Community learning, leadership and gender: the case of *kominkan* in Okayama City, Japan

Rika Yorozu-Kurata

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School of Education

College of Social Sciences

University of Glasgow

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Abstract

This dissertation is about leadership and gender in community learning in Japan focusing on a case of women professionals working in *kominkan* in Okayama City. Kominkan is a public and local educational institution providing community learning and community development services across Japan. Characteristics of leadership practiced by women in promoting transformative community learning for themselves as well as community members were analysed.

Based on a constructivist paradigm and critical feminist perspectives, my research used qualitative methods covering analysis of national and local policy documents and information-communication materials by *kominkan* and narrative text and voice data from individual interviews with ten female staff members of *kominkan* in Okayama City. Validation of early analysis was conducted through informal group discussion and follow-up interview with two participants. During the collection and analysis of primary data, I applied voice-centred relational method (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Jankowska, 2014) in conducting and reflecting on in-depth feminist interviews (Reinharz and Chase, 2001; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) in Okayama City in 2016 and 2017. Drawing on leadership characteristics of women by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010), I analysed the research participants' experiences with leadership and gender and their aspirations. One of my findings is that they are exercising transformative leadership with feminist critical perspectives. Their leadership is less visible than stereotypical (male) leaders; they define leadership as *kuroko* (backstage supporter in traditional Japanese play supporting main actor or puppets) or what Cranton and Write (2008) called *learning companions*. Women are the majority in the community learning and lifelong learning profession in Japan and other countries. Understanding and appreciating women's leadership styles is important in improving the professional development programmes as well as the quality of community learning programmes lead by them. Recommendations I propose for Okayama City may be significant for other local governments that want to take serious measures to promote women working in this profession in Japan and other countries.

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This research would not have been possible without the open mind and heart of women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City. You were all special and more educators should know about your work.

I dedicate this dissertation to women community educators whom I met through my work over the last twenty-five years. You were my incentives to start this big research challenge.

Author's Declaration

"I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution."

Printed Name: Rika Yorozu-Kurata

Signature:

Definitions/Abbreviations

Definition of Japanese terms used in the dissertation.

Alphabet	Japanese	Definition
Deshi	弟子	disciple
Ikigai	生きがい	Zest for living
Freeters	フリーター	young people who are job-hopping part-timers
Kominkan	公民館	Community learning centre
Kohai	後輩	Junior (colleague)
Kuroko	黒子	invisible support actor in Japanese traditional plays
Mura-hachibu	村八分	social ostracism in rural village
Ryosai-kenbo	良妻賢母	being good wife and wise mother
Senpai	先輩	Senior (colleague)

Tunagaritai	つながり隊	Elderly people's support group in a kominkan in Okayama City
Waigaya	わいが屋	Elderly people's social group in another kominkan in Okayama City

Abbreviations

ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
DESD	United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)
MEXT	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment by OECD
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
U.S.A.	United States of America

Chapter 1   **Why this research?**

1.1 Introduction

I would like to start this dissertation with a short story of myself and why I chose to research women's leadership in community learning in Japan. I have been working at the same position since October 2003 with no progression, what a career counsellor would call a career plateau. I applied to study in the Doctorate in Education programme at the University of Glasgow in 2012. At that time my second child was growing up to be a child from a toddler, I became less busy with taking care of her and started to look for a change in my professional life. I thought pursuing a doctorate degree will give me stimulation and improve my career portfolio for when I eventually leave the United Nations. Doing research was not my first agenda, the purpose of further study for me was finding a meaningful goal in life.

For many years, I did not take the opportunities for promotion as I was either pregnant, on maternity leave or living alone with my first child in a foreign country. When I started my doctorate study, I had a chance to be promoted but I also passed that opportunity as I was struggling with the first year of course work. Looking back, I wonder if I made such decisions because I was concerned that I would not be able to fulfil my professional responsibilities or because I did not believe I was capable of exercising leadership.

In the Educational Futures course I took in the second year of doctorate study, I chose leadership as a sub-theme among the three choices that were offered. The course work opened my perspectives on leadership and the diverse ways leadership are exercised. I found the difference between leaders and leadership and the concept of transformational leadership interesting and useful in

reflecting on myself as practicing leadership and followership (Gronn, 2003) at workplace. I wanted to know more about how other women in education, particularly in community education, which was my main field of work, were thinking and practicing leadership. Like primary school teachers in Asia, more women than men are working in the field of community education. While I met some women in leadership positions as directors in national ministries of education and non-governmental organisations, I thought of researching community educators considering that their leadership have direct impact on adult learners.

From this broad idea and following the advice of programme instructors, I narrowed the scope of my research to the educational leadership capacities of women working in *kominkan* (公民館 community learning centres) in Okayama City, Japan. *Kominkan,* managed by the local governments is a major institutional structure for publicly financed community education in Japan. Direct translation of *kominkan* would mean public citizen's halls. Appropriate translation however would be multi-purpose community-based learning centres where learning activities for diverse age groups are organised by and for members of community.

The overall aim of my research was to investigate views on leadership by women working in community learning. The specific research questions which guided this dissertation are to: understand the public education policy and professional development frameworks concerning *kominkan* in Japan, explore concepts and frameworks for feminist leadership characteristics in community learning and development, understand enabling factors in the career development of women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City, and formulate recommendations to support them to lead community learning.

In the following sections, I explain Okayama City as the choice of my research location and how the research questions relate to my professional work in lifelong learning. In the last section in this chapter, I provide an overview of the structure of this dissertation.

1.2 Locating the study - Okayama City in Japan

Okayama City is a capital city of Okayama Prefecture and nicknamed sunshine city for having many sunny days throughout the year. The city has a population of over 700,000 and is designated as one of twenty large cities in Japan. This city has grown in population and size in the past. Mergers with neighbouring districts took place thirteen times from the 1970s to 2007. Its 790 square kilometres of lands are divided into four wards with a mixture of metropolitan city area and agricultural villages surrounded by mountains and Seto inland sea (Okayama City Government, 2020).

As seen on the map on the next page, there are one central *kominkan* and 37 local *kominkan*s spread across the Okayama City covering both urban and rural areas.[1] About 1.72 million people participate in learning activities organised by or in the *kominkan*s every year in this city (UIL, 2017, p. 129). Figure 1 highlights the *kominkan* I visited for this research. Through my professional work, I had contacts with the Okayama City government officials and had opportunity to visit two *kominkan* in 2014 when the city hosted an International Conference on *Kominkan* and Community Learning Centre. During the visits, I observed that there were many women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City. This was a contrast compared with other local governments in Japan that sent mostly men as representatives of their *kominkan* to this conference. My original plan was to research *kominkan* close to my parents' home in Yokohama City. I decided to work with Okayama City because I was encouraged by the dedication and passion of their *kominkan* woman staff members.

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[1] The central kominkan closed in March 2018 and its supervision and coordination function was transferred to a new unit to promote kominkan within Okayama City Government's education bureau. The educational activities of kominkan is covered a 38th local kominkan which opened in 2019.

Figure 1 Map of Kominkan in Okayama City

(Okayama Central Kominkan, 2014, p. 42)

Note: Red circles indicate the *kominkan* I visited for the interview.

1.3 How the research questions relate to my professional practice

I introduce here what the research questions on women community educators' leadership development means to my professional work. I am an international civil servant working in the field of lifelong learning. My responsibilities at work involve capacity development of government and civil society partners in different countries with the aim of improving the quality of their youth and adult education policies and programmes. As a focal point for gender equality, I provide advice to colleagues and draft reports on the work by UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in relation to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s strategy on gender equality and women's empowerment. I chose *kominkan* women staff as my research participants because facilitators (educators) play a significant role in motivating people to continue learning and play leadership roles in coordinating educational and development actions for the benefit of their communities. The professional development of adult educators is a field I would like to focus on in my future work.

Compared with developing and middle-income countries I work with; Japan has trained and experienced people working in the field of community education which covers non-formal and informal education for adults and children. The government White Paper on education published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan (MEXT) reported that there were 193.5 million users of *kominkan* and other learning centres in 2018 (MEXT Japan, 2019a, p. 431). This is larger than the population of Japan (126.6 million people). Adult educators I meet in my profession often ask me about the experiences of Japan. They are interested in how the government is supporting community building through lifelong learning, how Japan has been able to keep its traditional values like respect for elderly and develop a modern economy. I chose *kominkan* as the educational institution to study because it is the foremost public and popular education institution for adults in Japan. According to the public opinion survey in 2015, about 40 per cent of people have participated in

learning activities organised by *kominkan*. *Kominkan* has the highest number of people participating in courses compared with other types of social education institutions like community outreach courses by higher education institutions, private institutions and companies (MEXT Japan, 2017).

