they felt something was lacking when they looked at the objects as illustrated in a paper. When they wanted to know about the materials as shown in an illustration, they had a second instance of luck: through Mochizuki's good offices, a Western friend of his lent Kobe Kindergarten an album containing Montessori's material tools and the staff of the kindergarten transcribed and colored them carefully. They made about ten transcripts, and one was given to Osaka Edo Hori Kindergarten. The kindergarten teachers read the transcript and felt there was nothing like seeing this material for themselves (cf. Zen, 1915, pp. 151-152). They also learned about Maria Montessori and Montessori Education through lectures given by Toshio Nogami and by Kiyomaru Kono in 1914. Zen said that Nogami made a comparison between kindergarten as proposed by Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel and Montessori's Children's House, and demonstrated a strong commonality between them (Zen, 1915, pp. 152-153). They could also see and touch the material tools made under the direction of Nogami, and then they gained a good understanding of Montessori's material tools (Zen, 1915, p. 152). Moreover, the teachers learned in-depth about her concept of education through a lecture presented by Kono, who had undertaken an intensive study of Montessori.

They first learned about Montessori through Kurahashi's lecture in 1912, and were influenced and supported by certain educators (for example, Nogami, Mochizuki and Kono, etc.); therefore, they learned about the theory and practice of Montessori Method, including the material tools. In this way, Zen and others were encouraged to practice Montessori Education in their kindergarten. Zen (1915) put a construction:

Montessori said that it is necessary for education to consider children's environment in her Scientific Pedagogy. And she strongly urged that preparing the environment is fundamental to the Scientific Pedagogy. If we put in order inside and outside our country educationally, and if we ensure children's spontaneous activity, we can realize Montessori's concept in Japan (Zen, 1915, p. 154).

Then, Zen put Montessori's «Prepared Environment» and «respect for children's freedom» into practice and judged its effect. She told the recent state of Osaka Edo Hori Kindergarten, which adopted Montessori's theory of education,

In that case, children became a marvel of order and neatness having a pleasant feeling because the true freedom showed what it can do (Zen, 1915, p. 157).

There were few, but enthusiastic, attempts at using the method in kindergartens in the Kansai area. Around this time, the material tools were produced by «Tenshin-Do» in Osaka, but Montessori Education did not develop widely beyond that. Why did Montessori Education not take hold in the first stage? Some reasons are discussed below.

First, certain Japanese educators criticized the method. While the progressive education movement, which was based on John Dewey's work, was advancing in the United States and in Europe, similar stirrings were evident in Japan. Some educators were careful to practice the new method, including supporters of Montessori Education. Entaro Noguchi, who was a principal at Himeji Normal School, made an inspection of Western education, from 1914 to 1915, and he visited Children's House, thereby cultivating a better understanding of unrestricted education in the West. He discussed his experiences in his book «Unrestricted Education and Material Tools for an Elementary School Student» in 1921. In the preface of this book, he expressed an opinion about the state of education in Japan at that time and about the Montessori Method:

These are the best books⁴ that describe unrestricted education (Jiyu Kyoiku) and record experiences related to unrestricted education up to now. [...]

However, our society does not reach its destination that Montessori's thought and devising will be generally accepted. In Japan, it is difficult to practice this method due to social and economic problems, and we should seriously

⁴ Maria Montessori 1917: *The Advanced Montessori Method* (Volume 1. and Volume 2.) New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company = Montessori, M. 1916: *L'autoeducazione nelle scuole elementari* (Parte Prima y Parte Seconda) Rome, P. Maglione & C. Stanri.

discuss this problem. We should not practice the method easily. (Noguchi, 1921, pp. 4-6).

