

Lifelong learning and adult education in Japan

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The purposes and implementation of adults' lifelong education (LLE) has been shaped by two imperatives: i) neoliberal reforms and ii) focuses on employability and economic outcomes. This has led to LLE taking similar pathways across many countries, i.e., away from a focus on personal and cultural betterment, to one associated with promoting individual employability. However, policies and practices in Japan offers a nuanced contrast to the general trend. That is, the overall focus on LLE, particularly for older Japanese is premised on social engagement, personal enrichment and often captured in 'social education'. There is also a focus on sustaining the adult employability, including the re-employment of retirees, in structured ways and tailored to meet their needs and enacted at the local level. This paper reviews the manifestations of LLE in Japan to examine how its goals and educational provisions are being developed, enacted, engaged with and evaluated. Overall, it is suggested that Japan has not wholly embraced the tight economic focus on promoting and supporting LLE associated with employability imperatives. Perhaps through the electoral power of the aged population, the provision of educational experiences is focused on longevity, cultural betterment, further education and reducing the social isolation of older Japanese.

Keywords: *adult education, lifelong education, employability, Japan, aged population, social education*

Adult and lifelong education: policy and practice

On 1 September 2021, in launching Adult Learners' Week, the Australian Minister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business, the Hon. Stuart Robert repeatedly made frequent references to adult education primarily being directed towards the employability of working age Australians. This was no coincidence or exception to the increasingly consistent governmental imperative focusing educational effort on achieving economic goals being its primary objective. Indeed, across countries with both developed and developing modern industrial economies, the purposes and implementation of adults' lifelong education (LLE) has been increasingly shaped by two imperatives: i) neoliberal reforms and ii) focuses on employability and economic outcomes. This has led to purposes for and processes of LLE taking similar pathways across many countries. Moreover, the origins and distinctiveness of the adult education sector as being that derived from and for members of the adult community premised on their social and economic needs has been eroded as its purposes. That is, moving away from a process on personal and cultural betterment, to one associated with promoting individual employability (Billett & Dymock, 2020). Although, concerns about becoming more employable have long been a purpose of adult education, this has become the primary focus, often at a cost of other purposes. Globally, since the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996, and the subsequent two education reports commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Learning to be, known as the Faure report (1972) and Learning: The treasure within, known as the Delors report (1996), there has been a global push for adult education to be primarily aligned with promoting employability. It emphasised the need for ongoing educational engagement across individuals' working lives for them to remain currently competent and employable (Organisation of Economic and Cultural Development [OECD], 1996), and expectations that working age adults would need to actively contribute through their learning to national economic well-being and be prepared to partially

sponsor their ongoing development themselves. This emphasis is usually associated with the development of work-related or occupational specific skills to respond to changing occupational requirements and with workplace competence (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006). This imperative led to significant changes in how governments across the world came to view and fund adult education, and for what purposes (Billett 2014). This change of emphasis and the associated policy initiatives have transformed views about adults' ongoing learning and educational provisions (Edwards, 2002), and educational provisions primarily about personal enrichment and cultural betterment (Coffield, 2000). These imperatives continue to be exercised across nation states. In many countries, this change is seen its purposes shift towards an employability focus albeit including general educational outcomes associated with enhanced literacy and numeracy.

Singapore with its third most aged population globally and an economy largely based upon its citizens' skills made the ongoing work-related learning of its adult population the first priority for sustaining its economic performance (Economic Strategies Committee, 2010). This has led to a series of national initiatives and incentives promoting ongoing development. Elsewhere, countries established and/or built more systematic approaches to continuing education and training (e.g., Germany), whereas other linked educational programs with occupational and workplace innovation (e.g., Switzerland, Scandinavian countries). In the United Kingdom, for instance, centers and programs in higher education institutions offering non-credit bearing lifelong education were closed, and in Australia the adult education courses offered through the technical and further education colleges were abolished with those institutions' operational mandate to only offer programs leading directly to employable outcomes. However, there are some exceptions to this general trend, and Japan with its aged population presents different orientations to adult education and its purposes. That is, the overall focus on adults' LLE is premised on two purposes: i) social engagement, individual betterment captured by the translated term 'social education', whose titling indicates a quite specific focus and ii) sustaining the employability of older workers and re-employing retirees. Yet, in contrast to the approach adopted in Australia, its approach to both social engagement and employability of the adult population is structured in ways that are tailored to meet the needs of these citizens and organised

locally and enacted professionally. Given the aging Australian population and diversity of their educational purposes and needs the Japanese approach is worthy of review and appraisal.

