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Cultural Background and Government Policy on Disinformation and Conspiracy Theories in Japan

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ABSTRACT

This document is an incomplete essay intended to provide the cultural and political context behind the disinformation problem in Japan and the government's efforts to address it. The disciplined nature of the Japanese people is one aspect of their conformist culture. On the other hand, they have not developed sufficient critical thinking skills. Japan's disinformation problem is related to such a conformist culture. Despite calls for media literacy education, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) faces opposition from influential figures, which hinders its implementation. The educational system's emphasis on conformity over critical thinking has resulted in outdated "information morality education." Local governments and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) are striving to implement digital citizenship policies, but conservative opposition persists.

Keywords

Disinformation, Conspiracy theories, Media and Information Literacy, Digital citizenship, Media Literacy

INTRODUCTION

I will discuss the situation of the disinformation problem in Japan and trends in the government's Media and information literacy (MIL) policies. In general, the issue of disinformation has never been treated as a major social problem by the media and politicians in Japan. One reason for this is that the social divide caused by social media has not been as severe as in the West. The political dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has never led to a dictatorship, but the situation is changing. Before World War II, Japan was a militaristic state. It was supported by a conformist culture that denied critical thinking in Japan.

The Japanese School Education Law sets the development of "sound critical thinking skills" as one of the goals of secondary education. The law was enacted in 1947 and was heavily influenced

by the United States. Since then, however, Japanese education policy has shifted to the right, with an emphasis on moral education based on a culture of conformity. This trend has been called the "right turn in education. Beginning in the 1970s, school regulations imposed greater control on students, forcing them to wear the same uniform and have the same hairstyle. Punishment of students also became an important educational activity. Under such a school system, a culture of syncretism developed among the population, like that of the prewar period. The disciplined nature of the Japanese people is an aspect of the conformist culture.

On the other hand, they have not developed sufficient critical thinking skills. According to the OECD's TALIS 2018 survey, only 22.8% of teachers said they could help their students think critically, adding "a little" and "a lot". This is significantly lower than in other countries, with 85.9% in the UK and 61.1% in France. Because "critical thinking skills" have never been emphasized in postwar Japanese schools, Japanese teachers have never been able to develop critical thinking skills in school. As a result, they lack the confidence to teach it to their students. Moral education became a special subject in 2019 under pressure from the LDP. In this way, Japan has developed a culture of conformity that avoids critical thinking. Japan's disinformation problem is related to such a conformist culture.

Another characteristic of Japanese culture would be pop culture, such as anime, manga, and video games, and the "otaku" culture that supports this culture. "Otaku" culture has expanded globally. Japanese manga and anime are popular all over the world, making it a unique culture in the world. Anime and manga are a form of message, and through the young people who are familiar with them, they form a "participatory culture". The problem of disinformation, misinformation, and conspiracy theories in Japan is related to this Japanese culture.

These two cultural characteristics could be called "Asian forms," and not only in Japan. This is because conformist culture is based on Confucian culture, a form of social culture common in Confucian cultural areas such as China and Korea. The despotic and authoritarian systems of government common in East and Southeast Asia also have a strong influence on information control. There are many nations in Asia that regulate freedom of the press and information, including China and Singapore, where the state has laws to control disinformation. But Japan is not an autocratic nation, and there is freedom of the press. That is why the cultural context is so important. This means that these two cultural distinctions function socially as a code of symbols and are reproduced through schooling and social activities. As a result, disinformation and conspiracy theories in Japan are generated and spread through these types of messages. This mechanism is not limited to Japan but is expanding globally. Wasserman points out that "in addition to the political and economic contexts in which misinformation is produced and consumed, it is also important to consider the cultural aspect. He then suggests applying the various theories of cultural studies (Wasserman, 2020). I agree with this view.

