

## **Creating a School on Television: A Study of NHK *Chugakusei Nikki*<sup>1</sup>**

Lingwei Wang  
Graduate School of Education  
Kyoto University

### **1. Introduction**

After the post-war economic miracle, Japan stepped into a high consumption society. With the coming of the affluent society, school problems became an educational issue of great concern. For example, in the era<sup>2</sup> called the third wave of juvenile delinquency, school-bashing was popular in public discourse and juvenile problems set off panic. Now mass media, especially the news media, was said to construct such discomfoting and misleading images in the specific social context. (eg. Hiroda, 2001; Hiroda & Ito, 2010; Okabe & Kobayashi, 2010)

In addition to the school full of troubled students depicted by news media, there is another image of the school created by television, which is almost ignored in the nowadays academic world. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate the importance of noticing a TV program, NHK *Chugakusei Nikki* (*Junior High School Diaries*). It aimed to portray a school community consisting of “ordinary” students, provided a place for different educational discourse and gained much support during the last three decades of the 20th century, when television was popularized rapidly and became influential in Japan<sup>3</sup>.

To do so, firstly a brief overview of the TV program will be given; then the necessity of studying *NHK Chugakusei Nikki* will be explained; in the final part of the paper, a case study analyzing this TV program and comparing it with two national newspapers on the issues of juvenile delinquency will be introduced.

### **2. Brief Overview of NHK *Chugakusei Nikki***

*Chugakusei Nikki* was an educational drama series<sup>4</sup> produced by Nagoya Broadcasting Station and aired on NHK nationally from 1972 to 2012, lasting for four decades. It was first broadcasted on NHK General TV until it transferred to NHK Educational TV in 2003. The program asked actual junior high school students living in Nagoya to play out real-life issues they were facing and sometimes provided hints on how to deal with these issues<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, it is also said that *Chugakusei Nikki* was neither a documentary nor a drama (Nozato, 1986), and neither fiction nor nonfiction<sup>6</sup> (Takahata, 2007).

Since played every Sunday afternoon, *Chugakusei Nikki* was famous as a program watched at home by teenagers companioned with their parents<sup>7</sup> (Narita, 2000). Also, it was in use by PTA<sup>8</sup>,

social educational facilities such as TV seminars especially in the 1970s<sup>9</sup>, and school's moral classes according to the ministry's study conducted in the late 1990s (Higashi, 2007: 43).

Although NHK does not care much about audience ratings, *Chugakusei Nikki* got a high rating<sup>10</sup> as a program broadcasted from 1:00 pm to 1:30 pm on Sunday. Additionally, based on the program, numerous book series have been published. During the 1970s and the 1980s, NHK *Books Junior* published almost all the related books. Then in the 1990s, several publishing houses such as *Kodansha*, *Popular Publishing* began to buy the copyright and especially the *Popular Publishing*, a teenagers' book publisher, published a series of 35 books from 1993 to 1996.

As an NHK program lasting for four decades, *Chugakusei Nikki* has won many awards<sup>11</sup> both domestically and internationally, reviewed as “a struggle to reform and revive school and family education systems in Japan<sup>12</sup>”. Besides, according to the National Diet Record, *Chugakusei Nikki* was mentioned 19 times, for it belongs to those programs produced in local TV station (3 times), investigated educational problems actively (7 times) and became the first group of programs carrying subtitles in NHK in 1993 (3 times). The comments are comparatively positive. However, one recommendation also implies that it was not so popular among teenagers despite its high quality. (Hatta Hiroko, 2001)

### **2-1. *Chugakusei Nikki* and *Chugakusei (Junior High School Students)***

The direct predecessor of *Chugakusei Nikki*, NHK *Chugakusei Gunzou (Groups of Junior High School Students)*, is also an educational TV drama series about junior high school life. It started in 1969. At that time, producers in charge of *Chugakusei Gunzou* received a large number of letters from its audience, one of whom is a junior high school student. From his or her letters, the producers found that there existed a gap between what was happening in schools and the program. To eliminate the gap, the producers began doing interview all over Japan. Then they changed to focus on only one student in place of a group in each episode. In this way, *Chugakusei Nikki* was born in 1972.

