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The Challenges of Fieldwork in Comparative Education Studies in Japan: A Methodological Consideration

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The purpose of this article is not to discuss fieldwork at large but rather to examine the position and role of the research method in one discipline, comparative education. For this purpose, first of all, the content of articles published by the Japan Comparative Education Society's journal over the past 35 years is analyzed. Based on this analysis, the implications, significance as well as apprehension surrounding doing fieldwork in comparative studies of education are then discussed. There are 504 articles published from the first volume to the latest No. 39. The classification based on a full reading of all the articles indicates 86 (approximately 17.1%) are found to be based on the data and information collected and formed by the researchers themselves with the various techniques in their fields. While studies about Western advanced countries account for a majority in all articles, those utilizing various techniques in the field remain limited at 20. The rest of the fieldwork-based articles concern developing countries. However, an increasing number of fieldwork-based studies have been appearing in the JCES journal. Not only has the speed of this increase been accelerating, but also the quality of the fieldwork seems to have been improving gradually. Similarly, countries and areas to be the object of investigation have been diversifying. What is perhaps the most salient phenomenon is that studies centering on advanced Western countries are also coming to adopt fieldwork as their primary research method. These recent academic trends may indicate that studies in Comparative Education in Japan are finally coming into their own: what was long considered a 'peripheral' or 'consumer' position in academia is now being replaced with hope for making original and active contributions to research in the field.

Fieldwork is defined loosely as an investigation technique for visiting sites in person with a certain purpose in mind, making direct observations, interviewing parties concerned, conducting questionnaire surveys, and extracting historical records and data on the spot in order to get scientifically objective results. It has been described extensively over the years as a distinct research method. Literature focusing on following sound interview techniques, the creation, distribution and interpretation of questionnaires, the intricacies of reliable participant observation, the taking of

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accurate field-notes and the writing of reports based on field experiences are too numerous to mention.[1] In the field of comparative education, which inherently involves the analysis of foreign country contexts or different cultural environments, fieldwork has been attracting more and more attention as an effective and informative research method.

The purpose of this article is not to discuss the merits and processes of fieldwork at large, but rather to confine the argument to examining the position and role of the method in one discipline, comparative education. Since a vast majority of comparative educators in Japan maintain membership in the Japan Comparative Education Society (JCES)[2], the author will closely review the Society's past activities and clarify how fieldwork has been conducted and considered on various occasions. More concretely, contents of the articles published by the Society's journal over the past 35 years will first be analyzed to ascertain their research methods. Secondly, based on this analysis, the implications, significance, and apprehension surrounding doing fieldwork in comparative studies of education are then discussed.

1 Recognition of Fieldwork in the Initial Stage of JCES Development

The JCES started to publish its journal in 1974, the 10th year following its formal inauguration in 1965[3]. The importance of fieldwork was recognized from the very beginning, as seen in various articles in the first issue of the journal. For example, while advocating the 'cultural anthropology approach', Tsuneo Ayabe listed the problems of conducting educational research using this method in the past as follows: "Without carefully selecting research targets and building up and scrutinizing precise hypotheses beforehand, research was actually conducted. .... It was not until visiting the research site and incidentally coming across some educational issues that a survey was started. .... Past studies lacked delving into the cognitive side of the context in the culture concerned."[4]

Subsequently, in proposals aimed at the improvement of research, Ayabe pointed out the necessity of 'educational ethnographic' study based on in-depth participant observation over an extended period of time. He also emphasized the importance of the 'practical use of field survey method', referring not merely to the collection of ready-made materials at universities, government offices, various kinds of schools, libraries, and research institutes located in urban cities of the country concerned, but also in conducting first-hand research in rural areas where literature and data are generally scarce. As for his interpretation of 'practical use of a field research methods', he added that "it does not include the group tour and inspection tour staying in a hotel, or mere study abroad, but is a means to carry out the investigation of an educational problem with concrete awareness, by staying a long time in a selected spot, learning the local language, eating the local food, and living the same life with local people."[5]

In the article in the same edition entitled in "The Area Studies in the Field of Comparative Education in Japan; The Example of Studying German Education," Masaharu Amano suggested that "comparative education studies in Japan probably need to advance more functional and effective research by introducing joint research systems and field surveys."[6] It is noteworthy that the importance of fieldwork was pointed out from the standpoint of a researcher involved in the studies of advanced nations or Western countries.

In addition, Michiya Shimbori asserted that a mere study of education in a foreign country could not be called "comparative education study, and education in two or more foreign countries

should be compared methodologically and systematically"[7], explaining that numerous approaches are conceivable. However, it is not easy for Japanese researchers in particular to stay in a foreign country long enough to master educational and various other aspects of the country, nor is travel to foreign countries always easily accomplished. Moreover, even if researchers are able to secure time and travel, average researchers still cannot easily grasp firsthand information due to restrictions of language or lifestyle habits. Therefore, Shimbori suggested that some alternative methods for comparison depending on literature ought to be developed, claiming that "*Only in this way we can close the gap with Europe and American researchers who have few differences between a foreign country and their own country*"[8] [Italics not in the original]. From this assertion, it can be surmised that Shimbori envisaged mainly the study of Western countries; other areas seem to have been overlooked when forming his hypothesis, because it is not reasonable to state that Indonesia and China, for example, are countries with "few differences" for European and American researchers. Rather, it should be considered that sensitive and cognitive distance toward these countries is equally challenging for researchers, whether they are Japanese, European or American.

At any rate, judging from the above-mentioned arguments presented in the initial stages of the development of the JCES, it can be observed that fieldwork methods were still in the early stages in terms of how they could be effectively used. In fact, two individual research articles appearing in the first edition of the journal as examples of actual research practice (i.e., "Arinori Mori and Horace Mann" by Akie Shoko and "A Study of the International Aims of Education" by Takashi Uehara) were both based on the results of the analysis of existing literature and published data.