Women make up the majority of mid-level professionals working in this field in Japan like in other countries. I have seen a lot of competent women, but they are less represented in higher levels of authority in community education. Thus, my professional interest is to find what is working well and what is not working well in promoting women in this profession. The scope of field work is limited to one city, but I hope the findings will have some relevance for other localities. My goal is to find leadership characteristics of women kominkan professionals based on their own voices and identify recommendations to improve the quality of community learning and professional development for them. In the case of Okayama City, women outnumber men in the profession but only a few (three) held director positions at the time of my data collection. By leadership, however, I am not limiting its scope to formal roles, such as individuals becoming Directors following *male-code of gentility* (Gronn, 2003, p. 284), but a leadership to play stronger educational and community development coordination roles for the communities in which they work. This concept of leadership will be explained more in Chapter Three.

The research recommendations have implications for how leadership is defined. Overall, transformative measures are necessary to enable more women to exercise leadership in the field of community learning and development. If current employment practices continue, women will continue to do excellent work without due recognition and rewards.

I have been working in the international education development field for over 25 years. During this time, the coverage of the education sector and geographic areas I have worked with has expanded. I initially started with the development of teaching-learning materials for adults with low reading skills and working with institutions providing technical support to adult literacy classes and training programmes for women. From programme level interventions, I have started to work more on policy level interventions. This involves designing international policies and strategies and supporting national governments to develop national

plans. From organising regional collaborative activities covering 18 countries in Asia when I was working in Tokyo and Bangkok, I started to work on regional activities in Africa and international framework activities that cover 193 member countries of UNESCO (as of November 2019).

As I look back, the first ten years shaped my development as an education development specialist. I have drawn on my professional experiences in this research. From this research, I discovered that I have a feminist perspective and it has been an unconscious driving force in my professional life. My work related to education for women has evolved from developing information and communication materials on women's literacy in Asia which is a region with large share of illiterate women. Although I was a junior staff, I remember that I had to keep suggesting and making corrections in the poster and videos which we were producing so that illiterate women were not illustrated as weak and ignorant, but with the potential for empowerment. The titles of materials which I produced indicate this intention: i.e. 'Yes, we can!' and 'Mina Smiles'. I also developed a programme to support government and civil society institutions to develop national resource centre for girls and women's literacy and organised networking. These centres established in over 15 countries in Asia were in turn providing support to facilitators and officials working in community learning centres in their country. They were organising staff training, developing resource libraries and databases in the respective countries. I was working on women's issues without making connections with feminist literature. Efforts were placed on implementing than on reflecting on the experiences by other institutions or localities.

In recent years, I have worked as a gender focal point at UIL, I was responsible for providing advice to colleagues on how to mainstream gender equality in their work and I also managed a project to improve action research skills among young women living in remote areas with little access to public services. Additionally, in reviewing national policies and plans at the request of countries, I have been paying attention to gender analysis. The relationships I developed with women through my profession is my treasure. I believe the relationships have been mutually reciprocal in encouraging each other to pursue our work. These professional experiences informed the decision to focus on women in community education in this dissertation.

What I learned from this research, from the research process to the findings and recommendations, will inform my ongoing international policy level work as well as in organising capacity building activities in UNESCO Member States. I will advocate for continuing professional development strategies for women working in the field of community education to be integrated in the countries I work. With high appreciation and understanding of feminist perspectives gained from my research, its contribution to the whole society and not only to women, I will be more confident and articulate in pursuing social justice agenda through education. More important, when I plan and carry out capacity building activities in new countries, I will have better ears to listen to the women working in education.

1.4 Structure of dissertation

This chapter discussed why I undertook this research on women and leadership in community education and selected Okayama City as my research site. How this research has implications on my current and future profession to practice feminist leadership in international education development was similarly reflected.

Chapter Two is an introduction to *kominkan* for readers not familiar with the social education context in Japan. Social education (社会教育) is a term used in Japan like community education used in Scotland and elsewhere. While covering public policy and current data at national level, I have explained the professionals working in *kominkan* and compared the national and Okayama City contexts. The status of women working in social education is explained.

Chapter Three is an examination of the concepts on leadership and gender in community education which I have selected for this research. I discuss transformative leadership and features of feminist leadership which served as a theoretical basis for my analysis. My research methodology is further accounted in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Five, I give an anecdote of each women *kominkan* professionals whom I interviewed for this research. Ten women's perspectives about their career in community education and leadership is elaborated based on my reflective listening and translation from interviews conducted in Japanese.

From individual anecdotes, the Chapter Six analyses the views and experiences of women *kominkan* professionals concerning their leadership as a woman. The five features of leadership by women (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010) is applied in analysing what the research participants shared with me as a researcher. I conclude with how the feminist leadership characteristics in school context in U.S.A. is adapted to the community learning context in Okayama City.

The last chapter discuss implications of Chapter Six and provide some recommendations to revitalise kominkan through communitarian approach and diversify leadership training and career progression for women *kominkan* professionals in Okayama City. While the recommendations are for Okayama City, they are significant for other local governments that want to take serious measures to promote women working in social education in Japan as well as in other countries.

Chapter 2   Understanding *kominkan* and its professionals

This chapter is about the changing landscape of *kominkan* in Japan. Some researchers (Iwasa, 2010; Katano, 2016) are concerned that *kominkan* is losing its vitality and significance in current society. I firstly introduce and discuss social education and *kominkan* as understood by people and the government giving attention to national policy, legislation and data. The tensions between the holistic learning people want to learn and the neo-liberal orientation of government policy is introduced. The second part of the chapter reviews policy and practice of *kominkan* in Okayama City where this research is located. The Okayama Model of *kominkan* practices in also outlined. Special focus is given on professionals working in *kominkan*.

Education policy in Japan has been evolving at a faster pace in the last two-decades than the previous decades, and *kominkan* has a long history. Therefore, I discuss some historical developments as well. Japanese society is being pulled into two directions – towards individualism with multiple values and towards social order/harmony. In the last section, I have a critical look at the state of social education and community learning in Japan from communitarian perspective.

2.1 Shift from social education to lifelong learning in national policy and legislation

2.1.1 Social and personal fulfilment education by the people

Learning throughout the life span is an age-old concept in Japan, like in other societies whether they are Christian, Muslim, democratic or communists. As symbolised by the Japanese proverb below, the traditional purpose of learning places more emphasis on spiritual enlightenment than on economic advancement.

I practice Zen throughout life [修行は一生積む]

I explain here four key terms, lifelong education, social education, recurrent education, and lifelong learning in a Japanese context. These terms are used interchangeably in different policy and legislation; it is useful to understand the origins of these terms. The term lifelong education was introduced from UNESCO in the 1970s in Japan. Before that, the articulation of lifelong education originated in the United States of America (U.S.A.) by Eduard Lindeman and in the United Kingdom by Basil Yeaxlee and Eduard Lindeman in the 1920s (Cross-Durrant, 1984; Volles, 2016; Stanistreet, 2018). For scholars in Japan (Hirakawa, 2019; Tani, 2013; Yamada, 2002), however, their view is that the term lifelong education was popularised from an education book written by Lengrand (a staff member of UNESCO) in 1970. This book was translated into Japanese by Kanji Hatano in 1971, promoted in the UNESCO Second International Conference on Adult Education hosted in Tokyo in 1972. Recurrent education proposed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the late 1960s is acknowledged in various texts but was not fully adopted by the public education policy makers in Japan. This term, recurrent education, is gaining attention in recent years by the business community in Japan to mean continuing professional development for individual adults to sustain and improve their employability.

Lengrand's integrated view on lifelong education had easy acceptance by Japanese as UNESCO was highly regarded at the time in Japan. UNESCO was the first United Nations' agency to accept Japan's membership and the Ministries and the publishing sector had close communication with UNESCO in hosting the international conferences in Tokyo. Lifelong education also had a push from the

private sector as a concept to upgrade the skills of workers in industry at that time.

A term that was and still in use before lifelong education was social education. The concept is similar to adult education; there is emphasis on education activities managed and organised at community level for adults and children outside the school-hours. Under this framework, the community-based learning centres, libraries, museums, and sports facility were established and administered by the government at different administration levels. These educational institutions provided various non-vocational learning opportunities since the reconstruction of Japan after the World War II. Based on the concepts of mutual teaching and learning and voluntary learning, social education has a special emphasis on meeting social learning needs more than individual learning needs (Iwasa, 2010). Makino (2013a, p. 45) observes that social 'learning is a framework for people to find ways to change the way "Japanese" community is and to recreate their being as citizens'.

Skills training for the Japanese economy to catch-up with the Western countries was largely organised as in-house training by private companies in the 1960s and 1970s. The training was voluntarily provided by the companies to fresh (male) graduates who were starting with a minimum salary and the promise of promotion based on seniority and lifetime employment (Shimizutani, 2011, p. 106). In my view, this was an adaptation of traditional *deshi* (disciple) training system of cottage industries to large and medium-size corporations.