It is essential to understand the relation between *Chugakusei Nikki* and *Chugakusei*. On the one hand, as indicated from the afterword of the first volume of *Chugakusei Nikki book series* written by its former producer Mitsukaichi (1973), the program was planned to let students think about the complex social environment around them and always be faithful to their heart. However, on the other hand, it is clear that in *Chugakusei Nikki*, teenagers' images were purposely created as a reflection of “adult society” and such images was mainly<sup>13</sup> intended for adults according to the former producers' round-table discussion record<sup>14</sup>.

January 18, 2012, NHK Nagoya Broadcasting Station officially announced that the long-lasting program will end its run in the same year and that the last episode named “*life*” would be played on March 16. About this, chief producer Takizawa (2012) mentioned: “Attracting teenager audience

became one of our missions after transferring to Educational TV, but it could hardly work out despite many trials and errors.” It is clear that *Chugakusei Nikki* kept low ratings after being renewed in 2003 because it could not get much support from teenagers.

From above, we can infer that though *Chugakusei Nikki* is categorized as a “teenager educational program” by NHK, actually its function was initially beyond teenager education and became a kind of education for adults. However, eventually the program was moved into Educational TV and became a teenager-intended one, which made the program lose its former influence.

## 2-2. *Chugakusei Nikki* as a Communication Place

This subsection aims to show the function of NHK *Chugakusei Nikki* as a communication place. The program has been focusing on ordinary students and providing educational topics. It is not a one-way communication medium but a medium open for the public from its early stage.

In 1972, the first scriptwriter of *Chugakusei Nikki*, Onishi Nobuyuki (1972) said to *NHK Graph* as below. He also emphasized the significance of audience’s letters.

“I think it is possible to say that the program was born from the audience’s letters (emphasis added). Although nearly half of them are fan letters, the others are from both male and female, at different age groups, and doing various jobs. For example, a junior high school student wrote the whole story to us of an incident that occurred in his or her class; a teacher pointed out what was wrong with the educational administration; we even received advice from a 77-year-old man or woman recently.”(Onishi, 1972)

Moreover, *NHK Graph* published some letters in July 1972. Here are some examples. It shows that in most cases, *Chugakusei Nikki* mainly played a part in raising issues rather than giving solutions and suggestions directly, which opened a space for further discussion.

“*Chugakusei Nikki* raises common issues, and lets us think and sympathize with those issues. When watching with my family, it also serves as a trigger for unexpected topics. I think it would be better if adding some discussion parts to the program.”(“*How about holding a discussion*”, a student)

“I would appreciate it if *Chugakusei Nikki* could tell me at least a clue to solve those problems.”(“*Tell me a clue*”, 19 years old)

Ichikawa (1999), one of the producers of *Chugakusei Nikki* wrote for *Seika*’s<sup>15</sup> special column talking about the risk that TV and broadcasting were facing and media’s future<sup>16</sup>. She took

*Chugakusei Nikki* as an example for thinking about broadcasting's future image, since the program made bidirectional communication possible between the producer and audience according to her article. In Ichikawa's opinion, *Chugakusei Nikki* was special because firstly, it focused on ordinary students and their daily life rather than sensational things which tend to attract attention; secondly, actual junior high school students took active parts in the production process. She considered these two features of great significance for TV and broadcasting in digital times.

From above, we can infer that the communication style in *Chugakusei Nikki* was unique for its emphasizing the participation of ordinary people and depicting real school life<sup>17</sup>. In other words, *Chugakusei Nikki* was at least, planned to serve as a communication place for teenagers, its producers, parents, teachers and other people interested in school education issues.

### **3. Literature Review**

This section aims to review previous studies of educational discourse in Japan, explain why there are few studies about educational TV programs and finally clarify the significance of this study. The paper contends that academic attention should be paid to various forms of media besides news media though it is nearly a consensus that: firstly, school-bashing and the excessive concern over juvenile delinquency were socially constructed; secondly, news media played a significant role in the constructing process as a claim maker.