This chapter begins by discussing the relationship between these distinctive aspects of Japanese culture and disinformation and conspiracy theories. In the case of Japan, a large electronic bulletin board known as "2channel" became its medium for transmitting various disinformation and conspiracy theories. It has led to the QAnon conspiracy theories in the United States. Second, I will discuss the relationship between the political system, disinformation, and conspiracy theories in Japan. In particular, the LDP government since 2012, when the second Abe administration was established, has not adequately addressed the issues of disinformation and conspiracy theories. The national education policy has also been indifferent to these issues. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has created a new situation for these issues globally, and Japan is no exception. The Japanese government, media, and academia are also called upon to respond to these issues.

1. Anonymous Electronic Bulletin Board as a Symbol of Japanese Digital Culture

The 2channel is an anonymous electronic bulletin board founded by Hiroyuki Nishimura in 1999. The 2channel is a Web 2.0-based media that was launched before Facebook was launched in 2004, and was the center of Japanese subcultural culture, or "digital otaku" culture. It is currently renamed "5channel" but continues to be active. In 2003, Nishimura launched the anonymous electronic bulletin board "4chan" for English-speaking countries, expanding the 2channel culture globally. 2channel also moved its servers to the United States to avoid Japanese laws and regulations. It is a known fact that QAnon in the U.S. was originally created on 4chan. Later, "Q" moved to a new anonymous bulletin board, "the 8chan," which is now renamed "8kun" to avoid regulations. These developments are detailed in the HBO television documentary "Q: INTO THE STORM" (2021). The operators of 8chan(8kun) are heavily influenced by Japanese subculture, and the fact that Japanese anonymous electronic bulletin boards have influenced American conspiracy theory culture is significant.

Today, 5channel functions as an information engine where all kinds of information are collected and disseminated simultaneously. It is also a hub for subcultures that compete with mainstream media, and a place where lovers of manga, anime, and video games can interact with each other. One of the subcultures that emerged during the 2channel era was painting in ASCII characters, and the cat-like character Mona was popularized by 2channel users. Today, 5channel has numerous boards covering a variety of topics, and users can select the boards that interest them to browse and post on. Boards dealing with the latest incidents and breaking news are particularly popular, and inside information about organizations that does not appear in traditional media is sometimes posted. On the other hand, criminal threats are often made, and when a crime is committed, it is covered by major media outlets. For example, in the case of

the highway bus hijacking by a 17-year-old boy in 2000, a criminal warning was posted by the perpetrator himself on 2channel at the time.

At the same time, 5channel has become a hotbed of slander and hate speech and has been active in right-wing speech. In Japan, right-wingers active online are distinguished from those traditionally active on the streets and are referred to as "neto-uyo" (Internet right-wingers). Many of them are not young people. This term is like "alt-right" in the US. And disinformation and conspiracy theories are also often spread through the 5channel. In the West, disinformation is often spread through fake news sites that resemble the real ones, but in Japan, it is often spread through curation sites. Many of them have right-wing positions. According to a report from the Yomiuri Shimbun's Osaka headquarters, the operators of these sites and YouTube spread disinformation and conspiracy theories for commercial rather than ideological reasons (Yomiuri Shimbun's Osaka headquarters' Society Department 2022). Since most of the curation sites use blogs or their own web servers and are not subject to social media restrictions, they are rarely removed.

In Japan, there are many studies on social media such as X (formerly Twitter), but few studies on anonymous electronic bulletin boards. Tsuji Daisuke conducted surveys on the "Internet right wingers" in Japan in 2007 and 2014. This research did not focus exclusively on anonymous electronic bulletin board users. He defined "Internet right wingers" in terms of (1) their exclusionary attitudes toward China and South Korea, (2) their conservative and patriotic political orientation, and (3) their participation in online discussions and debates on political and social issues. The survey results show that the percentage of "Internet right-wingers" among Internet users in general is less than 1%, and while most of them are male, there are no significant characteristics in terms of age or educational background. While there was no significant increase in perspective (3), (1) "Exclusionary attitudes toward China and South Korea" increased from 36.6% in 2007 (n=999) to 62.7% in 2014 (n=2347). As for (2) "Strongly conservative or patriotic political orientation," it nearly doubled from 6.4% in 2007 to 11.3% in 2014. Tsuji notes that "the potential support base of 'Internet right-wingers' is expanding" (Tsuji 2017: 215). This means that even if there are only a few 'Internet right-wingers', if they are active on anonymous electronic bulletin boards and social media, they can have a significant impact on public opinion. The Internet acts as an amplification device for ideas. This includes disinformation, conspiracy theories, and hate speech. If citizens are not resistant to these messages, it means that public opinion can be manipulated.