The recurrent education is a relatively trendy term in Japan promoted by the Abe administration to encourage employees to upgrade their skills, and private sector and higher education to expand their provision of work-oriented education and training. This is having in mind that the Japanese government has to plan for a longer economically active life with 100-year life expectancy. Many corporations and private training institutions are now using this term (Industry-Academia Council on the Future of Recruitment and University Education, 2020; Ishikura, 2018). This term is also used in government programmes supporting women who left the labour force for child raising to return to work. When recurrent education or sometimes called *refresh education* in Japanese, it

mostly refers to education and training for employed personnel (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 1996).

The term lifelong learning is now well known by the people in Japan along the lines of social education. For the current generation, the meaning of lifelong learning has not changed much from the aforementioned proverb. The results of a public opinion survey on lifelong learning conducted in 2012 revealed that over 45 per cent of people answering a question on what image they have about lifelong learning said it is learning throughout life from infancy to old age. The second highest response to the question was an activity to enjoy life and nurture humanity (43 per cent). Only 18 per cent of people viewed lifelong learning as learning to gain skills and knowledge for work (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2012, graph 1). This confirms the widely held view that the orientation of lifelong learning preferred by people in Japan is for social and personal fulfilment.

2.1.2 Holistic and traditional vision of social education

People's opinions about lifelong learning in Japan (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2012) is congruent with the government's education policy frameworks. Japan is one of a few countries which has integrated a holistic lifelong learning perspective into their national education policy and plans (Yang and Yorozu, 2015). The constitution guarantees the right to education as well as freedom in learning. In this spirit, the Basic Act on Education added a specific article below defining the concept of lifelong learning when it was last revised in 2006:

> A society must be brought into being in which the people can continue to learn throughout their lives, on all occasions and in all places, and in which they can suitably apply the outcomes of their lifelong learning to refine themselves and lead fulfilling lives (MEXT Japan, 2006, Article 3).

At the national level, the responsible ministry for lifelong learning is the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). From 2001 to 2018, the Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau in this ministry was responsible for overall coordination of planning with four bureaus concerned with education. The name of this Bureau was changed to Integrated Education Policy Bureau in October 2018 with an aim to enhance learning pathways and collaboration

among schools, universities and all types of institutions providing lifelong learning, including the *kominkan*. The term integrated was chosen by the Ministry to overcome compartmentalised planning and implementation and to realise the concept of lifelong learning as defined in article 3 with a 100-year lifespan of Japanese people in mind. In addition to planning national education policy, this Bureau is responsible for promoting lifelong learning, community learning, gender equality and social cohesion (MEXT Japan, 2019b).

Kominkan's work is governed by the Social Education Act enacted in 1949 and was established nation-wide after the World War II for community people to meet and learn together towards the development of peaceful and democratic society. This act was enacted after the Basic Act on Education and school education act were enacted in 1947 and it respects the principle of self-directed learning by people which is not strong in school education for children (Iwasa, 2010). The policy framework for *kominkan* will be discussed further in the next section.

The Social Education Act views learning in broad perspectives and make direct linkages with life and society. As opposed to school education, there is no official teacher but multiple supporters of education with changing roles. Social education requires a space for learning where people pursue self-directed learning in a collaborative manner. Social education views group or association settings as an essential element of education.

In terms of school enrolment and academic achievement, Japan's education system has been recognised as excellent. The 15-year old students scored above average in all subject areas in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) organised by the OECD in 2009 (OECD, 2010, p. 9). Since universal enrolment in primary education was achieved in 1910 (Kaneko, 2007, p. 76), completion of higher levels of education have continued to expand and now the working-age population in Japan is one of most highly educated in the OECD countries (OECD, 2013, p. 4). There is a growing demand for social education institutions to support schools in teaching life skills and prepare students for the world of work and community.

The private corporate sector and employability are absent from the Basic Act for Education and Social Education Act. Unlike Western countries pursuing neo-liberal approaches, the economic purpose was not strong in Japan's education policy making. The aim of education and learning in Japan strongly favours 'personal development and spiritual growth' over human capital theory (Sawano, 2012, p. 665). In terms of educational financing, however, Japan is following a neo-liberal approach. Private households are covering the cost of pre-primary education (38 per cent) to tertiary education (79 per cent) (OECD, 2013, pp. 3, 11). The government budget for social education has steadily declined since 1996 (Sawano, 2012, p. 665). To supplement the decline in public funding for social education, the neo-liberal agenda began to influence the operation of *kominkan*. The impact of neo-liberal policies is discussed in the last section of this chapter.

2.1.3 Lifelong learning as part of the Neo-liberal agenda of the government

Contrary to the public opinions and adult learning opportunities that were provided widely and at low cost by *kominkan*, the government policy on lifelong learning has pursued different directions during the current long-term recession. The shift from social education to lifelong learning has taken on a stronger neo-liberal undertone while the late Yasuhiro Nakasone from the Liberal Democratic Party held the Prime Ministership and led the education reforms in the late 1980s.

As a result of the education reform process, the term 'lifelong learning' was officially introduced in the government documents from 1988. The intention was a shift from government provision of education opportunities to individuals taking ownership of creating learning opportunities (Makino, 2013a, p. 44). By not using the term education, another intention was to bring in other ministries into the provision of lifelong learning (Thomas, Uesugi and Shimada, 1997, p. 135).

Following this line of thought, a new law on lifelong learning was enacted in 1990 titled *Law Concerning the Establishment of Implementation Systems and*

Other Measures for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning. According to Thomas *et al*. (1997), this law introduced for the first time the role of private sector in the planning and provision of lifelong learning and involved the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI, now renamed as the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), the most powerful ministry in Japan (p. 136). Strangely, in this law there is no reference to existing systems providing lifelong learning such as *kominkan* or other legislation on education.

The 1990 law is often thought of as a symbolic law in Japan as it did not bring the intended increase in private investment in lifelong learning. The economic recession started right after its adoption. It is not even mentioned in the MEXT White Paper in recent years. In addition to the economic recession Thomas *et al*. (1997) point out three reasons for the failure of this neo-liberal policy in education: a weak consensus among the political parties with the Prime Minister changing almost yearly; conflict among the Ministries in particular differences in governance culture between the MEXT and MITI; and strong socialist orientation among teachers and their unions.

Still, there are negative impacts of the 1990 law still present according to Makino (2013a), Sawano (2012) and Ogawa (2013). There has been an upstream shift of government responsibility from municipalities to provinces. Government subsidy to public lifelong learning programmes such as *kominkan* have declined followed by a reduction of professionals in lifelong learning. This means young people are not able to find employment in social education and women are taking up temporary employment to fill the gaps in *kominkan* workforce. How these national policies affect *kominkan* and how they are practiced in Japan will be discussed in the next section.

2.2 *Kominkan*: community public place for learning

This section introduces national legislations concerning *kominkan*, basic statistics on *kominkan* and people working in *kominkan*. *Kominkan* is one of

three public institutions designated in the Social Education Act which was enacted in 1949 to provide community education in Japan (Okano, 2016). From a top-down central government initiative during the reconstruction phase in the post-World War II era, *kominkan* has evolved into learning centres lead by community representatives and responding to the issues and aspirations of local communities. They are running in easily accessible locations for people and providing courses at free cost or very minimal cost. The group learning programmes are designed collaboratively according to discussions at the local level.

The other two institutions regulated by the Social Education Act are public libraries and museums. There are also other institutions for social education supported by the government, including women's education centre, youth training centres and a more recent category called lifelong learning centres. In terms of history and scale of learning activities and participants, *kominkan* is still the foremost public institution for lifelong learning.

The 1949 Social Education Act defined social education as covering the areas of adult education, community education, and education for children and youth that takes place outside of school (Maruyama, 2011). The Social Education Act legislated the responsibility of the state and local governments to promote social education. In the local government units, the education bureau within the local government office has an oversight on *kominkan*. An experienced social education specialist in Japan argues that this act has kept the principle of right to educational choice and learners' rights, however a series of amendments have made this act a weak one especially the removal of clauses making it mandatory for local governments to have social education officials (Kohno, 2014). Numbering more than the secondary education schools, *kominkan* is following the learning as a public good model and is a good venue for social learning – learning in a group.