#### **3-1. Studies on Educational Discourse in Japan**

In Japan, Hiroda's (2001) discussion on the transformation of the educational discourse from the 1950s to the 1990s is widely accepted. According to his historical study mainly based on newspapers and public documents, the social image of the school changed a lot during the 1970s. As the so-called affluent society came, the school was no longer a place of hope which was able to solve problems, contribute to society and bring about happiness. In other words, the school finally lost its cultural function to dominate the community and parents. Consequently, the school began to be seen as a problem in the early 1980s (Hiroda, 2001; 284).

In the same book, Hiroda (2001) also argues that the generally-accepted idea that "juvenile crimes are getting serious" is a misunderstanding of reality by comparing the official statistics and media discourse. Besides, some researches on juvenile delinquency (Okabe& Kobayashi, 2010) and school bullying (Ito, 2014) also consider media discourse as involving a misunderstanding or distortion of social reality.

Recently, Kitazawa (2017) criticizes such studies that aimed at verifying whether a type of discourse, in most cases, the news discourse is real or not in a literature review. Based on a social constructionism theory (Spector, M. & J. I. Kitsuse, 1977), he advocates that discourse from individuals and institutions that even have a conflict of interest should also be analyzed. Several

studies about school bullying (Yamamoto, 1996; Mayama, 2011; Kitazawa, 2015) and school refusal (Seto, 2001; Yamada, 2002) are listed by Kitazawa (2017) to show the applicability of this theory.

Kitazawa's (2017) argument reveals the diversity of educational discourse, but he has not applied it well to media study yet in his review. In other words, he pays little attention to the diversity of discourse from various media which are thought to play similar roles in the process of social construction.

### **3-2. Significance of Studying NHK *Chugakusei Nikki***

The limitation among studies mentioned above is that they took it for granted that there is a sum of discourse from various media despite the existence of different discourse spaces where discourse counters each other. We may consider media as discursive machinery that produces, reproduces and transforms social phenomena. Bringing this viewpoint into the analysis of educational discourse in Japan, we can say that it is meaningful to notice discourse spaces apart from news media to better understand the dynamics of discourse on school problems in modern Japan.

The background that television was popularized rapidly and went into families in the 1970s is also essential here. Television, inferred from McLuhan's famous saying "the medium is the message" (1967), differs from print media in many aspects, for example, television makes "average people now have access to social information that once was not available to them" (Meyrowitz, 1985; 322). Taking this into consideration, it is necessary to focus on television programs especially in modern Japan. Additionally, as mentioned above (in section 2), NHK *Chugakusei Nikki* served as a communication place more accessible to ordinary people. It indicates that the discourse space of *Chugakusei Nikki* was typical and possible to be entirely different from that of news media.

From the 1970s, the foundations for the existence of the school system began to be shaken and lose its sense of identity (Inagaki, 2004). At the same time, school problems came under the spotlight in Japanese society. In such circumstances, the new identity of school has been asked in public discourse. In this paper, I conducted a case study of *Chugakusei Nikki* on the issue of juvenile delinquency to get a better understanding of the program and the dynamics of educational discourse.

## **4. Case Study**

In this section, a case study of juvenile delinquents<sup>18</sup> portrayed in *Chugakusei Nikki* from the 1970s to the 1980s is conducted. Through the case, we can find that *Chugakusei Nikki* tried to control the moral panic<sup>19</sup> towards delinquent juveniles, which is thought to be brought about by mass media (Murakami, 1985).

Juvenile delinquents are usually defined as minors who have committed some act that violates the law, but in NHK *Chugakusei Nikki* the word was used to describe the teenagers who committed violence, shoplifting, bicycle theft, running away from home and so on<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, this case study

will include all these juvenile problems mentioned above.