Masaaki Ito, a prominent Japanese sociologist, has published *The Historical Sociology of the Internet Right*, based on a large amount of data. His analysis of the discourse of the "Internet Right" leads him to the following conclusions. There are three clusters of "Internet rightists" in Japan: one is the "backlash conservatives" cluster, a traditional right-wing group that advocates

a revisionist history that positively evaluates prewar Japan; the second is the "subculture conservatives," mainly the younger generation, who love subcultures and reject liberal discourse; the third is the "business conservatives," consisting of businessmen who support right-wing discourse. Ito states that "in the Abe administration, which has managed to gain support from these three clusters, the three agendas of historical revisionism, anti-liberal citizens, and anti-mass media are treated as if they are part of an implicit platform" (Ito 2019: 487). In other words, the Abe government, especially the second Abe government that took office in 2012, has succeeded in installing the support of the subcultural generation and becoming a strong right-wing government.

Until the mid-2010s, foreign disinformation and conspiracy theories were rarely as widespread as they are here, but things changed a bit after the 2016 US presidential election. Fake news began to appear on television and in newspapers. However, these problems became more serious after 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. However, the Abe administration did little to combat disinformation and conspiracy theories.

2. Disinformation and Conspiracy Theory Issues in Japan after 2020

The situation surrounding the issue of disinformation in Japan has changed rapidly in recent years. One is the spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19 and its vaccine. The other is the spread of disinformation and propaganda by Russia since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This latter issue has created a new phase of the disinformation problem in Japan. Until last year, disinformation was rarely brought into Japan directly from abroad. This was due to a language problem. Disinformation from abroad tends to be translated and spread by Japanese. This situation represents a new stage of the disinformation problem in Japan.

The Abe government did little to combat disinformation and conspiracy theories. This is because the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) itself systematically used disinformation and propaganda for its own political activities. In 2010, the LDP officially established the LDP NetSupporters Club (J-NSC). This is an organization that conducts voluntary speech activities to support the LDP on social media. In addition, the "Dappi incident" occurred in 2021: Dappi is one of the anonymous Twitter accounts widely known for its disinformation and slander aimed at criticizing the opposition party. Opposition lawmakers demanded the disclosure of its IP address and filed a lawsuit against the company that had manipulated the account, claiming defamation; it turned out that the company's main business partner was the LDP.

The Abe administration not only manipulated information online, but also falsified various official government documents. The Moritomo case is famous for a government employee who

committed suicide after being ordered to falsify documents. In this case, the names of Prime Minister Abe and his wife were listed on a document settling a deal between Moritomo Gakuen, a right-wing private elementary school, and state-owned land, but the document was forged under political pressure. In addition to this incident, there were other incidents such as the Kakei Gakuen case and the falsification of official statistical data. On the other hand, they also intervened in broadcasting stations. As a result, in 2013, when the second Abe administration came to power, Japan's global press freedom ranking plummeted to 53rd from 22nd in the previous year. Not surprisingly, the Abe government failed to take action against disinformation and conspiracy theories.

On July 8, 2022, former Prime Minister Abe was killed by a young man with a gun. The background of this incident is the cult "Unification Church". Both Abe and Japan's ruling party, the LDP, have close ties to the Unification Church. And the murderer who caused this incident had a grudge against the Unification Church. At first, most of the media did not report it, except for some magazines. Gradually, the mainstream media began to report on the relationship between the LDP and the Unification Church. And there is also a lot of disinformation and conspiracy theories circulating on social media about this incident. For example, there was disinformation that the incident was a government plot to assassinate him, when in fact another person shot former Prime Minister Abe from the top of a building.

