

Locus of Japan's Education Reform Through the International Baccalaureate in the Internationalization Attempts:

Literature Review of Studies on Internationalization and Education in Japan

Kazuaki IWABUCHI

This paper overviews Japan's education reform aiming at internationalization and situates the recent reform introducing the International Baccalaureate (IB) in it. To do so, this paper mainly relies on the survey of prior studies on the issue of internationalization and education in Japan. As a result, it identifies three different motives in internationalization. The first is derived from the political will to leverage power in the constellation of actors in a given internationalization attempt. Second, it also found economic reasons have close ties with the internationalization agenda. Finally, socio-demographic factors play a key role particularly on the side of individual schools. Based on this taxonomy of internationalization, this paper argues that the future study of Japan's IB reform could enrich the political aspect by offering an analysis of the interplay at work between the cabinet and MoE as well as shed light on the issue of equity, for the emphasis on thinking abilities in the IB reform might have an implication for narrowing the programmatic focus of Japan's education.

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, it is imperative for a country to adjust its education system to accommodate the rapid change. This is particularly eminent in the field of business and indeed the concerned stakeholders call for transformation of education to meet the demand of the globalized economy (Brown, Lauder, & Sung, 2015). In the

context of Japan, the government, backed up by the private sector, launched such an attempt utilizing the International Baccalaureate (IB), which is the focus of this research.

In 2011, the government of Japan declared the policy goal of establishing 200 IB schools in five years, seen as an overly ambitious goal, given the number of IB Diploma Program (DP) schools even in the entire Asia Pacific region was only 341 at that time (IBO, 2011). This reform was motivated by the concern over Japan's standing in the world after the lasting recession and increased economic competition across the globe. The reform aimed at producing human resources that can excel even in the challenging global environment, which they called "Global Human Resources (*Gurōbaru Jinzai*)" (Council on Promoting Production of Global Human Resources, 2012). The IB was adopted as one of the means of achieving this dream. In that sense, the reform corresponds to what Resnik (2012) describes. In referring to her previous studies (Resnik, 2008, 2009), she argues that "[t]he cognitive, emotional, sociocommunicative, and ethical dispositions fostered in the IB curriculum are similar to the skills needed to succeed in managerial positions in transnational corporations" (Resnik, 2012, p. 256). The reform of Japan can be considered an attempt to exploit this characteristic of

the IB.

However, a closer look at this reform reveals an irregularity. This reform was initiated not by the Ministry of Education (MoE)¹, even though the idea was exactly conceived by an affiliated civil servant. Instead, it was mainly councils placed under the cabinet that drove the reform, not the MoE.

This paper intends to situate this irregularity found in Japan's IB reform in a trajectory of its long-standing internationalization efforts through the survey of prior studies. The substantial body of this paper, therefore, is spent for classification of the studies, through which I aim to present multiple perspectives into Japan's IB reform. By doing so, at the end of this paper I identify which area is understudied and thereby highlight potential contributions that the future study of the IB reform can make to the scholarship on internationalization and education.

2. Overview of Japan's IB Reform

A. What is the International Baccalaureate?

Before delving into Japan's IB reform, here I provide a brief overview of the IB program. The IB was officially established in 1968² when the International Schools Examination Syndicate evolved into the International Baccalaureate Office based in Geneva, Switzerland (Bunnell, 2008; Resnik, 2012). One of the objectives for the founding was to provide an educational program for children of expatriates (particularly those who work in international organizations), who might need universally certified education because of their intermittent migration (Bunnell, 2008). This characterizes the IB's international orientation since its early period.

The IB consists of three different programs according to student age: the Primary Years Programmes (PYP) is for pupils at the age of 3-12; The Middle Years Programme (MYP) for students at the age of 11-16; Finally, the Diploma Programme (DP) for those at the age of 16-19. While the government of Japan introduces all these programs in the course of the IB reform, it places its primary emphasis on the DP. The DP offers six subjects: studies in language and literature, language acquisition, individuals and societies, sciences, mathematics, and the arts (IBO, n.d.-a). In addition, the DP requires three core elements to be completed: Theory of knowledge (TOK), the extended essay (EE), and creativity,

activity, and service (CAS) (IBO, n.d.-a).