#### **4-1. Background**

During the period from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, the number of juvenile arrests is said to have reached the third peak<sup>21</sup> in postwar Japan. Since this peak, juvenile delinquency has attracted considerable attention because people started to realize that juvenile delinquents may come from ordinary middle-class families (Murakami, 1985). In the 1980s, juvenile delinquencies were related to the delinquents' family environment and especially the mothers were blamed for the negligence of child care in newspapers (Ohba, 2010). Looking over newspapers at that time, we can easily find headlines such as "Juvenile Delinquency, the Worst Situation Ever" and coverages about the problem. In the meantime, *Chugakusei Nikki* also considered "juvenile delinquency" as an important agenda.

#### **4-2. Method**

The findings are mainly based on the program's information (from 1977 to 1989) gathered from a magazine called *Hoso Kyoiku (Broadcast Education)*. In the meanwhile, I also gathered data from book series *Chugakusei Nikki*, videos and articles written by the TV program's staffs.

The method used to analyze the contents was discourse analysis and historical approach. It means that the strategies to generate discourse and the representation of practices through discourse were used in the case study. Also, as I conduct the study mainly by comparing historical statistics about an old drama series, so I call the qualitative method a historical approach.

Also, school year (from April 1<sup>st</sup> to the following March 31<sup>st</sup>) is widely used in the case study. For example, the period from April 1<sup>st</sup> 1972 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 1973 is taken as 1972 in the case.

Questions were put forward as below.

1. How did *Chugakusei Nikki* portray "juvenile delinquents" from the 1970s to the 1980s? Is there any transformation of the images?
2. What was *Chugakusei Nikki's* attitude towards "juvenile delinquents"? Inferring from the attitude, what role *Chugakusei Nikki* aimed to play at that time?

#### **4-3. Images of Juvenile Delinquents in *Chugakusei Nikki***

According to the changes of the school's name and teachers' role play, the period (from 1972.4 to 1989.3) can be divided into two parts.

From 1972 to 1981, the stories happened in a fictitious school called Tounan Junior High School<sup>22</sup>.

Juvenile delinquency has not been the center of attention in the 1970s. On the contrary, the examination or evaluation system was given the highest priority in the program. About juvenile delinquency, there were only ten episodes<sup>23</sup> broadcasted in the 1970s that can be found in *Hoso Kyoiku* and book series. Among them, a "good child" (the victim) always played a leading role and

stories were developed from the viewpoint of how to deal with violence in their class.

Then, there is an extreme increase in episodes about “why and how teenagers turned to delinquency” in 1980. As for the causes of juvenile delinquency, firstly, psychological changes in adolescence; secondly, being invited by bad guys; thirdly, the irresponsibility of the parents; fourth, the irresponsibility of teachers, are represented this year. In 1981, the program portrayed girls’ delinquency and the causes are said to be “the absence of the father” or “being spoiled by parents”. The other two episodes mentioning delinquency this year mainly focused on teenagers’ views on friendship, moral and responsibility.

From the above, it is clear that in this period (1972~1981), attention was mainly paid on the dangerousness of violence and the countermeasures against it when discussing juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, the causes of delinquency were pointed out to be psychological changes in adolescence, being invited by bad guys, or the irresponsibility of the parents and teachers.

In April 1982, the school’s name changed to be Meihou Junior High School<sup>24</sup>. For the eight years since then, it is clear that there was a general pattern in the way of depicting delinquency problems, which is different from that before 1982.