2 Fieldwork Appearing as a Research Method

The issue of fieldwork was periodically taken up as a special topic in the JCES journal. In the 1999 Special Edition of the journal (No.25) dealing with 'New Perspectives of Comparative Education', we see a number of contributors referring to fieldwork as a research method. Minoru Ishizuki wrote that "looking at recent research trends in Japan, it is remarkable that researchers of the younger generation in particular are actively going abroad, energetically conducting field surveys, and gathering information in the areas concerned."[9] He also pointed out "the areas of investigation are extending wider to include Africa, Central and South America and Oceania, which had not received much attention in the past."[10] Shinichi Suzuki emphasized the necessity "to engage directly by reflecting, developing and experimenting (i.e., conducting fieldwork) in relation to the systematization of comparative education."[11] Akira Ninomiya expressed his pleasure that opportunities for young researchers to conduct overseas research through the so-called "Tokubetsu Kenkyuin Seido" or "special researcher program" of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), have increased, and that significantly more researchers are able to have direct experience in developing countries as Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)[12]. Takeshi Sasamori discussed the relation between comparative education and area studies from the viewpoint as a specialist of Oceania area studies. He indicated the importance of "community surveys" and asserted that "the newest data and literature are difficult to acquire, especially with respect to countries in the South Pacific. Therefore, [fieldwork] is the best method for collecting data and information."[13]

In the same edition, Yokuo Murata and Megumi Shibuya discussed the relationship between

comparative education and area studies as specialists of Southeast Asia. They noted that in 10 volumes (No. 15 to 24) of JCES journals, 18 articles had dealt with education in Southeast Asia, including many studies in which contributors conducted original data collection and fieldwork while staying for a relatively long period of time in the areas concerned. As for the research methodology "most articles are based on a review of the literature using primary sources .... In addition, there are many studies in which researchers have utilized participant observation, interviews, questionnaire surveys, scholastic ability tests, etc."[14] Specifically, the authors found that "among these 18 articles, 6 studies utilized participant observation, 9 conducted interviews, and 4 did questionnaire surveys, which included either multiple choice or open-ended questions."[15]

In the 2001 Special Editon of the journal (No. 27) entitled "The Frontier of Area Studies in Education", there is a review of studies concerning education in various contexts throughout the world, and a discussion of future directions for research. The contributors to this Special Edition were Hisao Takekuma (Southeast Asia), Hideaki Shibuya (South Asia), Yasuo Saito (Latin America), Setsuo Nishino (Islamic countries in Southeast Asia), Tadashi Endo (Russia and the Soviet Union) and Yutaka Kido (Europe). Each author is a specialist who has engaged in educational research in their respective areas over many years as JCES members, and their intimate knowledge is reflected in each article. Several articles in this Special Edition, for example, those by Takekuma, Shibuya, Nishino and Endo, also refer to domestic and international trends in methods of fieldwork.

Table I classifies the content of JCES journal articles by country and other research themes, illustrating how research foci and methodology within the JCES have evolved over time.

As indicated in Table I, looking back at all the articles published by the Journal, there were 504[16] published from the first volume to No. 39. If we narrow our focus to single countries (with the exception of Japan) such as the United States and China, articles dealing with advanced countries in Europe and America received a majority of attention throughout the whole period. However, if we consider change over each ten year period, it readily becomes apparent that articles dealing with Asia, Oceania and other developing countries have been increasing. In addition, the number of articles dealing with single countries seldom written about in the past has been increasing rapidly.

As seen in Figure I, among 504 articles, 86 (approximately 17.1%) are found to be based on original data and information collected and formed using various techniques in authors' respective fields. This classification is based on a full reading of all 504 articles. These 86 articles are distinguished by the criterion that the authors' research techniques including questionnaires, interviews, and observations in their respective fields are explicitly indicated in any part of the article. It appears that following edition No. 19 of the Journal, or since the beginning of the 1990s, research utilizing fieldwork has come to be seen with increasing regularity in JCES publications. Therefore, the period before this may be considered a 'run-up stage.' If we count the number of articles based on fieldwork in all 10 volumes of the Journal, 10 appeared in Nos.1–10, 9 in Nos.11–20, 29 in Nos. 21–30 and 38 in Nos.31–39. There is a particularly noticeable jump in the more recent 9 volumes, which were published within the last 5 years.

An article referring to fieldwork investigation appeared for the first time in the Journal in the 1976 volume (No.3). In "The Problems in Comprehensive Schools in Southeast Asia: A Thai Case," Shunichi Nishimura analyzed various problems involved in the movement toward the comprehensive school system which was a global thrust of education reform at that time. Nishimura mentioned having conducted an analysis "based on my own experience of on-the-spot inquiries."[17] While the article does not emphasize the use of fieldwork methodology per se, it nevertheless rep-

Table I Article Content in JCES journals by Country and Other Research Themes

	Target Country or Topic	No.1–10	No.11–20	No.21–30	No.31–39	Total
Single Country	Japan	18	14	8	4	44
	U. S.	20	22	12	8	62
	U. K.	11	11	10	3	35
	Germany	5	7	11	6	29
	France	4	9	4	2	19
	Russia (U. S. S. R)	5	4	3	1	13
	Sweden	4	3	0	3	10
	Canada	1	3	1	1	6
	China	1	7	11	7	26
	Korea	5	3	2	4	14
	Thailand	1	5	6	5	17
	India	1	2	3	2	8
	Indonesia	0	4	5	0	9
	Malaysia	0	5	3	0	8
	Philippines	1	1	2	1	5
	Australia	1	4	7	3	15
	New Zealand	0	1	1	2	4
	Others (single country)*	0	6	11	16	33
	Subtotal	78	111	100	68	357
Region/ Multiple Countries	Southeast Asia	1	1	0	2	4
	Asia	2	0	1	0	3
	Central & South America	0	1	1	1	3
	Comparison (multiple countries)	15	7	7	12	41
	Africa	0	0	0	2	2
	Subtotal	18	9	9	17	53
Other Topic	International Organization**	10	1	3	2	16
	Theory/Methodology	33	25	17	3	78
	Subtotal	44	26	20	5	95
	Total	139	146	129	90	504