Theory of knowledge (TOK) is a method of inquiry in understanding diverse topics. It is based on learning science, compiled as a textbook, and updated periodically (IBO, n.d.-f). TOK is formed as a series of questions, such as "How do we know?", or "What counts as evidence for X?" (IBO, n.d.-f, the section of How is TOK structured?). Using this theory, students attempt to compose the extended essay (EE), which is a research project requiring a 4,000-word paper (IBO, n.d.-e). Through these unique elements of learning, the IB is expected to inculcate a wide range of thinking abilities in students.

B. Japan's Education Reform Through the IB

Japan officially introduced the IB for internationalizing its education system since 2012³ and thus far established 92⁴ IB schools (IBO, n.d.-d). It is one of the 10 countries where the government financially supports the IB inception (IBO, n.d.-c). Figure 1 below disaggregates the number of schools by type of programs (PYP, MYP, and DP)⁵.

Among the three programs, the DP constitutes the largest part, followed by the PYP. Since the Council on Promoting Production of Global Human Resources called for the introduction of the IB into 200 schools in its final report in 2012, the number of IB schools gradually but steadily increased over the years.

The initial goal of launching 200 IB schools in five years was clearly not achieved. However, the deadline was extended to 2022 (Council on the Growth Strategy, 2021) to ensure the success of this decade-long initiative. From 2013, the MoE began the project of Dual Language DP with the partnership of the IBO (IBO, 2013). Based on this project, Japanese was approved as one of the official languages for the program, and some of the subjects, except for Language A and others, were allowed to be taught in Japanese. This was one of the measures that the government installed to help more schools adopt the IB. Despite the efforts, however, the majority of IB schools (86%) are private or non-Article 1 schools (IBO, n.d.-b), showing the difficulty of ordinary schools to be certified. Nevertheless, 14 public schools that successfully gained the label of the IB draw attention of media and parents, serving as a leader in each region, such as Hiroshima Global Academy, Osaka City Suito International School, and Sapporo Kaisei Secondary School, to name a few (Shibuya, 2019). While the government is striving to

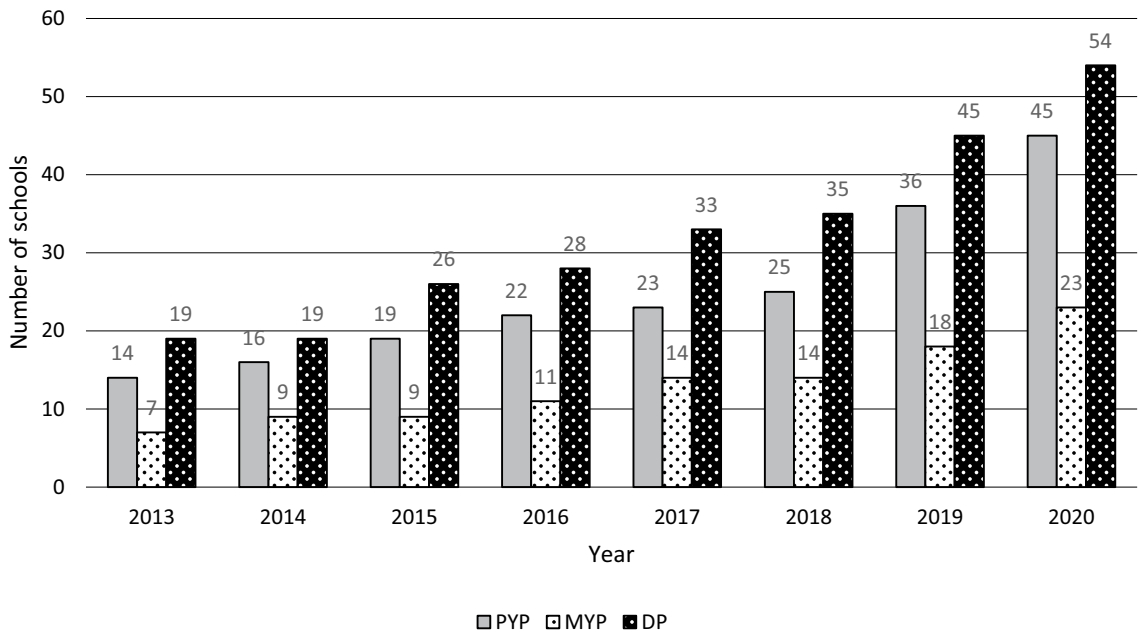


Figure 1

Number of IB Schools in Japan, 2013–2020

Source: IB Consortium (2021); MEXT (2019); Secretariat of the IB Consortium (2019).

