



REFRAMING *FUTŌKŌ*
(SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE) IN JAPAN
– A SOCIAL MOVEMENT PERSPECTIVE

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines *futōkō* (school non-attendance) in Japan from the perspective that *futōkō* is a social movement. It analyses citizens' activism in support of *futōkō* students over the twenty year period from 1984. Drawing upon social movement approaches the thesis examines how *futōkō* citizens successfully grasped political opportunities, established a network of organizations, launched a new interpretive frame for *futōkō*, and challenged the dominant representation of *futōkō* in society – that '*futōkō* is an illness'. To explore in detail the ideological aspect of the *futōkō* movement's framing, a content analysis of 140 editorials in the movement newspaper – the *Futōkō Shimbun* (School Non-attendance Newspaper) was conducted. Commencing with a critique of schooling practices that create *futōkō*, over the survey period *Futōkō Shimbun* expands its analysis to develop a critical appraisal of Japanese society that has broad implications for many different aspects of the everyday life of its citizens.

Adopting the typology of movement outcomes, this thesis assesses the outcomes of *futōkō* movement framing through two sets of factors: first, changes in government policies and attitudes and second, cultural and ideational changes as experienced by the movement organizations, *futōkō* activists and children, and as represented in shifts in media representation of *futōkō*. Government policies in the handling of *futōkō* students have become more flexible although not always positive, while government interactions with the movement are suggestive of recognition that *futōkō* citizens are valid spokespersons with a legitimate set of interests in relation to *futōkō* children. *Futōkō* movement activists have been successful in framing their movement in terms of: expanding and increasingly sophisticated networks of *futōkō* movement organizations; the professional development of activists; and a more positive media discourse.

The thesis concludes that the *futōkō* movement has influenced government policies, the media and wider social commentary about the phenomenon of and responses to *futōkō*. The thesis contends that the social movement perspective enables us to understand the issue of *futōkō* beyond the educational context, in its wider social, cultural and political contexts.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any others degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for photocopying and loan, subject to the provision of the Copyright Act 1968.

SIGNED: _____

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Notes on Style

Japanese names are written in Japanese style, with family names first followed by given names.

Quotations of works published in Japanese, including data and information acquired from Japanese language websites and the *Futōkō Shimbun* (the School Non-Attendance Newspaper), the raw material on which the major part of this thesis is based, are translated by the author unless otherwise specified.

The words '*futōkō*' and '*tōkōkyōhi*' have been preserved in the text because they have some specific features which distinguish them from the English words 'school refusal', or 'school phobia' (see Chapter 1). Also, Japanese words are either used or referred to when they are regarded as key words in the Japanese discourse on education and sociology, or when the Japanese expression carries a special nuance which is difficult to convert in full into English, for example, '*kokoro*', '*ibasho*', '*jūmin undō*', '*shimin undō*' etc. Likewise, names of Japanese organizations, for example, '*Oya no Kai*', '*Kibō no kai*', and '*Tōkyō Shūre*', as well as titles of Japanese publications, for example, the '*Futōkō Shimbun*', have been preserved with translation in English provided whenever these terms first appear or reappear when deemed necessary for the convenience of readers. Some translations are official translations but others are the author's own translations.

Japanese words are rendered in the style of Hepburn romanization and italicized, with macrons indicating long vowels, for example, 'ō' as in '*futōkō*'. However, macrons are not used for Japanese words of places that are familiar to English readers, for example, Tokyo.