Note: * Other single countries include Mexico, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Poland, Syria, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Chile, Kenya, Afghanistan, Turkey, Belgium, Tanzania, Greece and Taiwan.
** International organizations include the World Bank, UNESCO, OECD, EC and EU.

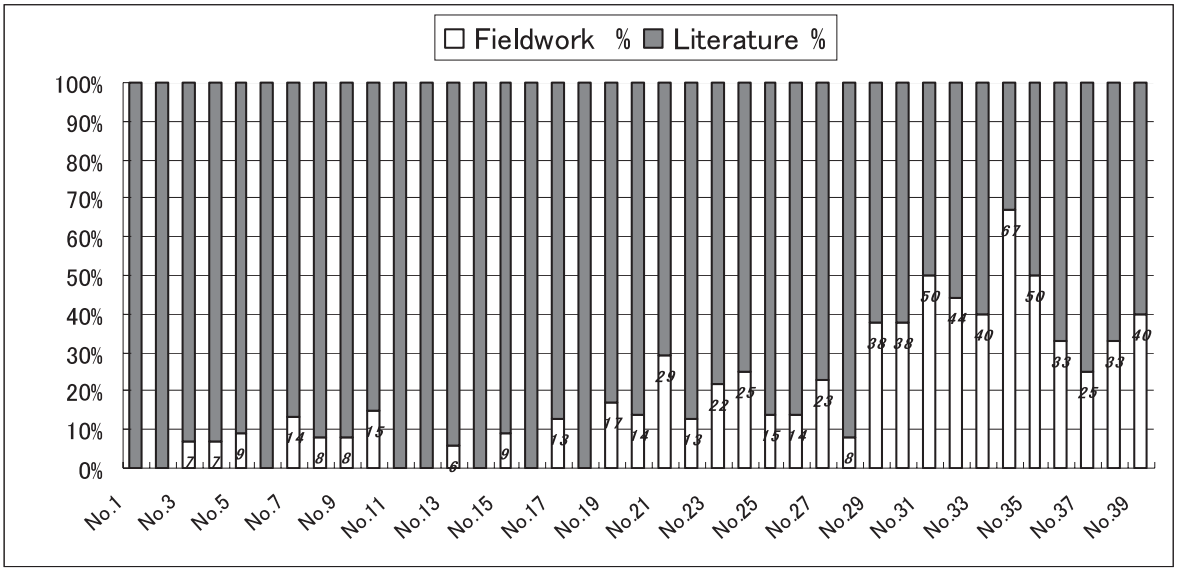

Figure I Research Method used in JCES Journal Articles (Percentage)

resents a significant contribution in being the earliest Society publication to report on findings based on this approach. This is especially true if we consider the difficulty in traveling to a foreign country to obtain detailed firsthand information in those days.

In addition, we can find five follow-up articles in this particular volume of the Journal that followed the previous volume focusing on 'Comparative Studies of Educational Research Systems in Various Countries.' This study was being systematically conducted as a common research project by JCES members at that time. Although these articles are written based mostly on information quoted from official documents, books and research articles published in the countries concerned, there is an explanation in Taneo Harada's article, "General View" that "for obtaining scarce (information) or verifying questionable facts, ... a very practical method is to delegate investigative responsibilities to those Society members currently visiting or living in the country in question, and to supplement and collect the information they provide."[18]

Among the previously mentioned 86 articles published by the Journal for which the authors collected data through fieldwork (see Table II), only 20 (23.3%) were on Western advanced countries, whereas the overwhelming majority, 65 articles (75.6%) were concerned with non-Western areas, especially those located in Asia.[19] In addition to these, although not clearly mentioned in the articles themselves, Masahiro Tejima's "The Introduction of Islamic Values into Environmental Education in Malaysia" [20] and Hirotaka Nanbu's "The Process of Preparing Higher Education Faculty in China" [21] implicitly included the contents of interviews with persons concerned in those

Table II Countries and/or Areas Studied Using Fieldwork

Bulletin No. / Country/region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	Total
Thailand			1	1*	1												1		1	1	1	1				1				1	2			1	1				1	15
Korea							1	1		1																					1				1			1		6
Philippines															1						1												1							3
Malaysia																	1		1										1											3
Singapore																			1																					1
China																				1			1	1	1				1		1			1			1		8
Indonesia																					2	1	1												1					5
India																								1			1												2	4
Vietnam																								1																1
Butan/Burunei																										1														1
Myanmer																													1										1
Bangladesh																													1										1
Afganistan																															1								1
Nepal																												1				1							2
Cambodia																																			1				1
Taiwan																																						1	1
Southeast Asia																																				1			1
Syria/Lebanon																									1														1
Lebanon																																	1						1
Latin America																															1								1
Tanzania																											1						1						2
Kenya																													1										1
New Zealand																																		1			1		2
Australia																													1										1
Uzbekistan																																			1				1
Russia(USSR)																																	1						1
United States					1		1			1																	1		1	1				2		1				9
Germany									1																							1		1			1	1		5
Canada													1																											1
United Kingdom																													1										1
Belgium/Holland																																1**			1				2
Sweden																																		1					1
Global																															1***								1
	0	0	1	1	2	0	2	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	3	2	4	2	2	3	2	2	3	1	5	5	6	4	4	6	5	3	3	3	4	86

Note: * Fieldwork was conducted in Thailand and partly in Malaysia.
** Fieldwork was conducted in Belgium and Holland.
*** Countries studied include the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands, Denmark, United Kingdom and Korea.

countries. Koro Suzuki's "Islamic Education in Public Primary and Secondary Schools in Southern Thailand" [22] was also based on reports of local education administration offices in Southern Thailand, which are not easily accessible in Japan, and seem to have been collected on the spot. However, these articles were not counted as having been the result of fieldwork-based research.

