

Summary Report on Thematic Research

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1. Purpose of the thematic research

Subject(-ivity) has long been criticized. Nonetheless, pedagogical discussions of subject(-ivity) are now being reactivated today under the acceleration of the internationalization of education, corresponding to the globalization of economics and politics. A trend can be identified of promoting the bringing up of the subject anew and for the future, as can be symbolized by the concept of agency. This concept combines two major approaches to subject(-ivity) in modern education: (1) citizenship education to form subjects of private law and (2) political education to develop subjects of public law. This trend or movement is said to cope with the current situation where overflowing political problems could determine the fate of humankind and the earth itself. However, one may raise the question that the convergence of educational practice on the development of modern subjects as explained above would narrow education to assistance with politics and economics. If so, how can we conceptualize another subject that is different from useful human resources for politics and/or economics?

In this symposium, we attempted to reexamine this issue with Mayuko Ishigami, who studies Hannah Arendt's philosophy of education; Akihiro Tsuchiya, who studies educational issues from the perspective of the sociology of law; and Jiro Morioka, who studies problems of eugenics and education. Each of these presenters made a presentation, the details of which can be read in this volume of this journal.

2. Discussion

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In this symposium, the discussion was first begun from questions posed by the participants and replies or comments by the presenters. We summarize it as follows:

2.1 On design-based education

Contemporary educational politics and practices tend to set up learning knowledge and acquiring competencies themselves as goals of education, analyzing and determining their contents, and seeking to achieve this through PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Action) and/or AAR (Anticipation-Action-Reflection) cycles. Several participants raised questions concerning design-based education that underlie this tendency. Morioka replied as follows: “One may or may not be able to do something, regardless of whether s/he has an impairment or sufficient time. It is important to not simply connect the time spent and the results but rather to rethink the premise that a goal can and must be achieved. We should not exclude from educational processes the uncertainty that unintended results may occur, for better or worse. Although a way of seeing that does not put a value on mere achievement of goal(s) could take on various forms, we should be aware that this way of seeing itself could be farther analyzed, measured, and taken up into the concept of utility.”

2.2 The dichotomies adult/child or subject/non-subject, and a child’s subjectivity

How should we regard the political and/or ethical implications of putting value on being a subject and making a child into a subject, as well as not putting value on being other than a subject? How should we find the limit of this dichotomic recognition?

Ishigami commented on these issues as follows: “In contemporary society, where the social is increasing and strengthening, it seems difficult to realize the public realm as conceived by Arendt, but it is not impossible to grasp the “appearance (of something)” in the public realm, the phenomenon of making audible voiceless voices of those who are not easily recognized. For example, social withdrawal cannot but provoke the problematic of inclusion/exclusion if we capture it within the frame of employment, public health, or social welfare. However, to actualize the voiceless voices of people as a political issue, it might be useful to utilize Arendt’s concept of association. Regarding categorization among A, Not-A and Neither of These, it seems important that we do not think of making Not-A into A, but conceive subjectivity as a process of visualization of what has been invisible.”

Tsuchiya commented on this as follows: “It is an important issue in jurisprudence, too, how we approve as legal person someone who is outside of the dichotomy we are discussing. For example, in the U.S., the sale of books that are harmful for youth is not always restricted by age but, in some states, is judged by capability of the individual child. The problem of legal certainty remains in those states, however. In Japan, there have been bullying cases, in which victim students sue offender students for tort liability. There is no legislation to distinguish between adult and child in such cases, so it must be judged on case-by-case basis. According to law reports, the boundary of liability would be around 12 years old or older. It should be noted that the actual situation is uncertain, as it depends on the development of the individual child’s capability.”

Morioka made the following comment: “As soon as we name something out of a dichotomy, there arises a risk of fixing it as a third (ternary) item. Nonetheless we can continue, while suspending the third item, our research in philosophy of education. And I think it is important that we keep on asking our position and/or perspective again and again, even if we can grasp our reality only within dichotomic cognition.”