2.2.1 Kominkan in numbers

In terms of statistics, the number of *kominkan* has been drastically declining from 35,352 at its peak in 1955 to 18,251 in 1991 when it was operating in over 90 per cent of local governments in Japan. According to the latest data from the

2018 national social education survey, which is held every three-years, the number of *kominkan* has declined to 14,281 with 83 per cent coverage of local governments. Correspondingly, the number of *kominkan* staff has declined from 57,907 in 1999 to 45,615 in 2018. Close to 39 per cent of *kominkan* staff were women and on average, there were 3.2 staff per *kominkan* (MEXT Japan, 2020, pp. 1, 5). *Kominkan* still outnumber the lower secondary schools and in 2014 there were 208 million users of *kominkan* (Practical Social Education Research Center, 2019, p. 399); meaning approximately twice the population of Japan participated in *kominkan* activities. It is the most popular and best utilised public social education institution in Japan for learners.

2.2.2 Professionals working in kominkan

From *kominkan* as public social education institution, I discuss here the state of professionals working in *kominkan*. They are called *kominkan* specialists or social education specialists or social education officials. The differences in the name reflect how they are appointed by local governments. Throughout this dissertation, I will use *kominkan* professionals to refer to all these classifications of people working in *kominkan*.

This profession has a long history in Japan. An introductory guidebook for *kominkan* professionals reports that as early as 1920, prefectures started to appoint social education specialists (National Kominkan Association, 2009). Before the Social Education Act of 1949, the local government law stipulated the appointment of social education specialists in 1947. In the 1959 revision of Social Education Act, the appointment of social education specialists in local governments to city, town and village levels with populations over 10,000 was stipulated. The Social Education Act Article 27 stipulates that the *kominkan* staff shall be full time. The revision of regulations for *kominkan*, in 2003 has however downgraded their status (Katano, 2016, p. 30).

There are two main roles and responsibilities of *kominkan* professionals. One is to analyse local learning issues, plan and implement social education programmes, provide expert advice and guidance to partner organisations by building effective networks with them. Another role is to support community residents' self-initiated learning activities and community-making activities

based on learning (MEXT Japan, 2016, p. 117). These roles are similar to the professionals working in Scotland's community learning and development sector (CLD Standards Council Scotland, 2019).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the *kominkan* professionals were mostly men and working full time as government employees. As the national government stopped providing subsidies and expected the local government to pay, in full, the wages of *kominkan* professionals, many local governments changed the working conditions of *kominkan* professionals from full time to part-time or temporary positions. By 2015, only 17 per cent of the professionals in *kominkan* were full time (MEXT Japan, 2020, p. 5). The vast majority of them have part-time and short-term contracts. Due to the worsening of working conditions, for example, the removal of the housing allowances, women started to fill the positions of *kominkan* staff. This happened because for married women who are recognised dependents of their husbands for health insurance and pension earning less is better in some cases to avoid the higher tax rates.

To work in *kominkan*, there is no certification or minimum qualification requirement. The Social Education Act requires the local education bureau to appoint necessary staff in *kominkan* and to organise training activities for the *kominkan* director and staff. Nationwide, only about fourteen per cent of *kominkan* professionals are designated as social education officials. The majority are another category called *kominkan* officials which does not require any academic qualification nor professional experiences. There are also *kominkan* with no specialists (around thirty per cent) (Intage Inc., 2012). The status of social education official is granted if he/she has completed the certification course and the local education bureau has appointed him/her as such. As this profession is by appointment, there are many *kominkan* professionals who completed the social education official's course, but they are not social education officials.

It has gotten worse with the neo-liberal policy influence in 1990s, some local governments started considering *kominkan* professionals less as educators and more as community coordinators. The share of certified social education officials working in *kominkan* declined from 85% in 1996 to 27% in 2018 (MEXT Japan, 2020, p. 6). At the same time, many local governments transferred the

supervising entity of *kominkan* from the local education bureau to other departments in local government and in some cases it was completely outsourced. This shift further downgraded the working conditions of *kominkan* professionals in Japan.

While there is no solid government regulation on *kominkan* professionals, an informal guideline published by the National *Kominkan* Association in 1967 offers the most detail. The guideline suggests having at least four staff in each *kominkan*. A *kominkan* officer shall be equivalent to social education officer in local education bureau in position and earn the equivalent of a primary or secondary school teacher. It also suggests that the *kominkan* staff to have training opportunities and the *kominkan* director to have a social education officer certificate, with at least five years of work experience as a social education officer (National Kominkan Association, 2019). As I explain in the following sections, this guideline is not followed in many cities including Okayama City.

The National *Kominkan* Association conducts a survey every five-year on the state of *kominkan* in Japan. The report from 2013 survey revealed that among the *kominkan* directors, the overwhelming majority are men (92 per cent) and they are mostly over the age of 60 (62 per cent). The majority of directors are working under a temporary contract or have concurrent duties in the local government. The survey asked for the first time what was their immediate prior employment before their appointment as a *kominkan* director. The highest number of responses to this question was that they were an employee in the local government. Only six per cent were former staff of *kominkan* (National Kominkan Association, 2016, pp. 16–25). This means that the *kominkan* directors do not have a strong background in social education and they do not stay in the job long enough to gain expertise.

Concerning women working in *kominkan*, the same survey reports that there are more women than men in absolute number. While the number of men and women working as fulltime officials are equivalent, twice as many women are working with a temporary or part-time contract. More than half of them are between 40 to 59 years old and many of them have more than five years of experience which is a desirable criterion for directorship as recommended by the

National *Kominkan* Association. While not backed by data, many of these women took up the job after working for some years as full-time housewives. Hirakawa (2003) criticises the working conditions of these part-time staff who are working in low-paid and unstable conditions despite the specialisation in social education they require. It is disheartening that only 1.6 per cent of *kominkan* had a woman as a fulltime director in 2018 (MEXT Japan, 2020).

As for certification of *kominkan* professionals, fundamental changes are required in the curriculum and the use of online learning tools for continuing professional development in my view. Japan has a national qualification system for social education officials. There are two basic channels to get this qualification. The first channel is through university credits mainly acquired by students. The other channel is through an intensive training course, taken after having two-year work experience. Responding to women's busy lifestyles, offering the courses through flexible pathways such as online learning may encourage more *kominkan* professionals and users to take the courses. Since this certification is covering basic skills and competencies to develop social education support measures at local levels, there is perhaps a need to design advanced level courses for experienced *kominkan* professionals and directors.

The government has been analysing the social education official system. A national study on the expectations by the local education bureaus on *kominkan* professionals was commissioned by the government. The study identified that preparing social education plans for local community (37.9 per cent) and planning and preparing learning plans and learning contents (22.7 per cent) were the highest two expectations (Intage Inc., 2012). Planning for community education certainly requires expert knowledge and experience so I agree with the authors of the study that *kominkan* should have more professional staff and continuing professional development opportunities.

A national study on *kominkan* professionals' contributions and capacity building needs by the Practical Social Education Research Center (2015) recognises that social education officials' work has evolved from administration of government provision of social education within *kominkan* to coordination of networking and collaboration activities for social education engaging people and institutions outside of *kominkan*. The institutions they must network cover a wide range of

stakeholders such as local government, universities, private companies and civil societies. The report also raises concern that very little training is organised for professionals with more than three years of experience and that there are no career development opportunities.

To manage the activities of *kominkan* well, social education specialists have complex tasks. They are managing a wide range of community 'common good' and responding to learning needs of children, adolescents, adults and elderly. Sato (2016, p. 162) reasons this complexity and flexibility required in carrying out the work makes it difficult to define what professional expertise are required by full-time *kominkan* staff. In Chapter Seven, I will discuss changes introduced to the qualification in 2020 and my recommendations.

Kominkan is by far the most recognised and accessible public social education institution in Japan with a long history. For professionals working in *kominkan* to carry out increasing complex work of providing community education, as described in the national framework, they should have better training, employment conditions and develop their professional profile. This is also a recommendation of the UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education to improve quality of learning (UNESCO, 2015 Article 28). From the national context, I now discuss local policies and plan of *kominkan* in Okayama City.

2.3 *Kominkan* in Okayama City – Okayama model

2.3.1 Policy

The mission of *kominkan* in Okayama City is to serve as a hub for city development towards living together. Okayama City has one central *kominkan*

and 36 local *kominkan*.[2] Each serves the same area covered by a lower secondary school catchment area.[3] There are also mini-*kominkan*s covering areas with no easy access to local *kominkan*. These mini-*kominkan*s are self-governed by local residents and do not have full-time staff. This section discusses public policies and plans guiding the operation of *kominkan* in this city.

The city has developed its own policy concerning *kominkan* adapting the national policies on social education and lifelong learning. Table 1 outlines the aims and activities of *kominkan* as mandated in policy documents at both levels. A legislation specifically on *kominkan* in Okayama City was enacted in 1952. Like the Social Education Act of 1949, it positions *kominkan* as a place to foster cultural and societal learning and development activities and is silent about its role for economic development. In fact, the Social Education Act prohibits activities of religious, economic and political nature in *kominkan*.