To illuminate and elaborate these differences, this paper provides a scoping review of manifestations of LLE in Japan to examine how these goals and educational provisions are being enacted, engaged with and evaluated. The review includes an illustration of different LLE programs in Japan. Adults' LLE in the Japanese context in this paper refers to learning provisions tailored towards older workers and senior citizens, addressing both economic and social imperatives. Overall, it is suggested that Japan has not wholly embraced the strict economic focus of promoting and supporting learning associated with work and workplace imperatives. Perhaps by dint of the aged population's electoral power, the provision of adult educational experiences is focused on longevity, cultural betterment, further education and reducing the social isolation of older Japanese. It, thereby, emphasizes a direct social focus including accommodating, but not having an overwhelming focus on employability. This approach is particularly relevant for Australia as there is a strong community commitment to adult education that is not always well aligned with governmental mandates about employability. There are, however, real perils in copying policies and practices from other countries without understanding the cultural, social and economic contexts in which they arise and are enacted. Consequently, the discussion here commences with overviewing the Japanese context for and approach to adult education. Then, as educational purposes are central to the kinds of policies developed and practices designed and enacted, particular attention is given to those purposes. Following from these points, the organization governance of adult education is discussed in terms of achieving these outcomes and then its enactment. In conclusion, it is proposed that a broader set of educational purposes of these kinds might be considered to accommodate the interests, intentionality's and needs of the Australian adult community, achieving a balance of economic and social imperatives.

Japanese adult education context

In 2018, the ratio of older Japanese people (age 65+ years) is 27.7%, and their average life expectancy was 81.0 years for males and 87.1 years for females (Statistics Japan, 2018). This makes Japan is one of the most

aged-populated countries in the world. Since the 1960s, its national government has sought to provide learning opportunities for older adults with both educational streams and health-welfare streams. Via either stream, educational centers for senior Japanese have been the central place for providing educational opportunities for older people¹. These centers exist both in small and large communities and across prefectures throughout Japan. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, because of economic constraints, restructuring of government organizations, and/or incorporation of private sectors, these centers have been downsized or abolished or privatized. So, as with other countries there has been cutbacks with provisions of adult education. How these provisions have been positioned and exercised are indicative of specific government imperatives and community priorities, however.

The history of contemporary adult education in Japan stretches back to 1949 when the Act for Adult Education was enacted (Fuwa, 2001), aiming to contribute to the building of a democratic Japanese society and extending the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education (Gordon, 1998). The idea of *lifelong education* was not introduced in Japan until the 1970s then another ten years for the term *lifelong learning* to be officially used in the country (Ogden, 2010). The National Central Advisory Committee for Education (NCACE) released a report in 1990 suggesting to the government to establish promotional systems and administrative divisions for the development of lifelong learning throughout Japan. Shortly thereafter in 1990, Lifelong Learning Promotion Law was established. Then the national government passed the Basic Act on Measures for the Aging Society in 1995 and established the General Principles Concerning Measures for the Aged Society in 1996 and actively promoted the Act from that date. In Japan, the enactment of the Lifelong Learning Promotion Act and formation of the Council for Lifelong Learning popularized the term 'lifelong learning' to describe education for adults. Subsequently, the policy orientation of the Ministry of Education was directed toward the construction of a 'lifelong learning society' (Hori, 2010). During this process, substantial emphasis has been placed on LLE.

Education for older people in post-war Japan began with the Tokiwa Senior Citizen Club in Osaka City in 1950. Also, early on the *Rakusei Gakuen* (i.e., Rakusei Academy) was established as a seniors' college in the Nagano prefecture in 1954. Subsequently, Senior Citizen Clubs and

seniors' colleges proliferated nationwide as representative organizations for the education of older Japanese. In response to this locally based movement, the Ministry of Health and Welfare initiated support projects for senior citizen clubs and the Ministry of Education began subsidizing senior citizen classes in 1965. To address the social crisis caused by an aging population and economic collapse after 1989, the Ministry of Education modified its policy to support large-scale institutions established by prefectures under a government mandate to promote LLE using private enterprises. Although the original welfare projects for elderly Japanese were primarily intended to address the socially disadvantaged, since 2000 policy shifted toward the construction of a participatory aging society. As a result, under the label of care prevention², the groundwork for LLE that supports projects for healthy older living were established. In Japan, the term 'social education' is used, while the equivalent term in Australia, America and Europe is 'adult education' or 'continued education.' 'Social education' is a term combining 'society' with 'education'. It is now an established concept for education that is conscious of society, aimed at society, and involved in society (Matsuda, 2014, p. 23). So, this presents a distinct view from education tightly focused on employability as is the case in many other countries.