There is another feature of Japan's disinformation problem. Two days after the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe, the Upper House election was held. As a result, a party known as the "SANSEI Party" won a seat in the election for the first time. "Sansei" means to participate in politics. This party has been spreading conspiracy theories on TikTok about the COVID-19 vaccine and global warming. Young people check TikTok daily, showing that conspiracy theories can spread while adults are often unaware of them. According to Tsunehiro Furuya, the Sansei Party is not supported by the traditional "Internet right", but by "anti-vaxxers" through "organic belief". In other words, it is a conspiracy theory party that is completely different from the traditional right-wing parties (Furuya 2022). In 10 years, the Conspiracy Theory Party may become the majority party. Today's youth participate in society through social media. But this also means that without critical thinking skills, they are vulnerable to conspiracy theories and government propaganda.

Various studies have shown that some of the user groups promoting conspiracy theories about COVID-19 and Russia overlap. For example, Fujio Toriumi analyzed Twitter posts in Japanese from January 1, 2022, to March 5, 2022, and found that 87.8% of the accounts that spread the information "Ukrainian government is neo-Nazi" spread anti-vaccine conspiracy theory tweets. In other words, the two conspiracy theories overlap. However, not all anti-vaccine conspiracy theorists spread Russian conspiracy theories. According to him, this percentage was only 4%

(Toriumi 2022).

The Sankei newspaper reported the results of an investigation by Internet security firm sola.com, which found that Twitter accounts claiming that the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe was the work of the government overlapped with accounts spreading Russian conspiracy theories and COVID-19 vaccine conspiracy theories. According to the article, "several suspicious points were found, including that the content of the postings was unfamiliar to Japan and that the posting times coincided with business hours in St. Petersburg, Russia. Therefore, the possibility of foreign involvement was raised (Sankei Newspaper 2022). The government's almost complete lack of response to Japan's disinformation, conspiracy theory, and state propaganda problems was a major problem for the LDP's Abe administration. Abe resigned in September 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic became a major political issue. Subsequent Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga took over the Abe administration, but his response to the COVID-19 pandemic was criticized, and he resigned a year later. The Kishida administration has struggled to deal with the Unification Church cult, as evidenced by the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe. Thus, the various problems caused by the Abe administration remained unresolved, leaving disinformation, conspiracy theories, and state propaganda measures unaddressed. However, since the end of the Abe administration, the situation is gradually changing.

A major influence on the government's policy change was GLOCOM's April 2022 release of "Innovation Nippon: Understanding the Current State of False and Misinformation in Japan and Examining Social Responses: An Empirical Analysis of False and Misinformation on Politics, Corona Vaccine, etc. - A Report". The report includes a literature review, an interview survey, a questionnaire survey, an experimental survey, and interviews with experts. The questionnaire survey targets registered observers of the Internet research company MyVoice.com, aged 20-69, and does not include children and adolescents in their teens. The literacy analysis in this report is based on the questionnaire survey. This report examined two categories of disinformation: the COVID-19 vaccine and politics. The results for each category differed: the percentage of people who believed disinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine differed for each type of information. For example, only 6.3% of respondents said that the disinformation that "the Corona vaccine makes you infertile" was true, while only 6.3% said that "the COVID-19 vaccine does not prevent infection. It only prevents severe disease. 44.5% said this disinformation was true.

The first case may have been influenced by the fact that the Minister of Vaccination announced on television that the information was disinformation. On the other hand, in the six cases of disinformation related to politics, about 40% of the respondents said that the information was correct in each of the six cases of disinformation. Moreover, the percentage of those who believe disinformation increases with age (Yamaguchi & Watanabe 2022: 39-40). The literacy concepts used in the analysis in this report are information literacy, media literacy, and health literacy. And

the report states that "'media literacy' and 'information literacy' showed a marked tendency to be more diffuse among those with lower levels" (Yamaguchi & Watanabe 2022: 77). This report had a major impact on the policy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), which is discussed in the next section.