Noguchi tried to practice unrestricted education in Japan, and he showed an interest in the Montessori Method. In fact, he felt misgivings about education for people and for elementary school students at that time, and evaluated Montessori education, saying,

When I felt like losing hope for the future of current education in Japan, I found a ray of hope by the experimentation of unrestricted education by Montessori. A child in Montessori Education can learn freely, joyfully, and pleasantly, and not feeling restriction, he/she is able to make great progress, have his/her interest around all of a study, and have enthusiasm for investigating their interests deeply. Thus, he/she grows up free from all cares, and honestly, not suffering from examinations and success in an examination, he/she is gradually aware of his/her duty and responsibility as a human being gradually. [...] If a child grows up like that, and according to education like that, we can expect that people may be self-conscious and may be released from encumbrances, and then our society will be free and natural (Noguchi, 1921, pp. 323-324).

Noguchi was confident that if we changed the approach to children's education, people and society would in turn change in the future. And regarding the possibility of attaining that, he was hopeful up about the material tools for elementary school students that had been created by Montessori. He empathized with her concept of «freedom» and with the practice, and wanted to apply it to Japanese children, but he also thought that it was still too early to implement the method perfectly in Japan at that time in view of progress of society and preparedness to receive the new education in Japan.

Second, there was already deep-rooted support for the theory of Fröbel in Japan. There were a lot of Froebel-style kindergartens in Japan; thus, Montessori was compared with him. Montessori's concept: respect for children's spontaneity and freedom was accepted, but actually, there was little room for these ideas to gain entry into early childhood educational circles.

Third, many educators were influenced by American educators in the late 1910s: Dewey and William Kilpatrick. As in Kilpatrick's article «The Montessori System Examined» (1914), they criticized the Montessori Method and their criticism was told by Tomeri Tanimoto and others. On the one hand, Tanimoto recognized that Montessori had established her method based on medical science and organized Casa dei Bambini, but on the other hand, he criticized that the method, saying it had five demerits and three merits, based on Kilpatrick's article. Tanimoto (1919) summarized the five demerits and three merits:

Five demerits

1. It is wrong thinking that a teacher leads a child from sense and suddenly leads the education of reading. [...] She is in an old framework of psychology.

2. Compared with the educational theory of Dewey in America, Montessori's theory is shallow [...].

3. Indeed, Montessori investigated kindergarten scientifically, but there was a person who investigated kindergarten in the same way.

4. Montessori Education is effective for the poor, but it may be unreliable for others.

5. Reading and writing are available in Italy but may not be available in other countries.

Three merits

1. It was an educational achievement that Montessori established Children's Home in Italy.

2. It is admirable that she has a scientific point of view.

3. It is commendable that she applied «the thought of freedom» to a real practice for children. (Tanimoto, 1919, p. 277).

In summary of the above, despite very strong interest from researchers, Montessori Education did not survive the torrent of criticism directed at it and the already deep-rooted support for the theory of Froebel. A reluctance to adopt the Montessori Method in Japan was apparent at that time. Therefore, there was little information on the practice of the method, and thus teachers could not begin to implement it a full-scale. In brief, the first reception of the theory and practice of the Montessori Method was superficial.

3.2. *The second stage (1930s-post-World WarII)*

Let us consider a tendency in childhood education during wartime. In 1931, the Manchurian Incident broke out, and then, the China Incident (China - Japan war) occurred in 1937. Following those conflicts, World War II began in 1941. Education for children that was free from restrictions drew criticism, and it took on a wartime quality around 1935. Children's activities involved playing soldier, playing nurse, and playing like they were in air-raid shelters. Concerning childcare, it was seen as important for children to grow up to become great soldiers and people who took part in war through tempering of teaching manners, physical training, and public health (Kobayashi, 1983, p. 64). In World War II, the administration of elementary school came under the authority of the state, but the regulations for kindergarten were comparatively soft (Kobayashi, 1983, p. 66). However, there was nationalistic content in day-to-day childcare, and in 1943, some kindergartens were changed into «day care centers for children of wartime» (Kobayashi, 1983, pp. 66-67). Under the sway of militaristic feeling, a method that insisted on the freedom of the individual, like Montessori's, was incompatible with these situations, so this form of education did not openly attract the spotlight⁵.