The community-based governance is viewed to protect citizens' quality of life during in the harsh living environment, while Japanese society suffers from prolonged economic depression and an aging population combined with a low birth rate (Lee, 2019). In the 1970s, LLE was adopted as a political concept to garner popular support. However, now, rationalization and self-governed administrative and financial reforms were implemented in line with the neoliberal structural reforms. While Japanese society is facing the issues of an aging population combined with a low birth rate, drastic depopulation, and prolonged financial deficit, self-governed reforms and privatization are occurring. Under these circumstances, diverse actors including local governments, citizens, and non-profit organizations (NPOs) are collaborating to reinvigorate local communities. Educational and cultural facilities play a central role in these activities, including *Kominkan* (Sato, 2015; Wang, 2019), schools, community cafes, and NPOs. Yet, this reinvigoration is occurring in distinct ways and for nationally specific purposes.

In Japan, the adult education divisions of the government and the local education authorities have long occupied a major part of LLE. When

broadly considering the wide variety of current educational activities conducted under the provision of the adult education divisions in local education authorities, conspicuous trends in their purposes and practices can be summarized under the following four points:

- (1) the majority of learners who participate in educational programs held at the facilities for LLE are middle-aged women with no jobs, and the elderly;
- (2) a majority of learners are from a middle-class background, and the number of learners from the working class are relatively few;
- (3) the educational interests of adults are mainly hobby activities, and recreation and sports activities in leisure time, not contemporary issues in politics, the economy and so on; and
- (4) adult education activities have been actively promoted at the *kominkans* (i.e., community centers) in rural areas much more than at those in urban areas. (Kobayashi 2013; Fuwa, 2001).

In accordance with these trends, LLE has been playing significant roles in giving opportunities for participation in educational activities and through offering a wide range of new and interesting information on education to adults in the community.

Apart from these trends, networking activities called *bunka borantia* (or culture volunteers) are considered LLE initiatives aimed to support and enrich the public sphere, i.e., construction of citizenship through volunteering (Ogawa, 2009a). Ogawa (2009a) introduces ethnographic examples of community-oriented LLE activities created by civic groups as well as the nationwide LLE practices and policies. Through networking at these national gatherings, the participants aim to accumulate locally acquired knowledge generated by volunteers through their activities at public educational facilities. This networking addresses the coordination skills of volunteer activities, collaboration techniques with the government at various levels, capacity of involvement in community development as volunteers, and decision-making tools for diversified stakeholders, all of which are practical understandings called 'civic knowledge' (*shimin chi*) (Ogawa, 2009a) for active participation in the public sphere. The production of this civic knowledge through volunteer activities at public lifelong education facilities offers a solid foundation for reshaping the conventional

discourse on the Japanese state–society relationship. It generates new dynamism and a flow of energy at the grassroots level. Ultimately, civic knowledge production is a crucial part of the construction of citizenship based on active participation in society (Ogawa, 2009a). It is also a very different approach than the top-down prescriptions advanced in countries such as Australia.

Japanese society tends to recognize, value, and respond to group concerns over individual ones (Young & Rosenberg, 2006). This contrasts sharply with the American emphasis on individuality, and perhaps to a degree Australia. These differing cultural values are reflected in the level and nature of the approaches to policy formation in the two countries. Australia has taken a more decentralized approach, essentially allowing each state to develop its own adult education policies and programs, while the Japanese have taken a more centralized approach and developed more inclusive policies that extend standardized LLE opportunities to the entire populace (Billett & Dymock, 2020). This concerted effort to promote LLE opportunities in Japan has helped maintain the status of the elderly against the push of modernization by providing them with opportunities to learn new, salient skills and develop new roles and resources. In doing so, older adults increase their resource base and become more powerful actors in social exchange situations. In an Asian context, China and Japan have different levels of aging, but both face severe population aging problems and massive demand for education and engagement. Compared with China, Japan's development and policy system is more mature and complete, creating favorable conditions for lifelong and vocational education and re-employment for seniors (Wu et al., 2021). So, here there are distinct bases for the premises on which LLE can progress. This extends to the purposes adopted for A/LLE.