Note. I retrieved the data points between 2013 and 2017 from MEXT (2019), those between 2018 and 2019 from Secretariat of the IB Consortium (2019), and those of 2020 from IB Consortium (2021).

expand the diversity of the geographical distribution of IB schools, metropolitan areas around Tokyo or Osaka attract more IB schools (as shown in Figure 2 below).

3. Japan's Internationalization Reform

In Japan, the introduction of the IB was driven primarily by the desire to produce human resources for global economic competition (Council on Promoting Production of Global Human Resources, 2011, 2012), which resonates with the global trend, such as what Resnik (2012) documents. However, as a non-Western country, Japan struggles in the issue of internationalization long before since early modern times. Therefore, the subsequent pages aim to trace Japan's long-standing attempts to westernize education, and to expound what internationalization means, particularly in the national/local context.

A. Semantics of Internationalization and Globalization

The very establishment of modern education system marks Japan's first attempt to *internationalize* its own schooling system. In earlier periods, therefore, internationalization primarily means modernization (*Kindaika*) and catch-up with the West (Goodman, 2007; Aspinall, 2012). Although the government prefers to use this word until 1970s, this word, *Kindaika*, ends up being replaced by a new word, internationalization (*Kokusaika*), because the society seems to have been enough modernized, and the rhetoric of modernization has become obsolete (Burgess et al., 2010; Goodman, 2007).

After experiencing the devastating economic recession in 1990s, however, yet another word, globalization (*Gurōbaruka*) appears in policy documents (Hashimoto, 2009) and produces numerous derivatives, such as *Gurōbaru Jinzai* (lit. global human resources). Hashimoto (2009) attributes to this change Japan's new attitude toward globalization. According to her analysis, policy documents

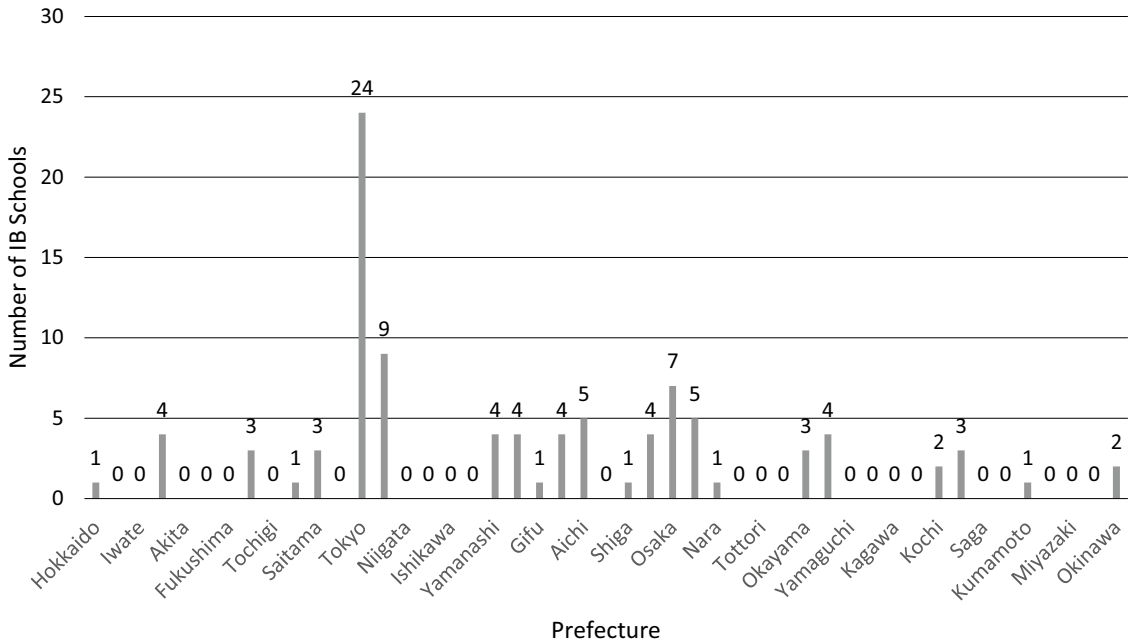


Figure 2

Number of IB Schools in Each Prefecture as of June 2021

Source: IB Consortium (2021).