⁵ The connection between Montessori Method and the politics of the time is often mentioned. In Italy, Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini tried to build a good relationship with Montessori to integrate his political power from the early 1920s. However, Montessori took a natural position for the government; Montessori Schools were forced to closure in 1930s.

In Japan, the criticism and oppression toward «New Education» became severe from 1920s. The «Maintenance of the Public Order Act» was established in 1925, supervising socialism and communism. Then supervise was spread toward the thought of education free from restrictions. The educational freedom was suppressed within the system of control on thought. Started to the incident of the Emperor Organ Theory in 1935, Meeting of Education and Learning Reform were established then excluded the socialism, the thought of liberalism, and Western thought because their rises were threats to the government which emphasized the Japan spirit and performed to expand Japanese capitalism by military advance. (In 1945, World War II ended, there were no longer controls on speeches and thoughts, and the regulation to study Montessori Education had melted).

In the second stage, in spite of the situation described above, educators serenely continued studying Montessori Education: many books on Montessori practices that were published in Europe and America, were translated into Japanese, and Montessori Education was recognized from a spiritual point of view.

The history of the reception of Montessori Education is often divided into two stages (the first adoption and the revival) (e.g., Moriue, 1984, pp. 87-130), but Tsuyoshi Yoshioka (1999b) includes a second stage and a third stage. He calls the second stage a «continuation of interest» (1932-1943) (Yoshioka, 1999b, p. 60). In the present chapter, I follow this division. In the second stage, there was not showy vogue like the first stage, but after the decline of the Montessori movement, some researchers still paid attention to Montessori's original theory and its effect on educational practice.

In this period, the practice in the West was explained. Masunori Hiratsuka discussed the Montessori movement in the West, by translating Western studies: The Montessori movement in England and Ireland (Standing, E.), the Montessori movement in Holland (Tromp, W.), the Montessori movement in Austria (Hauser, R.); the Montessori Method in America (Reed, M. & Raymond, M.) (cf. Hiratsuka, 1932).

Kiyozo Fujiwara (1943), who was well versed in the history of education and the history of industrial economics, published a book entitled «The History of Theories of Education and Educators, Third Volume: The Taisho Period», in 1943. In this book, he examined a feature of education in the Taisho period:

It was a golden age of the thought of the education free from restrictions, and the movement of the thought spread over some practices and educational methods. [...] In educational circles, educational methods turned from teacher-centered to child-centered, and educators established a method that put a child's life and mentality first.[...]

The idea of education free from restrictions that was in vogue, like Rousseau, Ellen Key, Tolstoy, and Nietzsche became a trend toward studies and practices that were attached to child-centered self-learning. And a various kinds of learning methods were imported and practiced. Especially, the following methods were well-known: the Montessori Method, the Project Method, the Dalton Plan, the Winnetka System, the Decroly method, and the Gary System. (Fujiwara, 1943, pp. 519-528).

He suggested that in the Taisho period, a Copernican-like revolution took place in which educational methods changed from teacher-centered instruction to child-centered learning. In that period, there was a call for education for the child and by the child (Fujiwara, 1943, pp. 519-520). He introduced and explained the Montessori Method as one of the learning methods that was child-centered, and was imported during the later Showa period in Japan. Fujiwara summarized Montessori's theory in five aspects: the principle of children's freedom, material tools, a muscular education, education of the senses, and a lesson in silence (Fujiwara, 1943, pp. 530-534). Fujiwara considered some ideas of education free from restrictions, and valued Montessori Education: it was started based on a medical perspective, so it offered a system that was examined from a physiological and biological standpoint, and with this background, Montessori realized her theory as a real educational practice (Fujiwara, 1943, p. 536).

In addition, Montessori Education was recognized from a spiritual point of view. Masatake Morita (1928), who is known as the founder of Morita therapy, expressed in a category of «spontaneous activity»:

In the educational world, the effect of Montessori Education in Italy is prominent (Morita, 1928, p. 110).