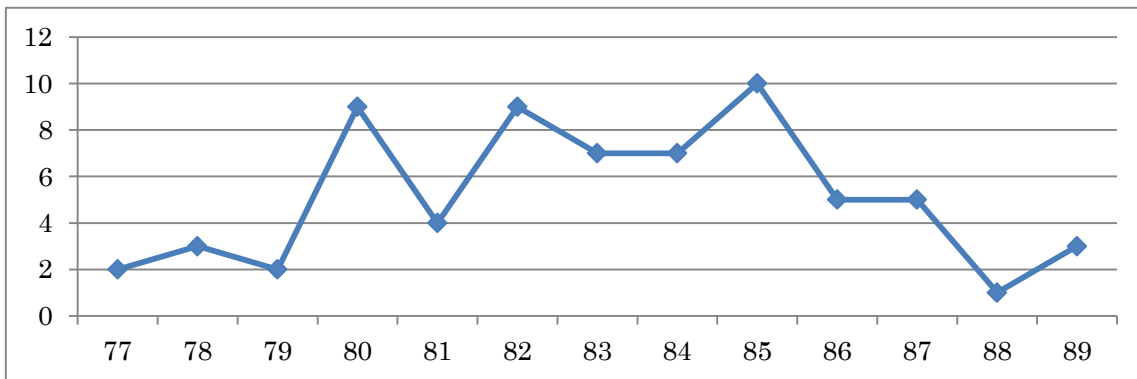
First of all, it was pointed out that parents and teachers were mainly responsible for juvenile delinquency. Then the program began to emphasize on juvenile delinquents’ “human” side. Specifically, despite these girls or boys behaved badly in the class and did badly in exams, they were good at sports or could be so-called good students if they tried their best. Moreover, *Chugakusei Nikki*’s viewpoint then shifted from juvenile delinquents to those around them (e.g. parents, teachers and their friends). In other words, parents, teachers and students were depicted to help juvenile delinquents “recover” in most episodes.

All in all, from 1982 to 1989, the program conveyed that not only the juvenile delinquents but also adults should take on the responsibility, and juvenile problems would be got rid of by their effort or surrounding people’s help.

#### **4-4. Analysis and Comparison**

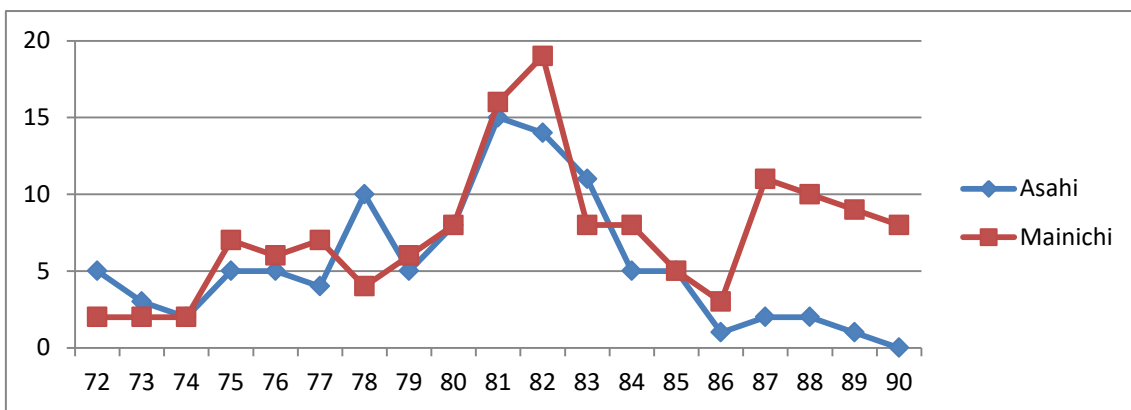
There are two tendencies in *Chugakusei Nikki* that can be inferred from the changes of juvenile delinquents’ image, which answered the first question.

A. Juvenile delinquency was not considered essential at first, but it increased in the early 1980s and then decreased in the latter half of the 1980s (see Graph 1).



[Graph 1: Number of Episodes about Juvenile Delinquency in *Chugakusei Nikki*]

The social concern about juvenile delinquency problems shown in Graph 2 may explain the tendency. From the number of news reports on juvenile delinquency problem, we can infer that juvenile delinquency attracted great social attention, especially in the early 1980s. It means *Chugakusei Nikki* had a similar agenda to newspapers but showed a steadier tendency<sup>25</sup>.