Note. IB schools include all the schools offering at least one of the three types (PYP, MYP, DP), regardless of its status of being public/private/national, or non-/Article 1 schools.

tend to use the word of globalization when they describe uncontrollable external forces, whereas policymakers prefer to employ internationalization for illustrating Japan's strategic actions (Hashimoto, 2009; See also Iwabuchi, 2005). Although her analysis is valid and insightful, these concepts do not remain the same consistently. No more than two years after her analysis, do Yamagami and Tollefson (2011) point out that a novel mode of globalization discourses appears in Japanese university documents, which see globalization as an opportunity.

These lexical and semantic variations do not necessarily mean the chaos and unproductive nature of Japan's internationalization education reforms. On the contrary, as Goodman (2007) points out, this multiplicity promotes reforms because it enables actors to work collaboratively even when they have different agendas in mind. Therefore, in reviewing the concept of internationalization, it is important to note "in what context who is using the rhetoric, how and for what purpose" (Goodman, 2007, p. 86). With this

statement in mind, I overview Japan's internationalization reforms in the following subsections.

B. Multiplicity in Purposes: Political, Economic, and Socio-cultural Purposes

As shown above, internationalization (or globalization) contains different meanings in different policy documents, and for different actors. This multiplicity is partly caused by a variety of purposes that different actors seek. Based on prior studies over internationalization of education in Japan, I classify them into three broad categories: (i) political, (ii) economic, and (iii) socio-demographic purposes.

1. Internationalization as a Political Project.

A number of researchers point out a political will behind the slogan of internationalization (Hashimoto, 2000, 2009; Horie, 2002; Kawai, 2007; Liddicoat, 2007; Rivers, 2011). They argue that rather than being tolerant for foreign cultures, the government is indeed trying to disseminate its

own opinions and values abroad (Hashimoto, 2000, 2009). Hence, internationalization is not intended to change Japan, but to transform the *Other* so that they are able to accept Japan (Lincicome, 2005). Hashimoto (2000), for example, notes this attitude was prevalent in policy documents particularly in 1980s under the Nakasone cabinet, when Japan marked its economic success in the world.

Although Yamada (2010) notes a qualitative shift toward multiculturalism in English education after the economic recession in 1990s, Liddicoat (2007) and Rivers (2011) maintain that the nationalistic motivation is still at work even until after 2000s. I argue that it is simplistic to give a dichotomous label to this complex phenomenon. As Hashimoto (2009) clarifies, multiple modes might co-exist simultaneously: a nationalistic move, on one hand, and a need to open up, on the other. Particularly after 90s' decade-long recession, when Japan lost its national confidence, it increasingly faces this dilemma (Hashimoto, 2009; Burgess et al., 2010).

Besides the political will embraced by the government, McConnell (2000) describes politics among ministries. He studies the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (so-called, JET program), which recruits English native speakers as assistants for English courses in Japanese public schools. As McConnell (2000) argues, the program is possible because it serves as a common ground where different actors achieve different goals. These actors include the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), and the Ministry of Education (MoE). The MoE, of course, tries to provide a higher level of English education through this program, and MoHA wishes to increase Japanese everyday contacts with foreigners, whereas MoFA looks forward to raising future elites of foreigners who might support Japan once they finish their job as an English assistant (McConnell, 2000). Regarding the IB reform, it is the similar mechanism at interplay not among ministries but between the cabinet and MoE that the future study needs to shed light on.

2. Economic Incentives. It is difficult to sort a variety of purposes of internationalization neatly in a chronological manner, because they coincide with one another during the same periods. However, it is highly probable that after 1990s, when Japan suffers from the lingering recession, there occurred large-scale social changes. It is at that time that the

demand to take actions to recover from the economic devastation loomed, particularly from the business sector.

Against this backdrop, internationalization of education became more closely linked to economic rationales. In addition, as Yonezawa and Yonezawa (2016) argue, since 90s numerous major corporations in Japan move headquarters and factories to abroad, which require Japanese workforces, particularly at the management level to be able to function even in foreign environments.