The main activities that are organised by *kominkan* in Okayama City go beyond the fields of activities by *kominkan* as defined in the national Standards for the Establishment and Operation of *Kominkan*, revised on 6 June 2003 (National Kominkan Association, 2009, pp. 195–196). The *kominkan* in Okayama City value local heritage and include sports and outdoor activities.

In addition to the national plan and prefectural plans for lifelong learning, Okayama City has adopted its own basic guideline to implementing *kominkan* activities in 2000. This plan is in line with the 1952 ordinance and Okayama City's Integrated Development Plan and the Basic Plan for Education (Okayama City Education Bureau, 2019). The development of the Okayama City *kominkan* basic guideline involved wide consultation process. How the consultations were carried out in participatory manner involving citizens, *kominkan* professionals and local administration is well documented by *kominkan* professionals in Okayama City (Uchida, 2015; Tanaka, 2013; Shigemori, 2012). I note here the objectives and functions of the *kominkan* which were guiding the *kominkan* professionals in this city. At the time of interviews undertaken for this research,

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[2] Since the interviews took place in 2016, the Central *kominkan* has closed down and a 37th local *kominkan* opened in 2018.

[3] Lower secondary school catchment area is normally within 6 km from the school.

kominkan in Okayama City framed their activities under three core functions of *kominkan*. These were creating a place to gather, a place to learn and a place for active participation. The objectives and functions of kominkan agreed in year 2000 for Okayama City in Table 2 will be reference points in the next chapters when I analyse leadership orientations of *kominkan* professionals in this city. The interests and concerns of research participants in 2016 reflected the guideline.

Table 1 Aims and activities of kominkan in public policy

National policy	Okayama City policy
Aims of *kominkan*	
'*kominkan* shall provide the people living in specific areas such as a city, town or village with education adapted to meet the demands of actual life and implement academic and cultural activities. *Kominkan* shall contribute to the cultivation of residents, improve health, develop character, enliven daily culture, and enhance social welfare' from Social Education Act, Article 20 (MEXT Japan and Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO, 2008, p. 4).	'the *kominkan* shall provide the citizens with education useful for daily life and hold various academic and cultural activities, so that the *kominkan* can contribute to the citizens' cultural improvement, health promotion and moral refinement, eventually promoting culture of life and social welfare' from Okayama City Legislation No. 58, Article 3 [my own translation] (Okayama City Government, 1952).
Activities of *kominkan*	
- Functioning as a hub for community learning activities - Supporting families with educational development of their children - Facilitating collaboration among institutions and organisations working for community development - Promoting volunteer work and community service activities - Tailoring *kominkan* operations and services to local contexts - Planning and evaluating their own activities [my own translation] (National Kominkan Association, 2009, pp. 195–196)	- Organise regular courses - Organise discussions, workshops, training sessions, exhibitions. - Prepare and encourage use of community books, records, models, and materials. - Organise physical education and recreational activities. - Improve the lives of citizens. - Contact various community-based organizations and institutions. - Offer venues and services for meetings by citizens and for or other public use. - Guiding and fostering community learning centre activities in the city. [my own translation] (Okayama City Government, 1952, Article 4)

The core objectives listed in Table 2 have an emphasis on reaching out and making the work of kominkan known by community people. This is probably driven by the need to make visible the benefits of kominkan for its sustainability of activities. Among the five functions, last two functions, future orientations and opening to other networks are new development compared with the 1952 legislation in Table 1. The plan envisions kominkan to connect and coordinate people, organisations, and networks to expand cooperation and partnerships across the city. These involve the local administration, neighbourhood associations, schools, universities, voluntary groups, and non-profit organisations. One project in kominkan counted over 100 institutions as collaborating partner (UIL, 2017). The outreach activities of kominkan is relatively new.

Table 2 Core objectives and functions of Okayama City's *kominkan*

Objectives	Functions
• To make the management committee active and strengthen its linkage with the community.	• Salon – information place to meet, learn and interact
	• Cultural development
• To understand local community issues and its integration in the activities of the centre.	• Problem solving skills development
• To carry out advocacy on the benefits of *kominkan*	• Hub for living together for the future
• To function as a platform for community.	• Hub of diverse networks for community development

(Okayama City Education Bureau, 2019, pp. 9–12)

Information about the learning activities in *kominkan* and other places are disseminated through variety of communication channels. Each *kominkan* is publishing monthly bulletins and have their own Facebook page to share photos and comments on the activities taking place.

To smoothly organise the functions and activities, the *kominkan* in Okayama City usually have three to five rooms with long tables and chairs which can be laid out flexibly to have meetings and trainings from 20 to 100 people, one Japanese style room where people can sit on the tatami (floor mats made from rice by-products) to practice traditional hobbies, one large kitchen room for cooking classes, one room for arts and crafts. There are also information corners about community events and news and library corners where one can read and borrow books and use the computer and internet. Many also have indoor and outdoor space for sports and exercise. In case of natural disaster, *kominkan* serves as emergency evacuation place for community people.

The *kominkan* is open from 9:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. from Monday to Saturday and until 5 p.m. on Sunday. It is closed on Wednesdays and national holidays. The rooms can be rented by clubs and groups of citizens. To use the rooms, one must apply in the *kominkan* and the cost for renting the rooms are minimal. Typical arrangement is that members of the group would contribute equivalent to having a cup of coffee outside for 60- or 90-minute session. Following the Social Education Act, clubs or groups for profit-making, political and religious activities are not allowed to borrow the facilities in *kominkan*.

2.3.2 Professionals

Kominkan in Okayama City is admired by other cities for having a strong group of professional social education officials. They played important roles in the 2014 International Conference on *Kominkan* / Community Learning Centres which was co-organised by the city and UNESCO. The kominkan professionals were active in setting the conference agenda, welcoming international participants in *kominkan* and drafting of the *Okayama Commitment 2014 – Promoting Education for Sustainable Development beyond Decade of Education for Sustainable Development through Community-Based Learning* (Noguchi, Guevara and Yorozu, 2015, pp. 54–57).

Each local *kominkan* normally has five staff members in Okayama City. Only one social education official is a full-time employee of Okayama City government. Other staff members: *kominkan* director, administrative staff, and evening staff have 3-year temporary contracts financed from the local education bureaus and

a community outreach staff has a temporary contract by the local citizen partnership department. Although called administrative staff, majority of them are certified in social education in the case of this city. Having five staff is higher than the national average signifying the past efforts made by *kominkan* professionals and priority given by the local government to *kominkan*.

There were several factors that there are more women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City compared with other places in Japan. The first reason, similar to other places, is that Okayama City government offered the job of social education specialists as a temporary contract. This working condition means not only employment for limited number of years, but it is also low-paid job and low job security. Men did not apply for nor keep these jobs. In Japan, there are tax incentives for one of married couples to work only up to certain income to avoid higher tax. This has been a factor encouraging married women whose husbands are earning enough to support the family to accept low pay work up to 1,500,000 Japanese yen per year. With the need to encourage more women to participate in the workforce in Japan to cover for rapid decline in working-age population, this regulation may need to change in future.

Good practices in Okayama City are having part-time evening staff in *kominkan*. They were mostly male university students. *Kominkan* in Okayama City has five staff, and this enables staff members to work in shifts. The city provides maternity leave for temporary contract staff as well. These are good working conditions for married women to continue working at *kominkan* giving them time for their families. These arrangements are not common in other places and were achieved through years of negotiation by *kominkan* staff union (Tanaka 1997). *Kominkan* managers in other cities mention the requirement to work in the evenings and weekends as discouraging factors for women to work as professional staff at *kominkan*. What Okayama City is doing is proving that with right set of support, women can be professional staff in *kominkan*.

Another key point about *kominkan* in Okayama city is that they have achieved having one official staff in every *kominkan* developed through lobbying work of *kominkan* users and staff in 1990s. According to a senior social education official, this is quite a change from the 1980s when *kominkan* staff were only expected to act like a receptionist answering inquiries and phones. *Kominkan*

users and staff organised themselves and reflected on the contributions of *kominkan* to community development and studied social education related legislations. Lobbying activities to improve the quality of *kominkan* were linked with the women's empowerment and they advocated giving due recognition to the work of women who were working as temporary staff in *kominkan* (Hasetani, 2011; Tanaka, 1997). The movement was successful in making the city to adopt *kominkan* as their mechanisms to promote city's strategy for community development and cohesion. Since 2005, part-time *kominkan* professionals were gradually appointed as social education officials. The appointment required officials to have social education official's certificate as well as to pass the exam for local government employees. Nowadays, there is one full-time social education official in each *kominkan*. The report by the Okayama City Committee on New Directions of *Kominkan* (2002) had also recommended in the long run to have a fulltime director in *kominkan*. This has not been implemented.