He insisted on continuity between his own theory and that of Montessori. He also discussed the Montessori Method in a topic of an «Educational Treatment» and tried to apply Montessori's Methods to his clients (Morita, 1935, pp. 148-165). The connection above would be able to be convinced by thinking about the first career of Montessori: she started her career in medical science and education for mentally disabled children. A relationship between Montessori Education and education of the mentally handicapped children then continued after that: in October 1977, the «Society for Study of Educational Treatment with Montessori Education in Japan» was established and «Educational Treatment with Montessori Education», bulletins of that society were published from July 1978 to December 1983. In a recent study, Montessori Education was examined from the perspective of inclusive education (e.g., Okamoto, 2016).

3.3. The third stage (1950s-present)

World War II ended on August 15, in 1945, and people attempted to restore their life from a state of disorder. On May 31, 1947, the Ministry of Education enacted «the Fundamentals of Education Act» and «the School Education Law». The 6-3-3 system of education was established and the education of democracy with coeducation had been driven. Regarding kindergarten, there were provisions in Article 77, Chapter 7 of the School Education Law. Thus, kindergarten was regarded as a lower stage of an educational institution and as a form of education that educated children before they started elementary schools (Kobayashi, 1983, p. 66). However, on December 12, 1947, the Child Welfare Act was promulgated and a new policy was determined: all the children must be guaranteed their life and must be protected. The Child Welfare Act provided a nursery, and «a day-care center for children in prewar»

(Takuji Sho) formally changed its name to «nursery» (Hoiku Sho) (Kobayashi, 1983, p. 66). In this way, kindergarten was institutionalized by the «School Education Law», and came under the authority of the Ministry of Education. Then the nursery was institutionalized by the Child Welfare Act, and came under the authority of the Ministry of Health and Welfare. Moreover, in this period, many people were inspired to insure that a child received a good education and day care, and groups were organized to study childcare or to revive education and day care, and to start to take action (Kobayashi, 1983, p. 75).

In 1945, GHQ presented «Five Major Reforms Directive on Democratization» intending demilitarization and democratization. The tide of education turned in one's favor. Liberalization of compulsory education was stated then a direction of education based on liberalism and democracy was searched for. In 1950s, postwar education was reconsidered, and the request of the education to rebuild economy was promoted. In this situation after World War II, Montessori Education caught on with many educators again, which was the so-called «Montessori revival». Not long after the war ended, an energetic effort began among educators to study the Montessori Method and to translate many studies about Maria Montessori. In addition, the number of kindergartens and nursery schools using this method increased.

In 1957, Tsuneyoshi Tsutsumi translated «Il segreto dell'infanzia» (The secret of childhood) (1938) into Japanese, and then, Keiko Akabane, who earned an international diploma⁶, started research and practice at the Kyoto Tsukimigaoka Nursery School with Tsutsumi in 1963. Tsutsumi had studied German literature and aesthetics until he was in his 70s, and he had personally encountered Montessori. He told about that meeting:

I got a German translation of «The Secret of Childhood», and I also got «Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook» at that time, and made the material tools myself, gave them to several children, and thought of going to Germany to see the real education of Montessori in 1963. And I met Keiko Akabane in Germany (Tsutsumi, 1975, pp. 23-24).

Through one piece of good luck after another and his support for Montessori's concept of auto-education/ self-education of the child, Tsutsumi became drawn into Montessori Education. His articles about Montessori were published serially in «Infant and Childcare» from April 1967 to November 1967(13(1)-13(8)). Tsutsumi accepted the values of Montessori Education and said that she made a «great discovery» about childhood education that defects about education of the past (Tsutsumi, 1967a, p. 78). He also considered that childcare free from restrictions would become a guiding principle for the Japanese (Tsutsumi, 1967b, p. 82).