Purposes of adult and lifelong education

The formal promotion of LLE (*Shogai-Gakushu*) has enjoyed great success in Japan. At the highest levels, the Japanese government is working to reform the existing educational system to provide learning opportunities at all stages of life. Adults' LLE is viewed as a key avenue for meeting the societal challenges of a rapidly aging population. As popular interest in LLE has grown, the diversity of learning opportunities available for older adults has also expanded, however as

well. Three specific types of educational opportunities exist for older adults in Japan each with their own purpose: for, about and by the elderly. Education for the elderly includes programs directed toward their specific educational needs. Education about the elderly includes educating youth about aging and older adults. Education by the elderly involves older persons assuming the role of educator to share their knowledge and experience with younger generations (Yamazaki, 1994, p. 453). Diverse kinds of programs have been developed to address each of these purposes.

When compared to England for instance, the neo-liberal policy push was manifested quite differently in Japan. LLE which was positioned to overcome skills shortages in England and *gakureki shakai* in Japan, was repositioned as a new paradigm for the reconstruction of society (Okumoto, 2003). Neo-liberalism was taken over by quasi-communitarianism (i.e., communitarian aspirations in a culture without mature civic participation) (Okumoto, 2008), Adults' LLE has been adapted to rebuild community bonding in society. Both the English and the Japanese governments position LLE as central to the reform policy of the education systems, but the LLE practice diverges between the two countries because of distinct policy agendas. In England, the over-emphasis on skills and the over-simplification of the inclusion policies can be barriers to enhancing 'social connections'; in Japan, the spiritual approach (spiritualism – *seishin shugi*) and the society's inexperience of democratic processes³ can obstruct 'a public good' aspect of social capital (Okumoto, 2008). So, despite being subject to the same kind of exposure to neoliberal sentiments, the pathway taken in Japan is quite distinct from that of England, and also countries such as Australia.

However, there are also international differences in the adult population and its imperatives that need to be considered. These differences, again, indicate preferences for particular focuses on pathways of LLE. At the individual level, for example, the fear of declining mental ability and loss of memory is common in both Canada and Japan (Hori & Cusack, 2006). In Japan, many adults are concerned about memory and they are buying books and videogames designed to sharpen their minds, stimulate brain cells, and increase blood circulation in the brain. It has been believed that declining mental ability with age was inevitable; but new understandings indicate that individuals can maintain—and even improve—their mental function and memory as they age (Hori & Cusack, 2006). The combined

experience with seniors' centers in Canada and elder colleges in Japan suggests that aging is a positive, natural experience (Hori & Cusack, 2006). It is an experience that brings new opportunities for growth, personal development, and contributions to society. To cultivate a productive, empowered, and healthy older adult population, LLE has an important role to play, and that is not always associated with the employability of adults, but their ability to maintain healthy and active lives. Not the least here is that, in this way, they become less reliant upon social and health care provisions. This is a particularly significant resources consideration in countries with ageing populations. Hence, this factor emphasizes a need to ensure that message is reflected in public policy and practice, including the purposes and provision of LLE. Yet, as with many aspects of education, its organization and governance are central to how these policies are enacted. What is evident in the Japanese example is a broadly distributed set of agencies and institutions being responsive to the educational needs of adults, not projecting their purposes onto those adults.

Organisation and governance of adult education

Lifelong education provisions in Japan exist mainly with three levels of organisations: i) public, private and civil (Choi & Hori, 2016). Public organisations exist in two administrations of local government: educational and welfare administrations. The operation of many public education institutions has been contracted out to private organisations. At the civil level, educational institutions for older people frequently exist in the form of civil organizations or groups. In addition to these 3-level organisations, Japanese firms are increasingly opting for LLE for their workers outside the workplace, thus resulting in a remarkable increase in the number of out-of-the-workplace programs to support older workers. Public-private cooperation is considered the key strategic thrust in these programs. So, there is a growing trend in both the public and private provision of LLE being organized through private agencies.

Organisation of adult and lifelong education provisions

The local educational administration system is usually made up of Prefectural Boards of Education (PBE) and the Municipal Boards of Education (MBE) operating independently of immediate governmental control (Koyama, 2008). Board members are, however, nominated by the

head of the local government, and the director of the executive office is selected from among these board members. In 1989, the PBE established the Live-Long Colleges Project, which ensured equitable opportunities for the education of older people within a given municipality. However, after peaking in 1999, the number of projects decreased dramatically because of administrative and financial reforms and economic recession. A task of the MBE is to support senior citizen classes at *Kominkan*. Most of these programs were originally available to adults of all age groups; only recently have older people made up most of the learners. Currently, as noted above most large prefecture-level institutions for the education of older people are commissioned by private organizations, such as related organizations, designated administrators, or NPOs, and they are not directly operated by boards of education (Choi & Hori, 2016). The public organisation within local welfare administration is the Prefectural Office to Promote a Prosperous Longevity Society. Forty-seven prefectures⁴ have established such offices nationwide according to the Gold Plan, and most of these offices support large seniors' colleges.

