

INTRODUCTION

The recent **discussions** in Austrian domestic politics **about reforms in the educational system** are not only a contemporary topic. As long as there was an educational system there were discussions about it. Until today there have always been different opinions, views and foremost intentions aiming at reforms in the educational system. Our goal was to find out if there have been reforms in the **East Asian educational system from the 17th to 19th century** and what the main obstacles and intentions of the reformers have been. This interest led to our research question: **“Reforms and changes as acceleration for progress? – Influences on the content of the curriculum between the 17th and 19th century”**.

Our main focus was laying on the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) in China, the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) in Japan and the Joseon dynasty (1627-1899) in Korea.

STATE OF THE ART

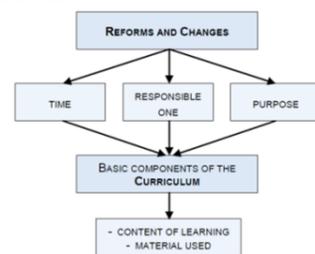
The history and development of education in East Asia is a topic that has been discussed throughout literature. Although **many volumes have been written** by scholars, both Western and Asian, from various views on education concerning that time period (Dore 1992, Elman 1994, Haasch 2000, Kim 2001, Zhang 2013), and reforms in general (Pepper 1996, Schoppa 2002), there appears to have been **no one who has undertaken any study of the relationship** between education related reforms and changes and the curriculum in this specific time period.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used for this project is a **comparative analysis** of the three East Asian countries, China, Japan and Korea, and the University of Vienna. In order to be able to compare the development of education in the chosen time period, the **focus was laid on reforms**.

According to Leonard Schoppa (2002) when looking at reforms, the most important aspects are the **time** the reform was introduced, **who was**

responsible and for what **purpose** it was introduced. In the case of this project the development and changes of certain aspects of the curriculum, namely the **content of learning and the materials** used, which are part of the basic components of a curriculum and used as framework in the curriculum studies (Lawton 1983), were observed. The goal was to analyze education-related reforms and changes by focusing on secondary historical sources with regard to the aspects of progression and modernization.



REFORMS AND CHANGES

CHINA

During the Qing period the curriculum was “heavily influenced by **diverse political and social interests** due to different Han-Chinese clans and the occupying Manchu rulers” (Elman 1994:118). There existed a constant struggle to balance the classic literary education and a more policy orientated one. Yet **reforms and changes often failed** in order to keep political stability.

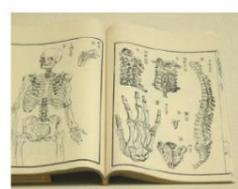
Towards the end of the 19th century the growing civil unrest and the **Western influences** have inspired ‘self-strengthening’ ideals. The elites and scholars called for reformations which would emulate Western education and strengthen China. However, the emperor failed with his attempts and the education remained unchanged until the decline of the dynasty’s power (Elman 2009:410).

The state of the Chinese education changed drastically with the abolishment of the examination system in 1905. With the creation of the Republic of China the **education system was modernized** according to Western models. At first Japan was the inspiration, later followed by the American education system. The content of the curriculum moved away from the classics and towards more ‘scientific’ studies including mathematics, natural sciences and western languages (Reynolds 1995:85-100).

JAPAN

In the Tokugawa era the curriculum was heavily influenced by choices made by the leading Tokugawa family. In 1615, the ‘**Laws for Military Houses**’, which directed samurai to be equally educated in the literary arts (*bun*) as well as the military arts (*bu*) were enacted (Kassel 1996:10-14). The emphasis of education was used as a tool to transform the semi-illiterate warriors into loyal and fully literate bureaucrats. Therefore, *bun* consisted of the Chinese studies with the Confucian classics and sciences such as medicine to improve the morals of the samurai (Dore 1992:69).

Since Chinese re-presented the *lingua franca*, even **Western knowledge** was first introduced through Chinese translations v especially after the closing of the country in 1639 to most foreign interaction. However, due to interest in a calendrical reform the **ban on imports of foreign books was relaxed in 1720** by the emperor and therefore a new (small) opening to Western knowledge was created, leading to the development of a new field of studies known as *rangaku* (“**Dutch learning**”), which laid the basis for the adoption of modern sciences in the Meiji-era (Sugimoto and Swain 1978:224, 262).



Japan's first fully-fledged translation of a Western book on anatomy (*Kaitai Shinhō*), published in 1774, National Museum of Nature and Science (Tokyo)

In 1856 the first large-scale school of Western studies was established (Zhang 2013:16). Thereafter numerous books and language programs were introduced to the curriculum (Dore 1992:169).