While studies of advanced countries in the West account for a majority of all articles published by the Journal as mentioned in Table I, those utilizing various fieldwork techniques remain limited at 20. How might this fact be interpreted? For researchers who are involved in the study of the Western world, is it sufficient merely to rely on a wealth of existing data in order to form and meaningfully test a hypothesis? Unfortunately, in my opinion, there seems to be an overwhelming reliance on existing research results produced in advanced Western countries, based perhaps on a 'servile spirit' (subordinate consciousness) of sorts on the part of Japanese researchers in terms of research. In the light of this possibility, above-mentioned Masaharu Amano's assertion seems to exhibit more luster.

3 Re-examining "Fieldwork"

Although there appear to be relatively more articles reporting findings based on 'fieldwork' undertaken in Asian countries, whether researchers' practices in the field are in fact worthy of the term should also be strictly examined from the following viewpoints.

First of all, fieldwork becomes self-contained only after appropriate activity is made in each phase of the process, i.e.: (1) before going into the field, (2) in the field, and (3) after returning from the field. Although the amount of data and information and the ease of access to these have increased enormously in the present global and Internet age, are we able to fully digest the data and information which are available before going to the actual site? In recent years, while some vital details remain difficult to obtain, much information may be obtained instantly by connecting to the World Wide Web from any access point around the globe.[23]

Second, the methodological processes that distinguish 'fieldwork' from other approaches must be revisited. As indicated in Table III, in earlier days an overwhelming majority of the fieldwork by Society members was based on questionnaire surveys, with only a few studies using additional interviews and observations. The situation gradually changed as studies based on interviews increased. When we examine the methods utilized by the 86 fieldwork-based studies, interviews, questionnaires and observations account for 49, 29 and 11 projects respectively, although some researchers combined these methods and therefore the total exceeds 86 studies.

Regardless of the methods used, how can we ensure representativeness and typicality of place, institution or respondent? Local research areas in which means of transportation are difficult to secure require an abundance of energy and self-initiative. Nevertheless, the research rationale must be assessed rigorously; even if a study is worthy of a prize for effort, it may not be very useful in terms of building new theories, providing new knowledge, or contributing otherwise to the field of comparative education.

Moreover, in a humanistic educational science which has as its core purpose the understanding of human being, face-to-face communication, direct dialog and personal contextual experience are undeniably the most effective research methods. While questionnaire surveys are practical alternatives to meeting with respondents personally, comparative educationalists are obliged to strive to discern the 'heart of the matter' through personal engagement and involvement. It is the *field*

Table III Method and Extent of Fieldwork (arranged by published sequence)

Bulletin No.	Article No.	Method of Investigation	Unit or Target of Analysis	Country/Region
3	1	fact-finding	not clear	Thailand
4	1	questionnaire/interview	6 villages	Thailand/Malaysia
5	1	questionnaire	college students	Thailand
	2	fact-finding	13 schools of selected states	United States
7	1	questionnaire	a few cities	Korea
	2	questionnaire	13 high schools of one state	United States
8	1	questionnaire	selected cities	Korea
9	1	fact-finding	selected schools	United States
10	1	questionnaire	selected cities	Korea
	2	questionnaire	3 schools	United States
13	1	fact-finding	one city	Canada
15	1	observation	one community	Philippines
17	1	questionnaire	20 villages of 8 counties	Thailand
	2	interview	3 schools	Malaysia
19	1	interview/observation	one village	Thailand
	2	questionnaire	one university	Malaysia
	3	questionnaire	3 schools	Singapore
20	1	interview	3 counties in one province	Thailand
	2	fact-finding	selected universities	China
21	1	questionnaire	college students at one univesity	Thailand
	2	fact-finding	one village high school	Philippines
	3	interview	adminstrators in 3 provinces	Indonesia
	4	observation	one school	Indonesia
22	1	questionnaire	11 schools	Thailand
	2	interview/observation	one village	Indonesia
23	1	interview	2 cities	China
	2	observation	classroom of a school	Indonesia
24	1	questionnaire	4 counties	China
	2	interview/observation/questionnaire	one state	India
	3	interview	selected institutions	Vietnam
25	1	interview	one university	China
	2	fact-finding	not clear	Syria/Lebanon
26	1	questionnaire/interview	one county	Thailand
	2	fact-finding	not clear	Brunei/Bhutan
27	1	questionnaire	2 states	India
	2	interview	one district	Tanzania
	3	questionnaire	one school district	United States
28	1	questionnaire	3 districts	Nepal
29	1	questionnaire	selected schools in one state	Malaysia
	2	questionnaire	2 colleges and 11 schools	Myanmar
	3	interview	4 villages	Bangladesh
	4	interview/observation	2 schools in one state	United States
	5	questionnaire	4 schools in one city	United Kingdom
30	1	fact-finding	3 schools in 3 areas	Thailand
	2	interview	7 schools in one city	China
	3	interview	2 schools in one county	Kenya
	4	interview	one school and one council	Australia
	5	interview	selected schools in 3 states	United States
31	1	interview	2 administrative offices	Thailand
	2	interview/observation	one school	Thailand
	3	interview	one research institute	Korea
	4	fact-finding	one city	Afganistan
	5	interview	selected persons	Latin America
	6	interview	8 countries	8 countries
32	1	interview	selected institutions	China
	2	questionnaire	27 schools in 6 counties	Nepal
	3	interview	one school	Germany
	4	interview	13 schools	Holland/Belgium
33	1	interview/observation	selected schools in 2 areas	Philippines
	2	interview/observation	selected schools	Lebanon
	3	interview	one school	Tanzania
	4	interview	one administrative offices	Russia
34	1	interview	Minsitry of Education	Thailand
	2	interview	selected persons	New Zealand
	3	questionnaire	teacher training colleges	United States
	4	fact-finding	selected institutions in 2 states	United States
	5	interview	one scholar	Germany
	6	interview	selected persons	Sweden
35	1	questionnaire	one county	Thailand
	2	interview	selected persons at one university	Korea
	3	fact-finding	selected institutions	China
	4	interview	selected schools	Uzbekistan
	5	interview	10 schools in 2 cities	Holland
36	1	questionnaire/observation	3 cities	Indonesia
	2	interview	one school	Cambodia
	3	questionnaire/interview	13 college students	United States
37	1	interview	selected institutions	Southeast Asia
	2	interview	selected persons	New Zealand
	3	interview	one institution	Germany
38	1	interview	selected persons	Korea
	2	interview/observation	one village	China
	3	questionnaire/interview	selected persons	Germany
39	1	interview	selected schools	Taiwan
	2	interview/questionnaire	10 villages in 2 states	India
	3	interview	selected schools and persons in one city	India
	4	questionnaire/interview	selected schools in 2 counties	Thailand