The governance of education for older people changed greatly following the introduction of the Designated Administrator System in 2000, which has led local governments to contract the operation of their institutions to the private sector. Previously, this task belonged to the government according to the principle of *Kosetsu Koei*, which translates as the public operation of public facilities. In particular, the large-scale institutions of education for older citizens previously administered directly by the prefectures have been contracted to auxiliary organizations, designated administrators, or NPOs. One well-known example of a private organisation is the Hyogo Association for Lifelong Education for the Aged, which has commissioned the operation of the *Inamino Gakuen*, a famous educational institution in Japan. This association changed its name to the Hyogo Association for Lifelong Learning in 2009, and it has grown into an organization that presently manages not only institutions for the education of older people, but also several other LLE institutions. *Inamino Gakuen*, established in 1969, was the first administration-led seniors' college in Japan. It mainly targets people older than 60 and is a 4-year senior college that offers four majors: horticulture, health management, cultural studies, and pottery.

The most representative civil institutions for older Japanese are Senior Citizen Clubs. The clubs are independent organizations based in local

communities and focus mainly on relationship building, volunteering, cross-generational exchanges, and learning activities. These clubs have existed since the 1950s, and over 100 thousand were in operation as of 2014. In 1962, the Japan Federation of Senior Citizens Clubs was founded to promote the activities of these clubs. The Federation is composed of local federations and individual clubs. Sixty-one federations at the prefectural level are in operation, and most of them manage seniors' colleges. However, with the increase in educational opportunities offered in other forms and by different providers, the number of clubs and members has steadily decreased since the late 1990s. In contrast to the declining membership of senior citizen clubs, older people's participation in circles, hobbies, and sports organizations is, however, increasing (Choi & Hori, 2016; Fuwa, 2001). So, there has long been a sustained provision of adult education advanced and supported by a prefectural level of government. Yet, over time and through neo-liberal economic reforms this provision has become increasingly enacted through private sector companies, albeit sustained through the interest and engagement of older Japanese. Yet, whilst primarily focused on sustaining culturally-engage and healthy lives, some of these provisions are directed to the needs of older workers.

Adult and lifelong education for older workers

Lifelong education provisions in Japan have also been designed and enacted to assist older workers to cope with overcoming difficulties and maximizing opportunities to engage in current labour markets. These include change in wage-age profile, impact of the economic and industry restructuring and on-the-job training, job insecurity and increased unemployment and redeployment practices, prolonged mandatory retirement, expansion of irregular workers, and IT-intensive labour market (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008). In Japan, there is a shrinking younger working population, because of the declining fertility rate and the rapidly ageing population. Consequently, greater participation of older people in the labour force is becoming necessary and they are being encouraged to stay employed and work longer. To be employed longer, older workers need to improve their employability through LLE (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008; Sato, 2017).

However, whilst policies and laws often provide necessary legal measures, they may lack effective implementation strategies and

conditions for advancing LLE for older workers (Debroux, 2020; Sato, 2017). So, further and joint efforts are needed by all stakeholders to support the actual development and practices of innovative LLE programs for older workers (Debroux, 2020; Sato, 2017). The section below describes the main features of LLE programs implemented by Tokyo's neighbour Chiba Prefecture's Government (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008), and the impact of training on the re-employment of older workers after their retirement (Sato, 2017).

Chiba, a neighbouring prefecture of Tokyo and its Department of Employment and Work, organises a 'Chiba re-employment training program' in 13 locations, targeting workers between 45 and 65, especially those wishing to be re-employed. The target group includes women who are dismissed or have quit working for childcare and older workers who are seeking new employment. Priority is given to those who have not attended any public vocational courses over the past year. Eligible older workers must submit their applications through the Public Employment Security Office of the Chiba prefecture. This LLE system offers two- to three-month courses (six hours per day). A daily subsistence allowance and travel fees are covered by public unemployment insurance. There are no specific entrance requirements and courses are provided free of charge. Lectures are given by highly qualified professionals in each field of specialisation. Upon completion of the course, all trainees are assisted in re-employment in cooperation with the Chiba Public Employment Security Office (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008).

