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## **Ministerial Co-operation on Education Policy Making in Contemporary Japan — A Case of Career Education**

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### **Background**

For a long time since the end of the Second World War, Japanese administrative structure had been presenting "solid bureaucratic sectionalism" as its main characteristic. Educational administrative structure also had this character — Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and its successor (since the year 2001) Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology exclusively made education policies.

However, recent administrative reform has caused several changes. For example, some local governments could make original policies as a result of decentralisation, and deregulation enabled the private sector to supply some services which the public sector exclusively supplied before. Furthermore, it is often said that the relation between ministries have also changed by way of the reform and various ministries co-operate in the process of education policy making. However, the detail has not explored yet.

So, this paper attempts to explicate the ministerial co-operation on education policy making in contemporary Japan by focusing on career education policy - a policy designed to enable every student from primary to higher education level to cultivate their own sense of occupation and labour. This study can be applicable in other national contexts.

### **Research Questions**

This paper attempts to explain the way the ministerial co-operation came into being and works. Concretely speaking, this paper looks at a policy document called 'Plan for Young People's Independence and Challenge', which constitutes the main part of the contemporary career education policy in Japan. It also pays attention to the work of the council established in the Cabinet Office to work out the plan. By doing so, this paper explores the mode of co-operation between Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology(MEXT), Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare(MHLW) and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry(METI).

The research questions are below:

1. At which stage did these ministries start to co-operate? Did they start to co-operate before the council meetings began, during the council meetings, or at the stage of implementing the particular policy? Did they co-operate in order to make the policy more relevant or its implementation more manageable?
2. What kind of relationship did they establish? Did one ministry take a superior position vis-a-vis others or did three ministries stand on equal footing?
3. What was the engine of making such co-operation? The setting up of a multi-ministerial council does not always lead to the ministerial co-operation. In Japan, it is often the case that ministries make their own policies and then patch them up to give an impression of coherence. However, the council and the policy in question were not the case. This paper attempts to show the engine which combined these three ministries.

### **Methods**

This research mainly adopts a qualitative method. Specifically, because the minute books of the multi-ministerial council meetings are not available, this paper attempts to describe the way the council worked mainly by examining its output — the policy document. In addition, this paper looks at the way each ministry worked by investigating the records of its own workshops and council meetings. Moreover, by interviewing government officials who were engaged in the process of the policy making, this paper attempts to present the findings that we cannot obtain from the available documentary records.

## Frame

This paper adopts *the theory of co-ordination between ministries* as an analytical frame. This theory shows the process of building ministerial co-operation, and this is divided into *co-ordination between two ministries* and *integrated co-ordination* - the co-ordination between three or more ministries. It analyzes the process of building co-operation by focusing on what ties one ministry to others. Some institutions, for example the Cabinet Secretariat, have an institutional function to co-ordinate, but often the co-ordination works in an informal way. Then, it can be difficult to explicate the total picture of this co-ordination.

In this case, MEXT, MHLW and METI co-operated. Therefore, the co-ordination was *integrated co-ordination*. Generally speaking, when the *integrated co-ordination* works, a certain superior institution, for example the Cabinet Secretariat or the government party, is playing the role of a coordinator. However, with regard to the career education policy in contemporary Japan, such a superior institution did not exist. The council established in the Cabinet Office provided the arena of *integrated co-ordination* between these three ministries, but the council did not lead the co-ordination. So a question arises — what actually helped to co-operate these three ministries? By focusing on this point, this paper will not only examines the process of co-operating ministries in detail but also deepen *the theory of co-ordination between ministries*.

## Research findings

With regard to this *integrated co-ordination* process, the engine of ministerial co-operation was the public opinion. In other words, the public opinion helped to cause the *integrated co-ordination* and ministerial co-operation even though no superior institution existed.

And, this research found the fact that other ministries than MEXT came to make educational policies where MEXT had the prerogative before. This means that other ministries than MEXT also administrate education, and the co-ordination between ministries means the process of reforming the administrative structure on a governmental action level. So the process of causing co-operation between ministries, which this paper considers by focusing on the career education policy, means the change of the ministries which are in charge of education policy. This finding can offer a viewpoint on thinking about the reform of the administrative structure, not only in education but also other fields, and not only in Japan but also in other nations.