that requires observation in order to obtain results which cannot be gained through considerations of literature alone. The field creates an image which can neither be trivialized nor exaggerated. Ethnographic investigation centering on long-term participant observation in the field is often considered antithetical to questionnaire survey. Of course, the former is only one survey method, as are intensive interviews, scholastic aptitude and psychological tests, the collection and scrutiny of literature as well as statistical data and other materials. The importance of 'watching and listening' cannot be denied, however the danger of *having no choice* but to devote one's time to 'watching and listening' should not be forgotten. Ethnographic investigation is a proven method of recording observations of educational activity, which are very individualized.

In this respect, studies based on 'participant observation' that have been conducted by members of the Society should be open for discussion about whether researchers have indeed followed appropriate methodological rigors to justify this claim. After having analyzed the studies by our Society members, what can be said at present is that we will likely have to wait until more quality monographs and articles have been accumulated in order for this method to take root in our field. A distinctive methodology of fieldwork cannot be established until such individual studies accumulate and achievements which cannot be reduced to any existing discipline are established.

It is not always the case that the length of stay in any given fieldwork context translates as 'the longer the better.' It is likely that short-term results from a novice researcher who is unfamiliar with the area concerned may not be as valuable as those of a specialist who has been committed to researching and living in an area for a long period of time. Three outstanding studies[24] conducted by Society members are particularly noteworthy, in that they reflect dedication to the field and involve participant observation as a main research technique. These studies demonstrate an attempt to grasp the changes in a village or educational institution not with a shortsighted or hasty attitude but from a long-term perspective.

There has been much concern in recent years that our increasingly global, achievement-oriented academic climate results in pressure to complete studies more quickly. In such circumstances, an environment is being established in which long and enduring field surveys with close linkages to investigation target sites, as expressed by the phrase 'one person in one village for one year' in cultural anthropology, will be difficult to realize in our discipline in coming years. Hopefully this concern will prove unfounded.

Third, regardless of whether a study is conducted on an individual or collaborative basis, human relations involved must be reexamined. Fieldwork performed by an individual researcher should be strongly encouraged when there appears to be a certain field or theme of study that an individual can pursue. Of course, a major premise of individual fieldwork is that what an individual can and should do must be performed alone. In this respect, it is sometimes seen that an individual who is involved in a country's development in a professional capacity (hereafter referred as 'development practitioner') mobilizes local consultants and specialists to collect related data and information and utilizes results in creating a report. In order to quickly grasp the complicated social relations in an area and accurately reflect results in a publicized project, various know-how and techniques using mainly qualitative methods to complete an investigation in a short period of time must be worked out thoroughly in advance. However, 'problem-finding type' investigations often adopted by researchers deeply involved in a local area generally do not easily fit within the time-frame of development practitioners. Are not comparative education researchers engaged in a task similar to that of the practitioners? To rephrase this question, does the successful collection of data negate any need to question the process? Indeed, it would also appear necessary to consider the

internal changes and mental development of the researcher.

There are many circumstances in fieldwork whereby two or more researchers, including the researcher of the area concerned, are necessarily involved. It is certain that an investigation conducted by one person has an advantage in terms of simplicity and rapport with those surveyed with the provision that it is carried out well. While it is often said that 'two heads are better than one,' conducting fieldwork investigation on an individual basis can have considerable advantages over collective efforts. However, in terms of reliability and verifiability of survey results and falsifiability in reverse, a group investigation is more effective than an individual investigation.