High level courses are offered by Chiba center: care and welfare service, personal computer (PC) and networking, medical office work and care service with PC, IT accounting, PC for business management, Internet business, training for care visit personnel, practical training for accountants, IT practices and CV-writing and job interview, general introduction for post-retirement work (seminar). Techno 21 (i.e., Matsudo-City vocational training center) offers a six-hour course in basic operational skills for personal computer *Let's use PC* for workers 60+. This type of computer training program specifically targeting workers 60 and above are still rare, but there is growth in demand (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008). The Chiba prefecture also offers university-entrusted re-employment training programs. For example, Jousei International University (specialised in care service and welfare) offers six-month social welfare and care service courses, and the program

involves both theoretical and practical training. This type of training course is popular among middle-aged or older workers, especially women, who seek care jobs for older people.

A more recent study, Sato (2017) examined the effect of job-related training on the re-employment of older workers using the Longitudinal Survey of Middle-aged and Elderly Persons, the largest panel data available on the elderly in Japan. It found that the probability of re-employment rises significantly one year and two years after training. Training is, therefore, effective in the case of re-employment as a regular worker. This effect is notable as most re-employed workers are employed as non-regular workers (i.e., part-time and temporary). These findings indicate that training is a useful measure for keeping older workers in work that is meaningful and productive for them. The findings show that such educational provisions when linked to labour market policies can be effective for promoting older workers employability of. Considering the trend of ageing in the future, it is essential to implement support measures to promote the development of capacity for the elderly. While support measures for young and middle-aged workers are being expanded in Japan, capacity development for the elderly is not yet sufficient, and future improvements are needed (Sato, 2017).

So, in these cases, there is a highly integrated approach to sustaining the employability of older and retired Japanese citizens focusing on developing capacities that might be seen as being deficient such as familiarity and competence in the use of computers. This approach integrates education, social service and employment support processes.

Enacting older workers' development

Adult workers engagement in LLE is largely enacted through in-house educational systems and facilities for their own employees (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008). These systems are called *Kigyounai kyouiku* and comprise many kinds of work-related programs with various levels and targets organized for employees with different educational and job careers, from newcomers to staff members, and the organized programs are usually put into practice on the job (OJT) (Fuwa, 2001). Although enterprises are retaining older workers who possess highly professional and specialized technical skills, they are often not willing to invest in their training due to modest returns. Thus, older workers lacking

specialized skills are compelled to turn to self-directed training in private human-resource development enterprises (Ohsako, 2009).

Another mode of engagement in LLE involves different kinds of information technology like personal computers, television and radio, specialist books that provide access to a range of sources of information (Fuwa, 2001). However, difficulties with technologies and associated perceptions are negatively affecting the lack of attractiveness and success of e-learning at all levels. In the case of adult learners, continuing education itself has been raised as a key issue as it has been asserted that a lack of perceived career reward has served to dampen demand for advanced degrees (Goddard, 2018). The lack of rewards for LLE of adult learners seems to have the greatest influence on the demand for distance education/e-learning. Overall, the diversity of the purposes, provisions and accessibility to these adult education programs is important.

Some cases

To briefly illustrate that diversity, the following are a series of short vignettes about the organisation and enactment of these diverse provisions.

Tokyo Metropolitan Government

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government established the Tokyo *Shigoto* (Job) Center in 2004. It provides older workers (55+) with counselling and consultation services and seminars, and experiences in community work which are jointly planned, organised and implemented by private agencies. The counselling and consultation services are offered as an individualized 50-minute session, and are delivered by career counsellors, lawyers and other professionals. Seminars and courses are given by business managers and executives and presidents of small and medium-sized companies, under themes such as re-employment support lecture; talent enterprises want; personal computer course; new life design, etc. Job-interview training is one of the main services provided. Career counsellors also teach concrete job-interview and CV-writing techniques. Trainees are presented with successful model cases and learn how to present their skills and experiences attractively and persuasively.