3. Japanese Government Action Against Disinformation

The Japanese government, on the other hand, has so far failed to address the issue of disinformation, leaving it to platform companies to deal with the problem. In October 2018, the MIC established the Study Group on Platform Services to examine the appropriate handling of usage information by platform operators. The results of its deliberations were published on February 5, 2020, as the final report of the Study Group on Platform Services (MIC 2020). The report considers the issue of disinformation as a global challenge and presents measures taken by countries around the world to address the problem, including educational measures such as the efforts of fact-checking organizations and the development of media literacy. It also states that in responding to fake news and disinformation, "action should be based on voluntary efforts by the private sector, including platform providers" and that "it is appropriate for governments to respect these voluntary efforts by the private sector and to closely monitor their progress" (MIC 2020: 35). The MIC added that "it is appropriate for the government to respect these voluntary efforts by the private sector and to closely monitor the status of these efforts" (MIC 2020: 35).

They urge education to "prevent the spread of disinformation; it is necessary for users to acquire the ICT skills to read information appropriately. In particular, they must have the ability to make judgments that prevent them from easily believing and spreading disinformation, etc., and the ability to confirm reliable sources of information" (MIC 2020: 45). This includes responsibilities related to the dissemination of information. Regarding the promotion of ICT literacy, they state. "With regard to existing actions by governments, private organizations, telecommunications carriers, etc., it is appropriate to organize from what perspective and in what places (schools and other educational institutions, etc.) and by what entities efforts to improve ICT literacy are being implemented. And it is appropriate to promote cooperation between the various actors" (MIC 2020: 46). Thus, concrete policy recommendations are postponed.

They also confirmed at the 19th meeting (July 2, 2020), which was held after the release of the Final Report, that they would study issues related to defamation on platform services. Then, at the 30th meeting (September 14, 2021), they released the "Draft Interim Summary". They stated that as "awareness raising activities to improve information morality and ICT literacy for users", it is necessary to "conduct systematic and multidimensional literacy awareness activities based on the results of understanding and analyzing the actual situation, with the cooperation

of industry, academia, government and the private sector, and continue to work to make ICT literacy improvement measures effective" (MIC 2021: 52). In this way, the MIC embarked on a basic research study on ICT literacy policies aimed at systematic and multidimensional literacy awareness.

The MIC commissioned "Mizuho Research & Technologies, Inc." to conduct this research and produce educational materials on measures against disinformation and established the "Study Group on Measures to Improve ICT Literacy" (Chairman: Shinichi Yamaguchi). The first meeting of the Study Group was held on December 16, 2021, and the last meeting (the 6th meeting) was held on March 25, 2022. As a result of these studies, educational materials on disinformation and misinformation, "How to Deal with the Internet - To Avoid Being Deceived by Disinformation and Misinformation" and related materials were published on June 17, 2022 (MIC 2022a). Among the published materials is the document "Report on the Results of the Survey on the Current Status and Issues of Measures to Improve Media and Information Literacy," which summarizes the survey.

The report includes the following:

- (1) Case studies of policies and practices to improve Media and Information Literacy in other countries, with a focus on countering disinformation.
- (2) Comparisons between Japan and other countries using relevant international indicators.
- (3) Challenges and solutions for improving Media and Information Literacy in Japan.
- (4) What educational institutions and businesses should consider when implementing media and information literacy policies.
- (5) Outline of awareness-raising educational materials produced during this research and their learning plans and effectiveness measurement methods.
- (6) Outline of the demonstration of the awareness course.
- (7) Desired direction of future policy.