[Graph 2: Number of Newspaper Report about Juvenile Delinquency in the Asahi Shimbun and the Mainichi Shimbun]

**B.** Before 1982, the so-called "good child" (the victim of delinquency) played a leading role, and the stories were about how to deal with violence and the dangerousness of delinquent behaviors. However, after 1982, the juvenile delinquents and the people who were willing to help them began to be the center of the story.

This change of tendency in *Chugakusei Nikki's* representation is different from that in news media according to the previous study. For example, Ohba (2010) indicates that after 1984, juvenile delinquents were reported to be ordinary teenagers and the school, their parents and even themselves was to blame in newspapers.

About this transformation, Takashima (1982), producer of the program, explained as below.



Criticism always came that such serious problems depicted in the program would not happen in reality. However, now it seems that the juvenile problems are becoming more and more severe in the real world than its portrayal on TV. The criticism has appeared that there is nothing so sweet in reality. Anyway, *Chugakusei Nikki* is a drama based on audience's opinions and the opposite ones.<sup>26</sup> (Takashima, 1982)

It indicates that since 1982 when juvenile delinquency became a social problem, the purpose of *Chugakusei Nikki* had been to play a role in dealing with the panic. According to an opinion poll<sup>27</sup> on juvenile delinquency in 1983, 87% thought that juvenile delinquency was a severe problem; especially many mentioned: "the number of cases that involves teens at early ages increased" (54%). Taking the results into consideration, we may say that the program was produced to manage the moral panic by emphasizing on parents and teachers' responsibility and their ability to manage juvenile delinquency. The program also attempted to remove labels of "juvenile delinquents" from teens who misbehaved.

Additionally, an episode talking about a panic due to mass media broadcasted in 1986 may support the conclusion drawn above. Here is the program information about it in *Hoso Kyoiku* (1986.05).

Recently, a bullying case in Aisei Junior High School has been highly reported by mass media. (After an incident,) a group of students in Aisei Junior High School hit some students from Meihou Junior High School. As soon as mass media knew the incident, they all rushed to Meihou Junior High School and reported that "bullying also happened in Meihou".

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In the meanwhile, the students in Meihou Junior High School started to discuss what TV means for them when they are taken a shot of and represented on TV.

From this scene it can be inferred that *Chugakusei Nikki* showed a critical attitude towards news media's fascination with juvenile delinquency and it tried to equip students with media literacy.

## **5. Conclusion and Future Directions for Research**

In this report, a case study of the portrayal of juvenile delinquents in an NHK television program called *Chugakusei Nikki* was conducted. As it indicates, the disagreement existed between news media and *Chugakusei Nikki*, and between audience's sentiment and *Chugakusei Nikki* on the issue of juvenile delinquency after it became a critical social issue. It shows *Chugakusei Nikki's* aim to manage panics beyond providing information.

Not only does the program reflect how the viewpoint of education changed from the 1970s to 2010s, but also itself plays a vital role as a type of media or a discourse space. Therefore, the characteristic

of *Chugakusei Nikki* as a medium remained to be discussed. Moreover, as a program produced by a local broadcast station, *Chugakusei Nikki* is said to be supported by the local community. So it is also significant to discuss the connection between the program and the local community.

## Acknowledgments

This research was supported by NHK Archives' Trial Research for Academics.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> It means "Junior High School Diaries" in English.

<sup>2</sup> The concern for juvenile delinquency reached a peak from the late 1970s to the early 1980s.

<sup>3</sup> See Sato Takumi (2008: 148).

<sup>4</sup> *Chugakusei Nikki* was categorized to "educational program--teenager program" according to *The NHK Yearbook*.

<sup>5</sup> See the introduction of *Chugakusei Nikki* in *The NHK Yearbook 1974*.

<sup>6</sup> Round-table discussion, <https://www.nhk.or.jp/archives/search/special/detail/?d=youth019>.

<sup>7</sup> See Narita, K. (2000). Recommendation for Home Viewing: How to use *Chugakusei Nikki*. *Broadcasting Education*, Vol. 55(4), pp. 18-19.