Hasetani (2011, pp. 33–35) reports staff training opportunities in Okayama City as a model for his city. *Kominkan* staff are able to participate in the summer intensive social education specialist certification course sponsored by the city government. On-the-job training is conducted for newcomers by experienced staff members and thematic training on themes decided by *kominkan* staff are organised which facilitates *kominkan* to work together on common issues. Many staff are also active in the employee's union of the Okayama City Government and have learning opportunities on various local governance issues. There is also voluntary group of staff who meet to discuss practices introduced in the social education monthly journal.

Professionals working in Okayama City give credit of the city's tradition and strong focus on training and networking among *kominkan* staff to the work of Shiori Shigemori (Ms) and her predecessor Mitsutoshi Uchida (Mr). Both were social education officials in the Central *Kominkan* with responsibilities to manage and oversee all *kominkan* in Okayama City. They have consecutively planned and implemented a package of training opportunities for *kominkan* staff in Okayama City. They write that it is essential for *kominkan* staff who have the responsibility to support learning by citizens to continuing to learn themselves and learn from group collaborative learning. The training organised by them has followed this principle and provided group learning activities, mutual counselling

and learning among the *kominkan* staff. Emphasis is placed on sharing the learning with other staff and users in *kominkan*, writing down their plans, reflection and reviewing other colleagues plans and documentation. To build capacities of experienced *kominkan* professionals, they have engaged them to be responsible for training new staff and to act as advisors to provide counselling on new courses and activities (Uchida and Shigemori, 2015). How the social education officials I interviewed appreciated these training opportunities are described in Chapter Five and analysed in Chapter Six.

2.3.3 Practices – the Okayama Model

Like *kominkan* in other places, *kominkan* in Okayama City has two main categories of learning activities. One planned and organised by *kominkan* based on the users' demands or observed needs in the community by *kominkan* staff. Typical themes in the city range from child raising, gender equality and inclusive development. In 2011, the city government appointed all *kominkan* staff to be public safety officials as well. Since then, they have also organised disaster preparedness sessions. The second category of learning activities is so called club activity at the initiative of community people. A group with minimum ten people can form clubs and are able to use rooms in *kominkan* to organise cultural and recreational activities as well as skills for volunteering such as sign language and summary scribe. The number of *kominkan* users is almost double the population in this city. In 2016-17 fiscal year, over 1.32 million people participated in *kominkan* activities. 1,150 courses were organised by *kominkan* and 2,413 courses were organised by users (Okayama City Education Bureau, 2017, p. 64). In addition, *kominkan* in Okayama City also provide library services in cooperation with the city libraries. What is noteworthy is that the number of users in the *kominkan* library amounts to almost half of the total number of registered users in the main public library. This indicates proximity to library services is an important factor to promote reading.

Topics covered in *kominkan* are intricately linked with daily life of community people. In line with the mandate of *kominkan* in the city policy, *kominkan* are organising a full range of activities covering the following seven major themes of learning activities: promotion of learning to live together, environmental

awareness raising, healthy life promotion, gender equality, children and youth development, fostering learning and friendships among elderly people and making linkages with safety and security network in the city. For each of the seven themes, a project team among *kominkan* staff in the city has been setup and providing mutual learning and information exchange across *kominkan* (Uchida and Shigemori, 2015).

Okayama City's *kominkan* practices are sometimes called the 'Okayama model' by scholars and practitioners in Japan for adapting education for sustainable development (ESD) as their working principles in their activities (Didham, Ofei-Manu and Nagareo, 2017; Oyasu and Uchida, 2017). The city government is promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) projects by multiple stakeholders and often *kominkan* is a leading or collaborating partner. Engagement of *kominkan* enables the project to explore sustainable development through dialogue and collaborative actions for sustainable life in Okayama city. They are proud of this work and have hosted international conferences, annual international prize and welcomed study visits from Indonesia and Nepal. The city has also won two international prizes by UNESCO. A colourful and informative book with case studies of ESD practices by *kominkan* is published by the Okayama Central *Kominkan* (2014).

So far, this chapter has discussed the historical development of *kominkan* in Japan and good practices in Okayama City as a case. The last section is a critical look at the relevance of *kominkan* and community education in Japan.

2.4 Is *kominkan* still relevant today?

In this section, I discuss the relevance of *kominkan* in building new public commons in Japan, provide examples of communitarian practices in *kominkan*, and explore the impact of disconnecting the residents from the management of *kominkan*. The demand for learning throughout life is ever present in Japan. On the other hand, the vitality of *kominkan* is in decline in terms of participation of

people in its management and learning and development activities. Some experts critique that *kominkan* needs rebranding as it has been around too long. With the continuing recession, aging society and frequent and increasing natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis in Japan brought about by climate change, the government and people are looking for ways to support and work together. My position is that by adapting communitarian approach, *kominkan* and community education can continue to be relevant for people and communities in Japan.

During my research, the lifelong learning committee under the Central Council of Education which is the main policy research and advisory arm of the MEXT was debating the future of social education. In December 2018, the committee submitted a report positioning social education as effective in building human resources, relations and communities (Central Council for Education, 2018). This report made two new recommendations concerning the *kominkan* professionals. One is to set up a new certification called social education specialist from 2020 so that their expertise can contribute to promoting social education in private and public institutions for lifelong learning as well as in other fields such as health and welfare, and community building. The existing social education official certification had limitations that one could claim as 'official' only when they are employed by the local education bureaus. Another recommendation was to encourage local governments to have staff exchange among local government offices and *kominkan*s (Central Council for Education, 2018). The career structure of social education professionals traditionally meant that career progress was limited. This new development may open possibilities for them.

2.4.1 New Public Commons – a rising issue in lifelong learning in Japan resulting in multi-task responsibilities for kominkan

In spite of rhetoric of politicians and the private sector about achieving economic success through lifelong learning, the principles of lifelong learning introduced in the Basic Act on Education when it was revised in 2006 did not reflect the productivity model. The new Article Three defining the concept of lifelong learning kept the spirit of holistic lifelong learning. Major education laws were revised following the 2006 revision of the Basic Act. Likewise, the 1990 law

on lifelong learning should be revised to recognise existing mechanisms for lifelong learning, including *kominkan*, and social business models.

With substantial decrease in the governments' capacity to deliver public services due to long term recession among other reasons, the Japanese Government started to pursue a policy of promoting new public commons (新しい公共) in the 2000s. Ogawa defines new public commons as 'an attempt to redefine the boundaries of moral responsibilities between the state and the individual, emphasizing more the virtues of self-regulation' (2013, p. 133). In short, it can be viewed as a form of social management through lifelong learning.

Ogawa argues that lifelong learning is used by neo-liberal policy makers as a support to the new public commons and risk management strategy. He also observes that lifelong learning is a convenient tool for problem-solving (2013, p. 139). I agree with building a new public common as it is a good foundation for building a learning society but argue that the policy approach needs to shift from neo-liberalism to communitarian or at least to social capital theory. New public commons require the government to provide more social services in partnership with communities and not through the private business sector.

As Makino (2013a) argues, creating new public commons through lifelong learning shares the objectives of the social learning model by Rees and Bartlett (Coffield, 1999) but it is slightly different from the problem-solving approach of Chapman and Aspin. The difference lies in that the problem to be solved through lifelong learning does not lie in education policy and delivery but in the daily lives of community members. In the report of the Central Council for Education, it is community development through lifelong learning and not the other way around (Makino, 2013a, p. 46).

Comparing lifelong learning in Japan and the United Kingdom, Okumoto (2008) wrote that both countries pursue neo-liberal approach in economic matters and view lifelong learning as a tool to cope with changes brought about by globalisation and to improve social justice. The main difference that exists between the two countries is in the implementation of the policy. She concludes that 'Quasi-communitarianism' was applied in Japan while it was advanced liberalism in the United Kingdom. Quasi-communitarianism is defined as social

development through social solidarity going beyond one's community and integrating with diverse groups. The concept of lifelong learning is adapted to strengthen social bonding in Japan. On the other hand, advanced liberalism is coined by Richard Edwards and refers to the Third Way in the United Kingdom which positioned lifelong learning as social reform policy towards more active civil society and individuals in governance (Okumoto, 2008, pp. 182–183).

For Japan to revitalise community and foster new public commons with proactive contributions from people, and in this process to go beyond 'social control', I propose to fully adopt the quasi-communitarian approach that is functioning rather than a neo-liberal approach that is not functioning in the education sector in Japan. Three principles of communitarianism remains valid in Japanese society: the common good, positive role of the government and social nature of individuals (Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004).

The revitalisation of community education needs to start from the adult community members as they were affected more than children in school education in the past neo-liberal approaches. The public budget for education in Japan had been increasing despite the global financial crisis and decreased slightly in recent years (OECD, 2019). On the contrary, the social education sub-sector which needs to initiate activities to build the new public commons has faced severe cuts in funding from the public sector with no complementary financing by the private sector. From 1995 when the social education sub-sector had highest budget since the end of World War II, its budget has diminished by more than 43 per cent (MEXT Japan, 2019b).