At the end of symposium, an audience member raised the following question: in the current situation, where “agency” and “proactive learning” are emphasized, should we regard this trend as taking the form of a movement toward completion of the modernity based on the principles of autonomy and democracy or as a movement of an anti-modernity that is characterized by “escape”? The panelists made concluding comments, including responses to the question above, as follows.

Ishigami: “I guess subjectivity is emphasized in part in the stuck situation of democracy, but I have a doubt whether a “tamed subject” who conforms to the expectations of politics and/or society is worth calling a subject. I have learned that there are attempts to seek suffrage for young children as the innovation of AI technology and so on progresses; I think it will be important to consider who expect what under the name of child subjectivity.”

Tsuchiya: “In divorce negotiation (or conciliation), for example, children often, worrying about making their parent sad, cannot manifest opinions of their own, or cannot make a judgment on one’s (their) choice(s). It is difficult to conclude one’s (their) manifestation of opinion(s) to be children’s subjectivity. At a children’s cafeteria (community kitchen for children), there are some staff members who would not ask children’s opinions but can understand their minds well. Therefore, we might say that respecting subjectivity of children depends on the way of grasping. We are required to make a sound judgment between contradictions of restriction and protection of children’s rights as well as conflicts between general criteria and individual cases.”

Morioka: “I do not raise an objection to direction toward forming subjectivity. But I think it is nonsense to consider education to merely involve analyzing and measuring directions or achieving certain goals. I think we should challenge how we can escape a logic which add conditions to competence and existence, or evaluating them from usefulness only. I would like to find an idea in educational relationship in which orientation toward the formation of subjectivity will not lead to a ranking of human beings.”

3. Conclusion

It has been long since the subject(-ivity) generated by the modern era was put in doubt, nonetheless discussion of it has not been exhausted, and we confront it even today. Against the self-evident premise of “modern subject” in politics, law, and economics, pedagogy has made “being not a subject yet” visible. We have struggled to form such a being as a modern subject and realized the fictionality of modern subject, as well as the difficulty of subjectivation. In this situation, education and pedagogy have approached subjectivity in various ways that cannot be converged on citizenship education and the political education that we discussed above. Ishigami, Tsuchiya, and Morioka undertook the task of considering and responding from their own perspectives to our questions that have not been verbalized clearly.

Ishigami’s presentation is interesting in that voluntary associations have been, at least in the U.S., a remedy against uncertain situations related to failures of institutions or the unreliability of human behavior. The way that such association’s function overlaps with daily practice of education, which must accept that something cannot work in a given way, as it involves uncertainties and impossibilities, as Morioka suggests. The ethics of education in such difficulties makes Tsuchiya’s suggestion that we must critically examine a conceptual framework in jurisprudence persuasive. That is, although legal theories tend to regard the legal status of child and the boundary of between child and adult as self-evident with intention to keep legal certainty as a top priority, we must reconsider it (and, in fact, this attitude is being criticized recently as “worry-free thinking” even in discussion on jurisprudence, as Tsuchiya says).

Another interesting point here is that presenters’ comments suggested in common the subject of a non-identical and co-existential being, which may contain a contradiction in a sense, in considering how we can envision a subject that will not be reduced to design-based education. For example, Tsuchiya described the staff of a children’s cafeteria who would not ask children’s opinion(s), but grasp their mind well. Ishigami

suggested a possibility of political subjectivation bringing to light voiceless voices within a public realm through the collaborative (communal) action of association. These examples suggest a subject that exists in a collaborative (communal) way, so to speak, unlike a platonic, identical subject that represents an inner intention (purpose) as one's own opinion (voice). Morioka emphasized the importance of questioning and suspending a third (ternary) item that cannot be grasped by dichotomy, with a danger incidental to naming and identifying in mind. Although the thought of identity/identification, as well as the design-based education, has a strong influence even today, it is also an important task for the philosophy of education to examine human being and its transformation from various perspectives, spreading beyond the thought of identity/identification. We hope the discussion of this topic will continue for a long time.