Through Tsutsumi and others, many people gained the opportunity to read Montessori's works in Japanese translations. Some educators earned a diploma in foreign countries, and then returned to Japan with this credential and spread what they had learned. Owing to their steady efforts, studies of Montessori Education and the practices of this method would gain a foothold and gradually develop in Japan.

⁶ An international qualification for Montessori teacher.

Montessori's concepts of «freedom for children» and a «Prepared Environment (including material tools)» was accepted by current educational circles at the time and re-evaluated by Japanese researchers. In addition, reassessment by scholars in the field of psychology in the United States motivated Japanese educators to begin studying the Montessori Education. Because of those positive assessments, many of the original works of Montessori were translated into Japanese within a short time, and many books related to her work were published in Japan.

Swimming with the current tide, the «Japan Association Montessori» was established in 1968. Moreover, a «Training Course for the Montessori Teacher» was then established at Jyochi University. In «Prospectus for Establishment of Japan Association Montessori», there was the description of the necessity to establish the association at that time:

Recently, studies of children's world and of the educational method of children have been flourishing, but these studies lack a correct view of life. So, these studies did not get results, and they look like they will remain in the realm of speculation.

In this situation, we believe that the theory of Montessori, which discovered the inner-power of children with a secret of life, must be the real light in today's childhood education.

There are many Montessori Associations in the world that have tried to succeed and develop what Montessori left behind, but there is no Montessori Association in Japan. Therefore, we have established the «Japan Association Montessori» and expect her thought to be studied and practiced widely (Japan Association Montessori, 1968, p. 71).

Like these, the second Montessori movement began around the 1960s. Starting in this period, the number of kindergartens and nursery schools using the Montessori Method increased not only in the Kansai-area but also throughout Japan. Thus, many researchers wrote papers about this type of education or made presentations of papers (e.g., Egusa, Yamaguchi & Okuyama, 1978; Hirano, 1976; Tsuda, 1977).

Let us compare the features of the first stage and the third stage. In the first stage, educators introduced and commented on a new method and pilot practices were established in some areas, but these practices did not take root in Japan. However, in the third stage, educators began steadily to conduct practical research and studies on classrooms, and thus Montessori Education gradually became rooted in our childcare practices⁷.

4. The relationship between the Development of the Montessori Education and Education Policy in Japan

Few studies have examined the third stage. In this chapter, I focus on the third stage in particular.

⁷ In the first stage, there was some criticism from researchers, but compared with the past criticism, the criticism in the third stage investigated details related to Montessori's concept and practice.

Today, there are various possibilities for accepting and developing Montessori Education in ways that are different from the first stage. There are many books about the Montessori Method and classroom practices. Educators can easily and study in-depth her educational philosophy. And it might be emphasized that current education policy has moved more favorably toward Montessori's concepts. The revision of the «National Curriculum Standard for Kindergartens» and the «National Guidelines for Nursery Centers» is worthy of telling the Japanese childcare education.

From the 1970s to the '80s, as postindustrial society became central in Japanese society, so too did the problem of children's growth become more prominent: issues like school non-attendance or bullying in school became more urgent. This problem spread to childcare education, and educators turned to a new teaching method emphasizing children's autonomy.

In 1989, the National Curriculum Standard for Kindergartens was drastically revised: «learning from the environment», «from instruction to support», «from teacher-centered to child-centered», and so on. The National Guidelines for Nursery Centers followed that. The basic issue is still carried on today.

Let us focus on the revision of «Chapter 1 General Provisions Section 1. Basic Ideas of Kindergarten Education», in the National Curriculum Standard for Kindergartens. The words «educate young children through their environment» were first mentioned in 1989: «the fundamental aim of kindergarten education is to educate young children through the environment» (Ministry of Education 1989).