Mergers and closing down of one-fifth of *kominkan* (from over 19,000 in 1999 to around 14,000 by 2018) (Practical Social Education Research Center, 2019; MEXT Japan, 2017) reduced people's access to *kominkan*. People with less mobility, for example handicapped people, elderly people and children, were most affected as they have less income to pay transportation costs to go to *kominkan* and high fees charged for learning activities organised by the private sector.

The Prime Minister Abe from the Liberal Democratic Party launched a revitalisation of education in late 2012. To build a viable learning society with participation of youth, working age and elderly adults, the Japanese government

should have a more balanced allocation of education budget. I argue that increasing public budget to build a new public is a viable option by raising the tax of large-size corporations and high-income individuals by a small percentage. These two groups of taxpayers have been benefitting from substantially reduced tax rates introduced in the last twenty years; for example, income tax of highest group have been reduced from 75 per cent to 37 per cent (Itoh 2005: 245). This could encourage companies to change their practice of rewarding successful individual employees with higher pay to financing other allowances and benefits which could be beneficial to the employees in general.

More important, allocating more public funds to *kominkan* is a democratic choice. Learning opportunities provided by public educational institutions, including *kominkan*, are valued by adults in Japan. Public opinion survey on lifelong learning is conducted every three years. The result indicates participation in classes/courses offered by public educational institutions such as *kominkan* ranked the highest (40 per cent) among 12 categories of providers listed in the question (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2016, p. 18). In a question asking which area should national and local governments give priority in supporting people's lifelong learning, the highest response was given to increasing the number of public educational institutions like *kominkan* (41 per cent) (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2016, p. 21).

As the relations among people in the local community have weakened over the past years, revitalising *kominkan* could play key roles in creating 'a virtuous cycle of learning and community activities (学びと活動の好循環)' as proposed in the report by the Central Council for Education (2018) on the future of social education. It basically means learning and development activities are contributing to lifelong learning, stronger bonds among people and solving local problems. Individuals are contributing the knowledge they gain from society back to the society (Makino, 2013a, p. 47).

Adopting an inclusive social learning approach entails reaching out to all. Starting from educating well-off people to share their wealth for the community's good. It also means identifying and responding to learning needs of those with low educational qualifications. Changing mind-sets may not be easy, especially regaining the trust of people to voluntary contribute to the new public

commons. Since the neo-liberal agenda became strong in Japan, people's trust in government has weakened. The Government's inability to take swift measures at the time of natural disasters (Hanshin-Awaji earthquake in 1995 and Higashi-Nippon earthquake in 2011), not being able to ensure social security measures for the current and next generation and increasing national debt have demonstrated a weak government. Makino (2013a, p. 45) says 'Japan is shifting to a disadvantage-distributing society'.

But the Japanese society is rediscovering solidarity after facing a triple disaster caused by nature (earthquake and tsunami) and humankind (nuclear accidents) on 11 March 2011. In post-disaster situations, communities where *kominkan* was active showed efficient delivery of emergency distributions of food and stuff and faster recovery and cooperation among community people (Fackler, 2011).

Weak segments of the population deserve extra support from a communitarian government. In the discourse and implementation of the Basic Plan of Action for Education (2008– 2017), women and youth were mentioned as a token in the action plan (MEXT Japan, 2008). There is no specific action point. The trade unions have weakened substantially during the neo-liberal approach (Itoh, 2005). There is no collective voice for workers unless the government shifts their preference from employers to employees' welfare.

The number of young people aged 15 to 34 not in education, employment or training (NEET) has remained around 600,000 since 2002 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, 2010). Moreover, there are over 1.4 million *freeters*, a term for young people who are job-hopping part-timers in Japan (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2019, p. 304). In the beginning, these *freeters* were considered as working part-time at their own choice to have freedom to have time to do what they like to do. It has become a systemic issue now that young people are not able to find full-time work. In 2018, young women are affected more than young men (770,000 vs. 660,000) (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2019, p. 304). Specific measures addressing this population by different ministries are called for.

To promote new public commons in an inclusive manner through community learning, *kominkan* professionals will need to have increased roles to reach out

to people and network with diverse institutions within and outside the community they work. Like the annual report on lifelong learning in the United Kingdom proposed by Tom Schuller and Caroline Bamford (Coffield, 1999), I recommend the National Institute for Educational Policy Research in Japan to monitor and produce an annual report on community learning activities carried out for disadvantaged groups of people in Japan. Such report will be informative to *kominkan* professionals to understand new community issues or new target groups of learners.

2.4.2 Communitarianism in Japan

Etzioni, writing on American issues, often gives Japan as an example of communitarian society with strong reliance on society than the state to govern social order (Etzioni, 2002, p. 84, 2003, p. 2, 2021). Although he writes that 'informal social controls often sufficed to motivate most people, most of the time, to observe social norms' in Japan (Etzioni, 2012, p. 222), my observation is that the social norms and bonds in present day Japan have deteriorated.

Lifelong learning academics in Japan are concerned about this loss of social bonds. Sakaguchi (2008) writes that individualisation is progressing in Japan whereby people's basis of making choices is shifting. It is shifting from making choices based on parents' or ancestors' preference or the rural village's preferences to one based on diverse range of open choices often based on individuals' preference as long as it does not harm other people. In writing about the current trends in community education in Japan, both Makino (2013a) and Sawano (2012) raises deep concern with the rise of no-bondage society (無縁社会) and the individuals' initiative to reconnect and build communities through local learning initiatives.

In spite of a long historical emphasis on learning to live together, communitarianism (共同体主義) is not a popular theory in Japan. One of the advocates of communitarianism in Japan, Kikuchi (2009, p. 54) says there is general misunderstanding that communitarianism is equated with authoritarian way of ignoring individuals' rights and freedom. He argues that the Japanese term of common good (共通善) and its concept should be highlighted more than

the concept of community (共同体). In other words, he proposes to change the translation of communitarianism to common good principles (共通善主義) by changing the first three characters with common good. Perhaps because of this perception of community in Japan, communitarianism is not popular among the policy makers and they have adopted new public common (新しい公共) to promote common good.

The common good as used in the Japanese constitution is widely understood by people (Kikuchi, 2009, pp. 67–68). Article 12 states that individuals' rights and freedom shall be used to produce common good.[4] The Japanese constitution, in other words, echoes the communitarian's concept of self (individual) in which 'individuals have a vital interest in leading decent communal lives' (Bell, 2020 section 2, paragraph 13).

On the other hand, community has a negative connotation in Japan as noted by Etzioni when he describes Japan as having 'traditional forms of moral impositions' (Etzioni, 2001, p. 371) which were practiced in traditional rural villages. A discriminatory term used for social punishment explains well this practice. *Mura-hachibu* (村八分 literal translation is village eight-tenth) meant that village members unite to exclude certain people who do not follow the social rules and order except for two community activities: organisation of funerals and fire-fighting. These two were included otherwise they could cause greater social problems like spread of communicable disease and fire. For the other eight community activities – coming of age celebration, wedding ceremony, care during birth and sickness, building or maintenance of house, support in case of water disaster, post-funeral events and travel – ostracised persons and often family members as well can be socially excluded. These ten sets of activities symbolise also the occasions in which social bonds were forged in traditional Japan.

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[4] Article 12. The freedoms and rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution shall be maintained by the constant endeavour of the people, who shall refrain from any abuse of these freedoms and rights and shall always be responsible for utilizing them for the public welfare (from http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html).

Despite this negative association with community in Japanese history, I will argue that communitarian philosophical framework like Bell (2020) suggests for other countries can help to counter the neo-liberal directions taking place in the public social education in Japan. I will first describe what is happening to *kominkan*s under the neo-liberal policy influence, then how communitarian philosophy can inform the vitalisation of *kominkan*s towards a preferable future followed by a few remarks on the critiques on communitarianism.

2.4.3 Decline of communitarian practices in social education

Way back in 1955, George Hillary collected 94 definitions of community in academic papers (Kahne, Westheimer and King, 1996). Acknowledging that there are diverse definitions of community, Hiroi (2008, pp. 49–54) discusses the evolution of community in Japan. First is the community of production versus the community of living. In traditional agricultural society, these two communities overlapped. This could be called a traditional communal agricultural community where practices of ostracism, *mura-hachibu* took place. Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in Japan led to increased separation of two communities. In the community of production, formed in workplaces, majority of the members were men with lifetime employment. Not only work but socialisation, further training and recreational activities took place with colleagues. Bell (2020) referred to this as Japanese-style communitarianism. A community of living played a much-reduced role within the nuclear family in urban settings. Mothers were preoccupied with children's upbringing and household work leaving little time to connect with the local community.