To examine more concretely the relation between individual and group investigation, we can consider the use of language. With respect to survey language, it is a minimum requirement for a person entering into the field to have a thorough knowledge of the language used in that field. It is inexcusable for a professional researcher who emphasizes fieldwork to intend to complete an investigation only in Japanese or English in an area where a third language is used in common discourse. However, to acquire sufficient proficiency in a foreign language to enable one to conduct research in that language involves no small amount of time, energy and dedication. Moreover, it is very difficult, though not necessarily impossible, to take up a theme that is related to multilanguage issues in an area consisting of multiple races and many languages, and to navigate languages other than the national language or a dominant language. It is not rare that multiple linguistic interpretations intervene between the researcher and those surveyed. Investigation may furthermore be carried out in collaboration with a researcher of the area concerned who is not simply a linguistic translator. In such a case, it becomes key to the success or failure of a whole investigation whether long-lasting relationships can be built between researchers in the field concerned. Such researchers, would hold the consciousness of being 'partners' in the literal sense, rather than utilizing local 'auxiliary persons' in capacities such as translator.

Generally speaking, there are a host of potential sources of complications hindering successful engagement in fieldwork. With respect to cooperation with the local persons concerned, as a foreigner a Japanese comparative education researcher cannot always enjoy free choice in the selection of fieldwork locations and institutions in every country. There often exist barriers for which individual researchers can do nothing about, as experienced particularly in socialist countries.[25] Another frequent problem involves perceptions of success: If a researcher gains the impression that his or her fieldwork in a foreign country has progressed smoothly, it is tempting to believe that the preliminary target level may have been too low, or that some unforeseeable force was at work behind the scenes. What we can do is to use our brains to get the most out of given conditions. Collaboration between Japanese comparative education researchers and those in the field concerned is indispensable from this viewpoint. It can be stated with conviction that first of all, good human relationships built up over a long period of time determine the success or failure of much fieldwork.

4 The Field as 'Method'

For the purpose of promoting active research in comparative education by Japanese scholars, Toru Umakoshi pointed out that more 'area studies' should first of all be conducted. He also proposed a concrete path (a reciprocating movement of 'area studies' and 'theorization') towards correcting existing theories rooted in each discipline.[26] When we confront various educational phe-

nomena seen in each field by using existing disciplines and theories, we must recognize that most of these disciplines and theories have been created in the West. Edward Said's assertion that "Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"[27] is in fact a reflection of Western ethnocentrism. His view is nevertheless extremely important for studies which consider non-Western areas as the field within comparative education research. Furthermore, Japanese scholars receive the benefit of using existing disciplines and theories as research tools in the process of academic training, regardless of whether we have internalized or merely superficially accepted them. Therefore, the suggestion by Yasushi Maehira that 'reverse ethnocentrism'[28] medially-located among Japanese scholars should be regarded is an important concept.

There has been numerous debate over the years as to whether or not area studies can be considered an independent discipline by itself. It is not my wish here to side definitely in favor of one view or the other. However whether we should place more emphasis on the 'field' or on 'existing theories' does seem to present a profound issue. What any approach must reflect is the understanding of the field not as a place for 'sample' extraction in order to verify or refute existing theories. This trivialized way of thinking will not lead to the development of an original theory peculiar to the field that begins with some holistic perception. This author believes that it is time to discard any attachment to the weak eclecticism of all-encompassing approaches, to dare to turn down the ambiguity of exploring the modifiability of the existing theories, just to thoroughly perceive what the field suggests without interposing any preconception. This viewpoint is also related to differences in whether the same 'study on Thai education', for example, can be viewed as a branch of 'Thai study', or as a branch of 'education study'. The "field" itself expresses totality, and it involves something completely different from segmentalized themes such as 'basic education curriculum of country A,' and 'decentralization of the educational administration of country B'. Therefore, let us suppose that a specified theme is apparently dealt with in several studies; the boundary line which speaks to the genuine value of those studies is whether the theme is selected independently by chance, or is based on full consideration and discernment backed by overall deep understanding of the field accumulated over a long period of time.

Regarding the unit of analysis or investigation target, as shown in Table III, a variety of units are analyzed in field-based studies, from cross-national perspectives of eight countries, to one specific classroom and even to an individual scholar[29]. There seems to be a general tendency in fieldwork where researchers focus on small unit such as a village or a school. In any case, in comparison with researchers who do not enter the field, those who do are distanced from their own culture, and much more frequently encounter situations where they cannot avoid reviewing their own cultures more objectively. Criticism that there is "no comparison"[30] in research results by JCES members often proves justified and must be accepted with sincerity. Nevertheless, the researcher who is deeply committed to the field is always personally engaged in 'comparison,' and is continuously pressed to make value judgments from a comparative viewpoint in the process of investigation and reporting.

This is the meaning of '*the field as method*,' which helps to contribute to character-building on the part of the researcher. In such daily, repeated 'comparison,' it is ideal for Japanese researchers not only to put a pivoting foot of comparison on our own cultural setting, but hopefully to seek out more perspectives and consider things from different angles. It is not sufficient only to consider various phenomena occurring in the field with the inborn views and ways of thinking as Japanese. Junzo Kawada called this concept 'triangulation'[31]; Kazuko Tsurumi showed the

same recognition in her works on Pearl Buck and John Dewey.[32] It is possible to consider more objectively and essentially the phenomenon seen in the field not by a simple comparison between two things, but by adding more perspectives and analyzing within a somewhat more complicated framework. On this point, Chie Nakane once pointed out the importance of having interest and practical knowledge in more than two research areas, such as 'major' and 'minor' fields. She stated that those geographical areas should be somewhere other than within the society in which the researcher was born and raised, reasoning that "if we choose the area in which we were born and raised, our observation will be inevitably less rigorous in method."[33] In general, in acquiring knowledge of a certain field, if we cling only to the field, we may not be able to have a very broad and deep understanding of it. However, unfortunately we can find few works in the JCES Journal that were written from a triangulated or multifaceted standpoint.