KOREA

In the Joseon dynasty in Korea there did not take place any new education related reforms. However, already in 1582 the **Yulgok School Standard Reforms** were introduced by the ‘Minister of Education’ on demand of the King Sōnjo. These reforms endured around 300 years and tried to solve the dilemma of the civil service examination (Kim 2001).

The main changes focused on the institutions and school life, which were transformed in order to reach the goal of

self-cultivation. Concerning the content of learning, the **Chinese classics** were still an important part of the curriculum, whereas Buddhist scriptures were banned in schools. As part of the reforms several new books were introduced to the curriculum throughout the period to further improve the reading skills of the students (Kim 2001).

VIENNA UNIVERSITY

The “**Theresianische Schulreform**” was executed in the course of the so called ‘pragmatic sanction’ in the middle of the 18th century, which could be seen as the founding of the state of the Habsburgs. In this process a centrally governed bureaucracy was installed. For this bureaucracy the state needed **well educated officials**. The educational system was reformed with the aim to educate the future state officials. The main focus was the studies of theology and philosophy in higher education (Acham 1999:115-116).

The second major reform in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution aimed mainly at high-school education and included the launch of the “**Maturitätsprüfung**” and basic philosophy was now taught in the last years of high-school, instead of at the university (Acham 1999:122).

COMPARISON

The comparison of the case studies on China, Japan and Korea shows that in all countries the **leading parties decided** on the introduction of reforms or changes concerning the education. During this time period the **Chinese classics** played a major role in the curriculum in all three countries. What’s more, the education was a tool to **develop a well operating and loyal bureaucracy**, who had control over the country and acted on the will of the leading parties.

Besides these common aspects, the findings show also differences. In the case of **Korea** for example, it was conducted that while the content of the curriculum has not really been changed by the Yulgok School Reform, the reform transformed the way students were learning, but **did not try to modernize education yet**.

When looking at the cases of **China and Japan**, the findings show that the countries realized the necessity of

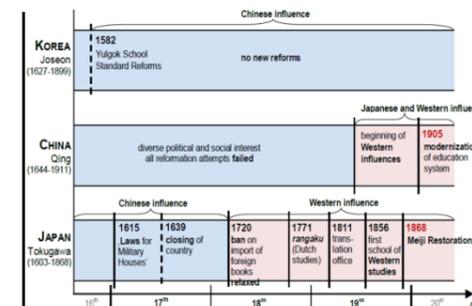
modernization and progression quite early. Both countries were **interested in Western knowledge** and, after a period of careful approaches, eager to learn as much as possible to modernize the education, the system and the curriculum. In both countries the goal of the reforms and changes was to **strengthen the own position**.

In **China** the interest for Western education started at the end of the 19th century, but the major reforms and changes, which aimed to modernize the school system, have taken place during the 20th century after the decline of the dynasty’s power (Elman 2009:410). **All the reformation attempts beforehand failed**. During the Qing rule the content mainly consisted of the classics required for the civil service examinations, but gradually the content of the curriculum moved away from the classics and towards **more ‘scientific’ studies including western languages**. China used not only Western cultures and models to reform the country, but **also looked towards Japan**.



A meeting of Japan, China, and the West, by Shiba Kōkan, late 18th century, California Digital Library.

In **Japan**, although in the Tokugawa era took place education related reforms and changes, the rapid process of modernization in this field occurred during the reforms of the Meiji-restoration after 1868. Nevertheless, already in 1543 when the first Europeans reached Japan new knowledge invaded the country, but due to the final decision of the Tokugawa government for a period of isolation in **1639 the era of modernization ended very abruptly** (Sugimoto and Swain 1978:149). The changes, which occurred in the curriculum, especially concerning the introduction of the **Dutch studies**, were not always introduced due to a reform enactment, but the **government had always a hand in the course the curriculum was taking**. Furthermore, the established educational system in the **Tokugawa era was seen as preparatory work** (Sugimoto and Swain 1978:294) and helped to realize the aspiring educational movements of the government of the Meiji era (Zhang 2013:7).



When comparing the findings for East Asia with the reforms taken place at the **University of Vienna** during that time frame, there are **two major parallels** to the education in East Asia. First, there was a high emphasis on an **ethical and philosophical system** – in East Asia the Confucianism and in Austria theological studies. And second, the ruling parties wanted to have **educated, but obedient and loyal subjects to control and rule the state**, which was made sure through the education and the curriculum.

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