We can find the phrase «environment» in «Basic Ideas of Kindergarten Education» and in «Aims and Content». In this chapter, I focus on the former «environment». The «environment» means the entire environment around children including teachers and other children, not only means natural environment or physical environment. Teacher should assume a role that encouraging children to undertake voluntary activities and configuring the appropriate environment for developing child. The concept «learning from the environment» is still continued in 1998 and 2008. The standards stated: «the fundamental aim of kindergarten education is to educate young children through the environment in order to achieve the objectives stipulated in Article 77 of the School Education Law» (Ministry of Education 1998).

Education during early childhood is extremely important in cultivating a foundation for lifelong character building, and the fundamental aim of kindergarten education is to educate young children through the environment, taking into consideration their specific needs and age, in order to achieve the objectives stipulated in Article 22 of the School Education Law (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2008).

In 2017, in Japan, the National Curriculum Standard for Kindergartens and the National Guidelines for Nursery Centers were revised. There is an intention to rear children to have the ability adapt to a changing society. The concept «through the environment» is also described in the 2017 version:

Education during early childhood is extremely important in cultivating a foundation for lifelong character building, and the fundamental aim of

kindergarten education is to educate young children through the environment, taking into consideration their specific needs and age, in order to achieve the objectives and targets stipulated in the School Education Law (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2017).

And in the National Guidelines for Nursery Centers (2017), the importance of the «environment that is careful to protective care» means a warm and loving environment. In National Curriculum Standard for Kindergartens, educating and raising children based on «learning from the environment» was continued. It is emphasized that when teacher encourages children to undertake voluntary activities and allows children to lead a life appropriate for them, children can demonstrate their ability under stable emotion. Then, they will gain the balanced development of physical and intellectual and mental. When we think about the means of environment, it seems to overlap the concept of environment of Montessori's (human environment, physical environment, and spiritual environment). In recent years, teachers are encouraged to expand childcare to stand in children's place, from teacher-centered childcare. They should learn a better understanding and anticipation of the individual actions and thoughts of each child.

In a fast-changing world, it is envisaged that we need to work to help children develop twenty-first century competencies: to tackle and solve problems in a responsible way (at times, to solve problems in cooperation with others). Montessori emphasizes «intellectual curiosity», «independence», and «autonomy», and Casa dei Bambini has a loving and intellectual environment, and is also a vibrant community where children learn to interact in various ways.

«Casa dei Bambini» was established over 100 years ago, but Montessori's educational concept is still suitable for today's needs. Based on detailed, systematic observation of children, the Montessori teacher seeks to provide an atmosphere of productive calm as children smoothly move along in their learning. And the teacher's goal is to help and encourage the children, allowing them to develop confidence and inner discipline so that there is less and less need to intervene as they grow.

In the educational reform that originated in a classroom collapse in the 1990s, it aimed at improving the quality of childcare and at raising the intellectual ability of the child. (In addition, the unification of kindergartens with day care is one of the big issues in the field of the childcare education.) Support for children's learning has been frequently examined in recent years, including Montessori Education.

5. Conclusion

The response to Montessori Education in Japan changed in each period according to the educational policy at that time. Today, we can find many foreign educational methods like Waldorf Education (which was advocated by Rudolf Steiner and introduced to Japan in the 1910s) or the Reggio Emilia Approach (created by Loris Malaguzzi with educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy). Japanese educators have adopted elements of foreign educational theory and organized them in a Japanese way. In this way, Montessori Education has steadily put down roots in Japan.

And this paper tried to clarify the history of the reception of Montessori Education in Japan, several viewpoints were revealed. Some Japanese educators learned about Montessori Education or the practice from the translation or importation from the West, the process seems to a kind of cultural «translation» or «misreading». Despite the importation of the translation or mistranslation, the Montessori Education has rooted in Japan today. As I mentioned in previous chapters, there were creative and steady transmissions among reception and that made Japanese-style Montessori Education: an emphasis of the principle of autonomy, an emphasis of material tools, and a unique reception specialized in childhood education.

In recent years, educators have tried to improve children's ability to «learn to learn». This issue has been examined for more than a century and that theme has been a continual task for educators up to today. We must think back to the past and try to come up with an ideal educational setting.

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