Thus, although the field may be is likened to 'a treasure mountain', neither is the mountain easily climbed nor can the treasures be found merely lying around. Even if physical and objective conditions are all provided for, not everyone is necessarily able to capitalize upon them. Only those standing in the field who have "a direct sensitivity to the material before them, and then a continual self-examination of their methodology and practice, a constant attempt to keep their work responsive to the material and not to a doctrinal preconception",[34] are successful in finding their treasures. Ultimately, the ideal fieldwork technique can be created only by researchers who continuously refine themselves in the field. In this way, an original theory, not to mention a new discipline, will be produced through persistent and close dialog with data and information[35] obtained and accumulated in the field; 'an original theory' in this case includes not only drawing conclusions from case studies, but also typifying the results obtained from two or more case studies and further interrelating them on a more advanced, abstract level. Some kind of 'synthesis' process is required, and eventually an achievement that is non-reducible to any existing discipline should be the end result. There is little value in studies on a foreign country or comparative studies which merely reuse and rearrange original research results.

Another point to be considered regarding fieldwork, as indicated in the title of the present paper, is the field as an educational material or learning resource; i.e., a survey in certain field adopted as part of course work for students majoring in comparative education. In some Japanese universities[36] the requirement of overseas fieldwork has been already adopted as part of the curriculum. The crucial problem of such overseas fieldwork, as I have discussed in detail elsewhere[37], include the scarcity of student involvement in the planning stages and the possibility that research will devolve into a 'quasi-survey'. As already stated, when the composition of fieldwork is considered, the success or failure of the whole study depends on precedent survey design or selection of sites, institutions, informants or interviewees. Therefore, survey design should be completed prior to actually doing observation and data collection in the field, which forms the middle phase of the survey (the final stage being reporting). In overseas fieldwork for the training of students, the extent to which students take part in this important process is, regretfully, extremely limited or almost nil.

5 Conclusion

More and more fieldwork-based studies have been appearing in the JCES journal with each new edition. The initial 10 volumes since its inauguration contain 10 articles based on fieldwork

and the next 10 volumes contain 9 articles. In the third decade, 29 articles based on fieldwork appeared, and 38 articles within the latest 5 years (owing largely to the decision in 2006 to publish two editions per year). Not only has the rate of increase been accelerated, but also the quality of the fieldwork seems to have been improving gradually. Countries and areas to be the object of investigation have been diversifying. Focusing on the most recent 9 volumes (Nos. 31–39), only 3 out of 38 articles depend solely on questionnaire survey which had been the typical technique used in fieldwork in previous years. Five articles utilize observation, although the length of time in the field varies from article to article. The remaining 31articles utilize the interview method, of which 6 articles are based on composite methods of interview and questionnaire or observation. A particularly noteworthy phenomenon is that studies centering on Western advanced countries are also adopting fieldwork as their research method. The younger generations involved with those countries are trying to positively form their own data and information, as was the case for studies on developing countries, instead of 'borrowing' or 'consuming' ready-made research results. These recent academic trends may indicate that studies in comparative education in Japan are finally coming into their own: what was long considered a 'peripheral' or 'consumer' position in academia is now being replaced with true hope for making original and active contributions to research in the field.[38]

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Notes

1 Typical works on Fieldwork are as follows; Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss, *Field Research: Strategies for Natural Sociology*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973. Roger Sanjek ed., *Fieldnotes: A Making of Anthropology*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornel University Press, 1990. Ikuya Sato, *Fieldwork*, Tokyo: Shinyosha, 1992. Robert Emerson, Rachel Frez and Linda Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. John Lofland and Lyn Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995.

2 1,003 members belong to JCES as of June 2009 and it is one of the largest educational societies except for the Japanese Educational Research Association, the comprehensive learned society of education in this country.

3 The Society organized four preparatory annual conferences prior to its formal inauguration in 1965. Since this time, the name and style of the Society's journal has changed a few times; i.e., *Hikaku Kyoiku Gakkai Kiyo* (Bulletin of the Japan Comparative Education Society) of the inaugural issue in 1975, *Hikaku Kyoikugaku* (Comparative Education) of No. 14 in 1988, and *Hikaku Kyoikugaku Kenkyu* (Studies in Comparative Education) in 1990. It was published once a year from its inauguration until the 2005 issue, following which the Society decided to publish the journal twice a year from No. 32 in 2006. Thirty nine issues have been published as of 2009. In this article, *Bulletin of JCES* is used in the references as representing these three different names.

4 Tsuneo Ayabe, "Methodological Problems in Comparative Education in Japan: Anthropological approach" *Bulletin of JCES*, No.1, 1975, p.27. [in Japanese]

5 *Loc. cit.*

6 Masaharu Amano, "*The Area Study in the Field of Comparative Education in Japan; The Example of Studying German Education*" *Bulletin of JCES*, No.1, 1975, p.39. [in Japanese]

7 Michiya Shimbori, "Methodological Problems in Comparative Education in Japan: Sociological approach", *Bulletin of JCES*, No.1, 1975, p.18. [in Japanese]

8 *Loc. cit.*

9 Minoru Ishizuki, "Role of Comparative and International Education in Educational Research" *Bulletin of JCES,* No.25, 1999, p.19. [in Japanese]

10 *Ibid.* p.20. [in Japanese]