This call from the business sector is reflected in policy documents particularly from 2010s (e.g., Council on Promoting Production of Global Human Resources, 2011, 2012). Indeed, a number of researchers note the emergence of a word, *Gurōbaru Jinzai* (lit. global human resources) in more and more white papers and observe the link between international education and economic incentives being strengthened (Ishikawa, 2014; Tsuneyoshi, 2019; Yonezawa & Yonezawa, 2016). Arguably, this also had strong repercussions for the IB reform.

3. Socio-demographic Forces. Lastly, social forces also play a significant role in promoting internationalization of education. Among internationalization reforms, English education has been one of the major focal points. Terasawa (2012) highlights how macro social changes led to the spread of English education and made it a de facto mandatory requirement in junior high schools in 1950s and 60s. The MoE was initially against any initiative to make English as a dominant language in schools (Terasawa, 2012). However, English education ended up widely spreading in junior high schools, mainly because of macro-structural factors, such as: high schools (and later, universities) decided to use English for entrance exams; baby boomers were supplied as human resources that took up the role of teachers (Terasawa, 2012). I argue that these two factors, demographic on one hand, and selection on the other, should still play a key role in internationalization reforms even until now.

Goodman (2007), from a different perspective, describes how a demographic change is related with attempts of internationalization by higher education institutions. Universities in Japan suffer from the decreasing number of students because of the low birth rate and reduction in the number of children. This change poses threats particularly for universities at lower tiers, and private ones that cannot receive as much subsidy as prestigious national universities, and that

rely on student tuition as their major financial sources (Goodman, 2007). In other words, Goodman (2007) shows that those universities receive international students as a survival strategy in response to the demographic change. This perspective is insightful particularly in probing motives of individual schools (or universities) toward the IB reform.

C. Curricular Reforms since 1980s

Thus far, I summarize different factors that promote Japan's internationalization reforms. In this subsection, I pay particular attention to post-war curricular reforms in Japan's education. Those reforms encompass larger changes in education, and hence constitute the policy background affecting internationalization reforms.

The importance of examining curricular reforms lies in the status of the national curriculum in Japan. The MoE of Japan issues the Curriculum Guidelines (*Gakushū Shidō Yōryō*), which roughly stipulate what students should learn in each grade from elementary schools until high schools. These guidelines cover each of the subjects, as well as present an overarching principle in learning and instruction. Rather than simply a tool for the government to communicate with schools, teachers, and students, those guidelines legally bound both public and private schools as long as they are Article 1 schools⁶, which are allowed to receive subsidy from the government.

At every important shift in education policy, the government revises the guidelines. After the WWII, the MoE revised the national curriculum at least nine times: in 1947, 51, 61, 71, 80, 92, 2002, 2011, and 2020⁷. Among these, this section pays particular attention to the revisions after 80s.

Facing the successful launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union, the MoE attempted to respond to the shock by updating the content of STEM education and by instilling the longest hours of instruction since the WWII. However, in the revision of 1980, the MoE decided to reduce the hours of instruction for the first time in the post-war history. This was the MoE's strategy to deal with disorder in schooling system appearing since 1970s, while the country was rapidly developing, and the competition for school entrance was intensifying. During this period, the number of school violence, bullying, and youth suicide rate all increased, and failure of schools was singled out as one of the causes (Kariya, 1995). Therefore, the MoE, with the intention to deal with these problems, provided room for

students by cutting down the hours of instruction and the number of curricular contents they are supposed to master. Since 1980 until 2000s, when Japan experienced another shock (so-called, the PISA shock) (Takayama, 2008), this trend to reduce instruction hours persisted, which is called *Yutori Kyōiku* (relaxing education).

In considering internationalization reforms, this radical transformation of Japan's education has a crucial implication. According to Kariya (2019), Japan's education policy from 80s is an attempt not only for introducing room (*Yutori*), but also for cultivating student thinking ability and creativity. In 1984, Prime Minister Nakasone formed a council to innovate Japan's education, as one of his efforts to devise Japan's next goal, when it seemed that Japan had already fulfilled its long-held ambition to catch up with the West (at least GDP-wise), and therefore they needed a new momentum as a nation. Curricular reforms since 80s, therefore, are attempts to raise human resources that are able to think by themselves to pursue new goals for the nation (Kariya, 2019). When emphasizing the strength of the IB in inculcating thinking abilities, indeed this agenda might operate behind its claim. While that emphasis, as Resnik (2012) argues, might be linked with an economic motive, it is important not to overlook this curricular path-dependency particularly in the context of Japan.