The report also examines various theories and concepts from other countries, but it should be noted that it ultimately adopts UNESCO's "Media and Information Literacy (MIL)" as the basis for its study. Of course, UNESCO is an educational and cultural agency of the United Nations that influences educational policies in countries around the world, including developing countries. Media and information literacy is a concept that combines both media literacy and information literacy and integrates new literacies such as digital literacy and cinema literacy. The report builds on the UNESCO concept, which defines it as "a set of competencies that enable people to find, evaluate, use and create information in cultural and social contexts, using all means of communication" (MIC 2022b: 7).

On the other hand, the report does not use the term "fake news," but rather "disinformation and misinformation." The terms "disinformation" or "misinformation" are commonly used in Europe

and the United States, but the former is intentional while the latter is unintentional. The term is adopted as a combined concept of the two. In addition, although not adopted as a descriptive term in the report, "malinformation" is defined as information that is factually based but maliciously harmful to individuals, organizations, or countries. These three categories are used in educational materials produced by the Study Group. The Study Group on Measures to Improve ICT Literacy identified the following seven "short term solutions" that should be addressed as early as possible to improve Media and Information Literacy against "dis and misinformation" based on the findings of the survey (MIC 2022b: 93):

- (1) Develop and publish educational materials on disinformation and misinformation for domestic use.
- (2) Publication of information on educational materials to reach target audiences.
- (3) Free use of developed educational materials.
- (4) Develop nationwide efforts in coordination with existing MIC efforts to improve literacy.
- (5) Further development of developed educational materials to raise awareness of Media and Information Literacy.
- (6) Further promotion of voluntary efforts by the private sector to improve literacy.
- (7) Centralize information on Media and Information Literacy courses.

These questions are based on a review of actual cases in other countries. For example, with regard to the development of teaching materials for professionals and the conduct of courses, it is noted that in other countries "programs to train instructors" and "publication of guidelines for instructors conducting courses" have been implemented. It is also noted that there are also those aimed at teachers and carers of disabled children, employees of public institutions (community centres, youth welfare institutions, etc.), librarians, schoolteachers and journalists (MIC 2022b: 99). Regarding the appointment of credible trainers, the report refers to the "Online Media Literacy Strategy" being promoted by the UK and cites measures to work with social media influencers to raise awareness among users (MIC 2022b: 100).

Finally, the report makes the following five recommendations for the medium- and long-term future.

- (1) Develop initiatives to realize a society in which ICT is used proficiently.
- (2) Initiatives involving multiple stakeholders.
- (3) Strengthen measures to improve Media and Information Literacy for a wide range of generations.
- (4) Providing environments and methods that are easily accessible to diverse audiences.
- (5) Providing data for course planners from SNS providers, etc.

The report highlights the importance of digital citizenship. It defines digital citizenship as "being able to find, access, use and create information effectively; engage with other users and

with content in an active, critical, sensitive and ethical manner; and navigate the online and ICT environment safely and responsibly, while being aware of one's own rights" (UNESCO 2013: 15).

It goes on to point out that "based on this concept, people will need to be able to learn, create and participate in society, using a variety of digital tools, such as information terminals, to collect and create information efficiently and at their own discretion" (MIC 2022b: 135).

Second, the report calls for a variety of actors, including academic and research institutions, non-profit organizations, and platformers, to be the main actors in implementing the course from different of perspectives, referring to precedents in other countries. Third, it calls for a wider range of generations to be targeted. Cases from Finland and the United Kingdom, for example, show that not only school education is targeted, but also a wide range of generations, including the elderly. Referring to the UK case, it points out the following. "In addition to the over 65s years of age, the list of groups to be considered who have difficulty accessing the Internet includes the disabled, children whose parents unduly restrict their use, those who lack available technology, and those with limited access to education, requiring a focus on individual characteristics other than generation" (MIC 2022b: 137).

Fourth, the report calls for the provision of implementation environments and methods that are accessible to diverse audiences. In other words, the report calls for the provision of methods that enable people from all over Japan, including towns and villages as well as urban areas, to have opportunities to learn Media and Information Literacy. Online learning platforms and information on teaching materials are available in many countries around the world, and similar measures are needed in Japan. On the other hand, the course should be offered in places and in ways that are familiar to those who have difficulty accessing it online, and SNS providers should provide data to course planners. In particular, the report points out that "it is desirable that data useful for understanding the actual situation be provided" (MIC2022b: 138).