11 Shinichi Suzuki, "Problems and Future Perspectives of Comparative Education Societies", *ibid*, p.42. [in Japanese]
12 Akira Ninomiya, "Research Infrastructure of Comparative Education", *ibid*, pp.47–48. [in Japanese]
13 Takeshi Sasamori, "Comparative Education and Area Studies (2): The case of Oceania", *Ibid*, p.66. [in Japanese]
14 Yokuo Murata and Megumi Shibuya, "Comparative Education and Area Studies; The case of Southeast Asian countries" *Bulletin of JCES,* No. 25, 1999, p.58. [in Japanese]
15 Ibid. The result of present author's analysis shown in Table III is slightly different from Murata and Shibuya's. These authors mentioned numbers of articles in question but did not specify detailed contents.
16 Among the published articles, memorial addresses for the deceased, annotated bibliography, moderators' brief summaries of symposium, special sessions and roundtables are excluded from analysis.
17 Shunichi Nishimura, "Problems of Comprehensive Schools in Southeast Asia" *Bulletin of JCES*, No.3, 1977, p.74. [in Japanese]
18 Taneo Harada, "General View", *Bulletin of JCES*, No.3, 1977, p.1. [in Japanese]
19 The remaining article concerns eight countries, including the United States and others in Europe, Oceania and Asia (Yoshiyuki Nagata, "An International Comparative Study of Alternative Schools and Educational Administration", *Bulletin of JCES*, No.31, 2005, po.156–176. [in Japanese]).
20 Masahiro Tejima, "The Introduction of Islamic Values into Environmental Education in Malaysia", *Bulletin of JCES,* No.25, 1999, po.116–134. [in Japanese]
21 Hirotaka Nanbu, "The Process of Preparing Higher Education Faculty in China", *Ibid*. pp.135–150. [in Japanese]
22 Koro Suzuki, "Islamic Education in Public Primary and Secondary Schools in Southern Thailand", *Ibid*. pp.97–115. [in Japanese]
23 Considering the case of China, the present author's research area, the situation existed until approximately 15 years ago whereby sources of obtainable information were limited to general newspapers and magazines such as the *People's Daily, Guangming Daily*, the *Red Flag*, as well as a limited number of education-related books and magazines. Nowadays, although the objectivity and validity of reporting may remain questionable, voluminous books and magazines exclusively on educational-related topics are being published in China. No longer are visits to the Ministry of Education in Beijing necessary to obtain the most basic data such as school or enrolled student numbers.
24 In fact, there are studies which deserve close attention among those utilizing ethnographic methods by our members. Mina Hattori's article based on participant observation and interviews during her two-and-a-half year stay in Diniyyah Puteri, a women's Islamic school in Padang Panjang of West Sumatra, was bestowed the Hiratsuka Award which was established in 1990 to commemorate the first president of JCES, Dr. Masunori Hiratsuka, as well as to encourage and reward young scholars' research achievement. Takashi Nozu has entered Yasothon County in northeastern Thailand intermittently since 1996 and continues to observe school culture. Another example is the study by Shigeo Nishimura, which compared and contrasted the changes in education in Nappon, a small village in north Sumatra, from the early 1970s to the present.
25 Taking China as an example, even if the desired site of fieldwork has been decided upon, it is impossible to unilaterally specify the area below the county (xian) level according to investigation design.
26 Toru Umakoshi, *Hikaku Kyouikugaku* (Comparative Education), Tokyo: Toshindo, 2007, p.59. He seemed to use the term 'area studies' not as a discipline but as a synonym for 'fieldwork'.
27 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p.3.
28 Yasushi Maehira, "Interpretation" in Le Thanh Khoi, *Comparative Education* (translated by Y. Maehira et. al.), Kyoto: Korosha, 1991, p.421. [in Japanese]
29 The article in question analyzes the changes that happened after the unification of two Germanies through the life-history of an educator, Dr. Wendelin Szalai of former East Germany (Emi Kinoshita, "Tenkanki no Rekishi Kyoiku to Yoriyoi Shakai no Kikyu (History Education in Times of Social Changes and the Desire to Build a Better Society)", *Bulletin of JCES,* No.34, 2007, pp.3–19. [in Japanese]
30 Shogo Ichikawa, "Hikaku Kyoikugaku Saiko" (Reconsidering the Comparative Education) , *Bulletin of JCES,* No.16, 1990, pp.5–17. [in Japanese]
31 Mineo Nakajima and Chalmers Johnson eds. *Chiiki Kenkyu no Genzai (Area Studies and the Social Sciences)* Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten, 1989, p.170. [in Japanese]
32 Kazuko Tsurumi, "Pearl Buck wo naze kakuka (Why I write about Pearl Buck)" and "Dewey to Nippon (Dewey and Japan)"*Collection: Tsurumi Kazuko Mandara* (Collection of Kazuko Tsurumi's Works like Mandela), Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 1997, pp.129–149 and pp.103–119. [in Japanese]
33 Mineo Nakajima and Chalmers Johnson eds. *Ibid*, p.311. [in Japanese]
34 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p.327.
35 As for the process of making continuous interaction with data and information and generating a theory, Glaser and Strauss's book (Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968) is suggestive.
36 For example, the Faculties of Education at the University of Tsukuba and at Nagoya University, as well as the Graduate School of International Development of Nagoya University have been actively implementing overseas field-

work for students.

37 Yutaka Otsuka, "Kaigai Jicchi Kenshu no Mokuhyou Settei to Kokateki Jisshi Hoho nitsuite" (Overseas Fieldwork and its Effective Pracitices) Hiroshi Osada ed. *Kokusai Kaihatsu Kyoryoku Jinzai Ikusei no tameno Kaigai Jicchi Kenshu Shuho no Kaihatsu (Development of A Method of Overseas Fieldwork to Train the Manpower of International Development and Cooperation*) Graduate School of International Development, Nagoya University, 2004, pp.1–14. [in Japanese]

38 Altbach defined the Third world countries and their universities as 'periphery' and 'consumers of knowledge', thereby contrasting the 'centers' and 'producers' in the industrialized countries (Philip G. Altbach, "The Universities as Center and Periphery" translated in as Chapter 2 in Toru Umakoshi ed. *Hikaku Koto Kyoikuron (Comparative Higher Education),* Tokyo: Tamagawa University Press, 1994, pp.106–135.