4. Conclusion: Locating the IB Reform in Japan's Internationalization Efforts

Thus far, this paper overviews Japan's education reform employing the IB and examines its prior internationalization measures. In addition, I also underscore curricular reforms in parallel with these attempts. Eventually the series of reforms to innovate education came to a halt due to the break of bubble economy and subsequent recession persisting in 1990s. However, policymakers kept embracing the desire to change education, even after *yutori* education was completely overthrown in 2011. The IB reform constitutes part of the sustained efforts, as can be seen in policy documents legitimizing the incorporation of the IB into the national education system by emphasizing the utility of the IB in cultivating thinking abilities and thereby complementing the national curriculum (for example, Shotō chūtō kyōiku ni okeru kyōiku katei no kijuntō no arikata ni tsuite [Shimon] in 2014). Internationalization reforms

(particularly, introduction of IB schools) could be an attempt to complete a domestic mission to install a new mode of education that policymakers have dreamed since 1980s.

This pedagogical project, however, needs to be understood from diverse perspectives regarding its purposes. As documented above, internationalization reforms encompass political, economic, and socio-demographic motives. Policy documents indeed justify the inception of the IB for its benefit in producing global human resources (*Gurōbaru Jinzai*). Furthermore, the IB can also prepare future elites for spreading Japan's national agenda or attract foreign students to fill in the lack of students and tuition revenue. Hence, it is important to clarify who possesses what purpose in advancing the IB reform, following Goodman's (2007) precept.

In doing so, I argue, there are two issues worth particular attention but with little focus in prior studies on internationalization. First, it is not only the MoE but also the cabinet that is the main advocate for the IB reform. As mentioned above, the MoE was characterized by its conservative nature, sometimes rejecting alien ideas for changing education (e.g., English education) (Terasawa, 2012). If the MoE follows the inertia to maintain the national education as it is, it is an external actor that needs to be in charge of the project of internationalizing the system, and the cabinet seems to fulfill this position.

The second aspect is linked to the side effect of *yutori* education. By emphasizing the room for students, in fact, the curricular reforms might have led to leaving behind students with hardships in learning. In other words, rather than forcing every student to commit themselves to studying, the government might have shifted its focus to those who are able to study, while letting those who reject study (and often resort to delinquent behaviors) do what they want. Hence, this implies a fundamental shift in the underlying philosophy of public education of Japan. It is against this backdrop that the IB reform needs to be comprehended. In the future study of the IB reform, these two issues, that is, the politics between the cabinet and MoE and the issue of equity need to be further explored. By doing so, I argue, it can provide broader perspectives into studies on internationalization and education.

Notes

1. In Japan, the official name of the Ministry of Education is "the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology", and thereby the MEXT is used as its abbreviated name. However, this study calls it the Ministry of Education (MoE) to avoid confusion for international audience.
2. Bunnell (2008) identifies 1967 as a year of establishment based on his claim that the experiment of providing international education was finally put into practice in that year.
3. In fact, the idea of using the IB as a policy solution had existed since 2009. The Council on Promoting Production of Global Human Resources included this in the interim report in 2011. The official beginning of the reform, however, was placed even later when the final report from the council was approved by the cabinet meeting in 2012.
4. As of August 2021. This number includes non-Article 1 schools, which are not officially recognized as schools by the government of Japan (such as international schools for expatriates).
5. While the school level in Japan consists of six-year elementary, three-year lower secondary, and three-year upper secondary education, some of the schools integrate different levels, offering nine-year, or six-year education. As a result, the sum of the three different programs does not correspond to the actual number of IB schools in Japan.
6. This article is in the School Education Law (*Gakkō Kyōiku Hō*).
7. Since the revision process usually takes around 3 years, followed by another 3 years of announcement and piloting, the years indicated here are those when implementation began. The revisions of 1956, 2003, and 2018 are not included, because of the extent of revisions being only minor and incremental.

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(Advisor: Professor Ryoko TSUNEYOSHI)