The Senior Citizens' Technical College was established in 1997 to provide LLE opportunities for older workers aged between 50 and 65. The college

is also open to disabled, single mothers, and people with unemployment insurance. There are 11 senior citizens' technical colleges in Tokyo. Courses are free and no academic degree is required for admission. However, students need to meet some prerequisite skill requirements and pass written examinations (Japanese language and introductory mathematics) and interviews. That is, the senior citizens' technical colleges provide training mainly to well-educated and white-collar older workers (55-65). Senior citizens' technical college grants certificates in different vocational fields. There are two-, three- and six-month courses, run both as day and night classes. What motivates older workers is that senior citizens' technical colleges help their trainees on course completion look for a job in coordination with and help from the Tokyo Public Employment Security Office.

Tokyo Silver human resource centers was founded as a follow-up to the job stabilisation law for older workers (60+). Silver centers support relatively low-skilled and modestly educated older workers (60+). The centers have recently been receiving more and more contracts for offering high-skilled jobs (such as management of public facilities) to older workers competent in personal computer management, accounting and teaching. Employers of Silver centers' registered members pay Silver centers directly, which in turn pay salaries to older workers. Although older workers are temporary and part-time workers, they are eligible for accident insurance. Registered older workers at Silver centers are supported by two training programs: 'employment support course for silver human resource development (HRD)' and 'seniors' work programs', free of charge with no specific entrance requirements. The employment support course for silver HRD offers short (9 to 20 days) and practical courses in: personal computer, house-work support, parking and building management, office and machine cleaning, cleaning air-conditioning equipment, gardening and tree-planting, mounting instruments and techniques, painting, etc. The seniors' work programs offers (approximate duration of one month) both theoretical studies and internships in care service professions.

These LLE interventions suggest that the central principles and practices for implementing education for older workers should feature the: i) locality and accessibility of training provision; ii) public-private cooperation; iii) flexible training provision; iv) inclusiveness of training, and v) life-course perspective and sensitivity towards heterogeneity.

Other important issues include LLE being combined with assistance to job-search training, cost-sharing, training both with and without certification, and high-quality/highly competent trainers.

Osaka Prefecture Senior College

Osaka Prefecture Senior College is a learning center for mainly older people in Osaka Prefecture. The estimated number of participants in this college is 2,800 in 2018, with no geographic or age limitations. The number of open classes is 67, and each student is required to participate in only one selected class per year. Initially, the college was managed by local government, but this management model was abolished in 2008 (Dept. of Lifelong Education, 2018; Hori, 2016). Since 2009, the Osaka Prefecture Senior College has been voluntarily managed by a senior NPO.

Hori, Choi and Park (2018) conducted a large-scale quantitative survey at the Osaka Prefecture Senior College. Findings indicated that learning needs that tend to bloom after age 70 in sample populations, particularly in topics of life review and communication with other seniors (Hori et al., 2018). This phenomenon is also seen in the results of Hori's (2006). Such findings can provide insight into the development of learning programs for people older than 70 years. Inner life enrichment is also an important avenue for the promotion of LLE.

Achi village and Nagano prefecture Kominkan

Various social education activities are provided through *Kominkan* in Japan, and there is strong support for self-governing *Kominkan*, such as the practices in Achi village and Matsumoto City of Nagano prefecture. These two case studies show that the *Kominkan*'s historical spirit in social education remains active and recognizes how residents' learning activates local communities, with Achi village serving as a rural model, and Matsumoto City as an urban model (Wang, 2019). Nagano prefecture's *Kominkan* learning activities generally present four characteristics: (a) centered on social education; (b) developed by the residents of rural areas; (c) focus on rural issues, such as challenges and issues of farmers' life; (d) coordinated and operated by *Kominkan* professional and related staff (Iwamatsu, 2016).

These local residents' learning contributes to community development through LLE and action. The meaning of these residents' learning

goes beyond learning itself, illustrating a welfare function to activate the whole community. Achi's example made local agriculture produce known to outsiders, and during the process, these residents also developed a new recognition of their community's value. Matsumoto's example made its residents rethink the area they live in and become empowered to bring about changes during the self-learning process. Through these activities, local people build a stronger bond within their neighborhood. These activities can build a safety net for youth and the elderly in the community and contribute to community welfare as well. Also, these learning opportunities confirmed the ownership by residents, and their learning activities connect to the needs of and in the community, which in many ways the government cannot accommodate.

The self-determined learning promoted by Kominkan creates new meanings for LLE, which can be a great reference for LLE in other countries with similar situations. This type of learning signifies that when learning is initiated by residents, related to everyday life, and about community development, it can meaningfully motivate and improve each person's quality of life. Further, this kind of social education will connect to social welfare through learning activities. In summary, the practice of Kominkan infuses new insights into empowering communities while promoting LLE and a learning society at a local level.