Next, I will explain the educational material "How to Deal with the Internet - To Avoid Being Deceived by Disinformation and Misinformation" published by the MIC to raise awareness. It was developed with reference to the EU's "Recognizing and Combating Disinformation" (EU 2021). However, the content is an original teaching material by the Global Communication Center of the International University of Japan (GLOCOM), developed with reference to domestic surveys, educational content, and teaching materials (MIC 2022b: 112).

The learning objectives of this material are the following ten points:

1. Understand the characteristics of disinformation and misinformation.
2. Understand the types of misleading information.
3. Understand that you may be deceived and the reasons why you may be deceived.
4. Understand that disinformation is spread for the purpose of deceiving oneself.

5. Understand how believing or sharing disinformation can affect society and oneself.
6. Understand how algorithms affect what we see on the Internet.
7. Know what types of reliable sources of information are available.
8. Know how to verify information.
9. Know how to interact appropriately with information.
10. Understand the importance of distinguishing between fact and opinion and the diversity of opinions in the world.

As you can be seen from these learning objectives, this is essentially a learning experience about the characteristics of disinformation and how to verify information. The actual content of the material shows that learners will learn why they are deceived by disinformation and the consequences of being deceived, with explanations of terms such as filter bubble and deepfake. The learner then checks four things: is there a source for the information, is the source an expert in the field, what other sources say about the information, and is the image real? In addition, they are made aware that they may believe something just because they know it, that they may have questioned the table or graph, that they may have a motive for the information, and that they may have checked the results of the fact-checking. This material is designed to cover these topics in about 90 minutes (MIC 2022b: 114). Therefore, it can be said that the educational materials provided by the MIC are the minimum basic materials to be used when conducting courses at social education institutions in the future, as they provide a basic understanding of disinformation and how to confirm information using a checklist method.

Conclusion

So, does any ministry other than the MIC have a policy against disinformation and conspiracy theories? The National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of National Defense released its "China Security Report 2023" on November 25, 2022. It includes descriptions of Chinese propaganda and disinformation dissemination operations and cases in Taiwan but does not include cases in Japan (National Institute for Defense Studies 2022). In addition, the Working Group on Education and Human Resource Development of the Council for Science, Technology and Innovation released the "Policy Package on Education and Human Resource Development for the Realization of Society 5.0" in June 2022 (Cabinet Office 2020). This report clearly states the need for digital citizenship and media literacy education and that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is the ministry primarily responsible.

However, MEXT has not stated that it will implement digital citizenship or media literacy education. Until now, the Japanese school education system has neglected critical thinking and reproduced a conformist culture. The symbol of this is "moral education" as a school subject. The second Abe administration revised the courses of study in 2015, making moral education a

special subject, which means that morality must now be taught and assessed using textbooks such as Japanese and mathematics.

Information moral education, which teaches online morality, has been made part of the moral education curriculum. Information morality education is fear-based learning that teaches risks and discourages Internet use. However, on the other hand, each student will be given a tablet PC from FY2020, and remote teaching is required to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the traditional information and moral education had to change direction, but the MEXT was unable to do so. As a result, many local governments have introduced their own digital citizenship education policies. Moreover, the MIC is also trying to support these policies. However, right-wing politicians and experts who want to maintain conventional moral education oppose them. Thus, there are contradictions and conflicts within the Japanese government.

Without a policy to counter disinformation and conspiracy theories, democracies will have difficulty maintaining democracy, as evidenced by the situation in which Russia spreads state propaganda around the world. Policies that attempt to control the population through propaganda are bound to be contradictory. At first glance, the problem seems complex, but if democracy is the foundation of the state, the problem is simple. The question is simple: do we preserve and develop democracy, or do we abandon it and surrender to digital fascism? I believe that we also face a great challenge.

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