<sup>8</sup> Parent-teacher association, is a formal organization composed of parents, teachers and staff that is intended to facilitate parental participation in a school.

<sup>9</sup> Several essays about the TV seminal are published on *Social Education* (1972.10; 1978.08; 1979. 11.).

<sup>10</sup> 4% to 5% on average when it was broadcasted on NHK General TV according to The NHK monthly report on broadcast research.

<sup>11</sup> For example, NHK President Award (1978), Pestalozzi Education Award (1996) by Hiroshima University, International Emmy Kids Award (2013) and so on.

<sup>12</sup> See Pestalozzi Education Award: Introduction of the Award Winner,

[https://www.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/system/files/24832/%E5%8F%97%E8%B3%9E%E8%80%85%E7%B4%B9%E4%B8%8B%EF%BC%88%E7%AC%AC5%E5%9B%9E%E8%A1%A8%E5%BD%B0%E5%BC%8F%E3%83%91%E3%83%B3%E3%83%95%E3%83%AC%E3%83%83%E3%83%88%E6%8A%9C%E7%B2%8B%EF%BC%89\\_0.pdf](https://www.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/system/files/24832/%E5%8F%97%E8%B3%9E%E8%80%85%E7%B4%B9%E4%B8%8B%EF%BC%88%E7%AC%AC5%E5%9B%9E%E8%A1%A8%E5%BD%B0%E5%BC%8F%E3%83%91%E3%83%B3%E3%83%95%E3%83%AC%E3%83%83%E3%83%88%E6%8A%9C%E7%B2%8B%EF%BC%89_0.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> 70% of the episodes are for adults as Yaegashi (2007) said.

<sup>14</sup> Round-table discussion, <https://www.nhk.or.jp/archives/search/special/detail/?d=youth019>.

<sup>15</sup> *Seika* is a magazine published by Iwanami Shoten.

<sup>16</sup> Ichikawa (1999), *Now we can do such interesting thing on TV*, <https://www.iwanami.co.jp/sekai/1999/05/134.html>.

<sup>17</sup> However, the meaning of the word "ordinary" remains to be discussed.

<sup>18</sup> "Juvenile delinquents" refers to "Syounen Hiko" in Japanese.

<sup>19</sup> The concept moral panic is defined as "the process of arousing social concern over an issue – usually the work of moral entrepreneurs and the mass media" (John S., 2014). According to Cohen, media appear in any or all of three roles in moral panic dramas: setting the agenda, transmitting the images and breaking the silence and making the claim (2011; 28-29).

<sup>20</sup> However, school bullying is not included in the case study, because in school bullying problems, the victims usually attract more attention while the delinquents attract more attention in general juvenile problems.

<sup>21</sup> See The White Paper on Police 1977~1986.

<sup>22</sup> The main character of the period is called Kazama, an art teacher in charge of a class. He was thought to be "too passionate to be disqualified as a teacher" and "rare in modern society" (Miura, 1981).

<sup>23</sup> They are: "My good friend" (1976/05/02) "Reward of Justice" (1976/05/30) "Keep Walking" (1976/09/05) "Lost Money for Bread" (1977/05/08) "Kaoru under Boots" (1977/05/22) "Clean Hands" (1978/06/11) Round Table Discussion on "Courage" (1978/07/02) "Shoplifting Boy A" (1979/01/21) "The Twelfth War" (1979/05/13) "40 vs. 1" (1980/02/17).

<sup>24</sup> A teacher called Azuma succeeded. He taught students "Technology and Home Economics" and was also a passionate teacher with affection for students.

<sup>25</sup> However, there is weak positive correlation between *Chugakusei Nikki* and *Asahi* ( $r=0.3486$ ); *Chugakusei Nikki* and *Mainichi* ( $r=0.1625$ ).

<sup>26</sup> See Takashima, H (1982) the production note of *Chugakusei Nikki*, *Chuokoron*, Vol. 97(6), pp.168-177.

<sup>27</sup> It refers to Opinion Poll on juvenile delinquency by Cabinet Office.

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