'Citizens' University'

There are around 150 citizens' universities all over Japan. They are non-formal educational organizations regularly providing several genres of lecture-driven courses in which citizens of all ages can participate. Their names vary: the City (Town, Village) University, the Community College, the Citizens' Academy, the Citizens' Cram School, the University of Trivia, the Community University, and the Free University, for example. Some of them are organized by local government, but many are entirely citizen run. They first appeared in the early 1970s, when the concept of LLE was introduced in Japan. Background for the development of citizen's universities includes i) firstly, Japanese views about life changed as other changes occurred in their society and as they became richer; ii) secondly, local and national control over the provision of learning has weakened recently due to cuts in the lifelong

learning budget; and iii) thirdly, local citizens have been empowered to independently operate their educational organizations.

Sawano (2012), for example, discusses three citizens' universities that are 'recycling knowledge' throughout their communities and are nurturing a 'New Public' striving to improve community life through mutual teaching and learning. The first case of Kiyomigata University Cram School is significant in the sustainability of its evolution, observable in the participation of citizens as civil professors and school managers. The second case, that of Asunaro University, represents an ordinary learning opportunity for elderly people provided by a municipality, but it succeeded in getting rid of passive learning by introducing the self-motivated research of the great voyage seminar. The third case, that of the Shibuya University Network, has elements of the preceding cases, but the school was founded and is run by a new generation of active citizens. The Shibuya University Network was designed to emphasize both individual lifelong learning and the vitalization of the community. In another case study, Maeda (2015) examines Fujisawa Citizens' University which illuminates an approach to promoting senior-centric intergenerational exchange and the effective deployment of senior citizens as leaders.

Considerations for broader adult educational purposes and practices

As can be seen from the case made above and the illustrative examples provided there is a great deal of diversity in the educational purposes and processes for adults in Japan. Moreover, the organisation and sponsoring of these provisions are widely distributed across the national government, prefectures, local organisations and commitments from the community, including volunteer effort and, obviously participation by Japanese adults. In consideration of contemporary adult education role in and its relationship with employability, the case from Japan offers two distinct kinds of approaches that might be helpful for Australia. With its own ageing population, the emphasis on maintaining the health and contributions of that ageing proportion of the population can be supported through adult education focusing on social engagement and focuses on personal enrichment and cultural betterment. That is, education focused on the development of the individual, based on their interests and needs. Yet, there is also a strong focus on employability

within Japanese adult education. With its shrinking young working age population, there is a need to sustain the working life of Japanese adults, and also re-engage and re-employ those who have retired. Consequently, policies and practices have also been developed and enacted in Australia to achieve those outcomes. Yet, what is seemingly distinct about the Japanese approach is the integration of those employability efforts with supportive and tailored educational provisions, organised and enacted at the local level within prefectures. Moreover, the approach appears to be premised upon dedicated organisations, professionally supported, albeit enacted through private sector companies. Hence, there is much local engagement and participation that is not only associated with enacting provisions designed and mandated by others but generated within the communities that these programs serve.

Endnotes

- ¹ In April 2021, the Japanese Cabinet has approved bills requiring companies to retain their workers until they are 70 years old, effectively raising the retirement age from 65 to 70. The move is part of an effort to address the country's falling birthrate and an ageing population, and the consequent labour shortage and rising cost of pensions.
- ² Care prevention is defined as “preventing (delaying) the occurrence of the state requiring long-term care [for] as long as possible, and preventing deterioration as much as possible even in a state requiring long-term care, and further aiming to mitigate a state requiring long-term care” (The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare).
- ³ In many cases, ‘associations’ and ‘relations’ within volunteer groups or NPOs and with other related institutions are not democratically functioning. In some cases, ‘participation’ is a mere slogan or a formality, has an element of compulsion or entails conflicts amongst participants due to different values and benefits (Maehira, 1999). Or, people participate simply because of personal interest without any intention of public contribution and political engagement.
- ⁴ The provinces of Japan were historical subdivisions of the island country. They developed and changed from the 7th century until the Meiji Period. In the 1870s, the provincial system was replaced by a new system of prefectures. Japan is then divided into 47 prefectures (todōfuken), which rank immediately below the national government

and form the country's first level of jurisdiction and administrative division. They include 43 prefectures proper (ken), two urban prefectures (fu: Osaka and Kyoto), one "circuit" or "territory" (dō: Hokkaido) and one metropolis (to: Tokyo) (Nussbaum, 2002).

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