The dominance of workplace community based on lifetime employment is declining due to diversification and frequent changes of employment mode. Moreover, the share of active working age population is declining compared with the elderly population (age 65 and over). By 2065, if the current trend continues, the share of the elderly population is projected to reach 38 per cent and working age population (age 15 to 64 years) will be only half of the total population in Japan (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in Japan, 2017). Considering this rapidly aging society, Hiroi (2008) says the locality-based community will become more important in the future as

the elderly have less mobility than workers. He questions: which place shall be the centre of Japanese community? Or is such a centre not needed at all? By centre, he means a central place in the community where people, including strangers, can easily gather to have diverse range of communication and interactions.

Hiroi carried out a nation-wide survey asking people where do they consider as a key central place in their community. People most frequently selected community *kominkan* and community centres followed by schools and then welfare and medical institutions in the community (Hiroi, 2008: p. 62 diagram 5). This result confirms that these centres are the place where the ten community activities described previously are taking place. I would like to emphasise here that *kominkan* is highly preferred by people as their choice of social institutions much more than the schools or the religious places (shrines and temples). *Kominkan* are also contributing to making of community as defined by the communitarian perspectives.

Etzioni (1996, p. 127) defines that community is a combination of two elements: a) A web of affect-laden relationships among a group of individuals, relations that often crisscross and reinforce one another – rather than merely one-on-one or chainlike individual relationships; and b) A measure of commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity – in short, to a particular culture. In explaining 'thin' communitarianism, Olssen *et al.* (2004, p. 235) emphasise on the balance between the individual and the collective like Etzioni's symbiosis balance between strong communal bonds and powerful protections of self as one character of good society. This balance in Japan is starting to resemble the imbalance that tends towards strong individualism in U.S.A.

Although the politicians and policy makers in Japan are raising future concerns with the changes in population structure, I see that a greater social-political problem lies with the way a neo-liberal government is breaking the egalitarian society in Japan. One concrete example of growing disparity is observable by comparing the growing share of national income by the richest ten per cent in Japan since the economic slowdown. The share of richest have increased from 34 per cent in 1992 to 42 per cent in 2010 (World Inequality Database, 2012).

The increasing inequality and poverty among single female parent households and elderly is a growing concern in Japan.

While the functions of shrines and temples that united residents and marked the boundaries of local communities have declined, *kominkan* have occupied the space for community making in the sense of Etzioni's relationship building and forging common values. A story of how the villagers handled the aftermath of the earthquake-tsunami-nuclear power plant triple disaster in March 2011, reported in the New York Times is an 'exemplary of Japan's communal spirit and organising abilities' (Fackler, 2011). The villagers were evacuated in the *kominkan* and I am certain that the villagers had worked together and learned together on many occasions in the exact venue. Knowing each other's name and the trust among them built through experiences of working together must have helped them to organise themselves in emergency situation.

The Japanese society at large, however is becoming more diversified and neo-liberal stance is influencing the foundations of social education – *kominkan* and its' professionals. Arai and Tokiwa-Fuse (2013, p. 172) write that the philosophy of social education in Japan is based on a human rights-based approach and the learners have the right to decide learning subjects and activities. Every *kominkan* under the leadership of a social education director or coordinator and with the participation of citizens agree on their management principles. There is an active network among the *kominkan* for mutual learning and exchange of good practices. The government has a national standard guideline on the establishment and management of *kominkan*s, but this is a minimum standard mostly concerning facilities. There is one model of management that was developed in Santama *kominkan* in a suburb of Tokyo in 1973 that has had an influence on other *kominkan*s. This popular model has four roles and seven management principles of *kominkan*. The key essence of this model was the *kominkan*'s role to guarantee citizens' right to education, that residents are the main driver of teaching-learning contents and activities and qualified *kominkan* staff shall serve and support the realisation for their learning (Arai and Tokiwa-Fuse, 2013, pp. 188–189; Iida, 2003, p. 71).

Bell (2020) describes three forms of communities or communal life: 'communities based on geographical location'; 'communities of memory or

groups of strangers who share a morally-significant history'; and 'psychological communities, or communities of face-to-face personal interaction governed by sentiments of trust, co-operation and altruism'. These three forms of communal life have been taking place through the activities of *kominkan*.

The vitality of *kominkan*, however is in decline due to many reasons. The MEXT supported the outsourcing of *kominkan* management to private sector responding to requests from the national association of mayors in 2005. The Japan Association for the Promotion of Social Education (JAPSE) had issued following statement about the privatisation:

> It spread the idea that beneficiaries should pay for public services in social education. It created an obstacle to the participation of the residents in policymaking. It destroyed the freedom of learning because the designated institutions system prefers profitability and efficiency. It denied the continuity of social education. It made the working conditions worse and less professional for people working for social education. (Arai and Tokiwa-Fuse, 2013, p. 177)

The changes in management of *kominkan* influenced by neo-liberal policy is having greater implications and the above statement is becoming a reality. The autonomy of the local community in *kominkan*'s decision-making is gradually lost when community members are excluded from *kominkan* committees. Payment by the beneficiaries (=individual learners) for public services in social education was newly introduced in some *kominkan*. Learning topics and contents are controlled by outsiders of community as choices were made based on profitability and efficiency. Place to discuss sensitive and critical issues in community are lost. Under these circumstances, working conditions and professionalism for people working in the field of social education became worse.

Citizens' participation in the social education policy and financing is weakening partly due to the aging of citizen representatives and difficulties of finding a successor (Maruyama, 2011, p. 6). A greater cause is the legislative changes in the Fundamental Law of Education and Social Education Act in the 1990s to present in reducing the autonomy of local communities in the planning and management of *kominkan*. Before the changes, every *kominkan* was mandated to have an advisory committee with representatives of residents. Since this

mandate has been removed, some local governments restricted the membership of *kominkan* advisory committee to have education representatives from the education sector and industry only. Some *kominkan*s do not have advisory committee membership anymore. An article by Arai and Tokiwa-Fuse (2013) explains in detail the changes made in the legislations and its consequences, notably in increasing control of learning contents by the Government.

Along with the mergers of local administration, the *kominkan* are being closed in many places or managements are taken over by the private sector under the name of efficiency in neoliberal policy. Likely future scenario of this is bigger (and more fiscally efficient) *kominkan* offering education activities meeting the market demand. What will be lost is *kominkan* that was within walking distance from homes where people discussed community issues and shared joys and happiness and sorrows of their daily lives. The number of *kominkan* used to be more than the secondary schools in Japan. The proximity has an important factor in participation of community members. With big *kominkan*s, children, housewives and elderly do not have easy access as they need to depend on other people for transportation and time for travel is limited.

The introduction of neo-liberal policy in the management of *kominkan* has greatly shifted the philosophy of *kominkan* from education to service industry ruled by profits. Not only are the citizens excluded from deciding on what to learn, they have to pay for courses which are very much similar to what is offered in the market. Private community centres are mainly dealing with hobbies and higher education institutions are offering liberal arts courses. Before, the majority of courses in *kominkan* did not charge fees or collected only small amount to cover for necessary supplies and to drink tea together.

The working conditions of social education officers became short-term and non-professional work. Local government staff with no background in education could become a staff of *kominkan* at any point. As Sakaguchi (2011, p. 59) points out that the non-profit organisations in Japan tends to be treated as low-cost labour to carry out the local governments' welfare services, detachment of *kominkan* management from community to private sector is making the work of social education less attractive.

At the local community level, it was common that social education officers had established working relations with the civil society and social movements. *Kominkan* was the place where citizens learned about alternative views and solutions different from the mainstream economic development views. Learning activities initiated by local residents covered sensitive topics such as women's empowerment and industrial pollution. Nowadays, the local government or the private managing company self-censors the topic of meetings so a discussion could take place on the global environmental issues that is harmless to local community but not issues that could be critical of incumbent Mayor's work or status quo.

Claims by communitarians that the community has a central role in providing necessary frameworks 'of learning, of language and of opportunity'(Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004, p. 230), I would add culture as well. Each geographic community in Japan as elsewhere has developed their culture handed down from previous generation.

In this dissertation, I chose to use community learning to cover social education and group-based lifelong learning activities in Japan. The government support for *kominkan* and social education is declining as discussed in this chapter, I propose strengthening communitarian perspective and using community learning to refer to group learning to build new public commons taking place in *kominkan* is important in the future advocacy and policy development at national and local levels. In the next chapter, I will discuss about leadership which is the second component of this research.

Chapter 3   Literature on leadership and gender in community learning

3.1 Introduction

Like lifelong learning, leadership has a long history. It is defined in many ways and several approaches and theories have been designed and analysed by scholars over the last century. Thick academic handbooks on leadership have been updated with publications of new editions in this century (Bass and Bass, 2008; Day and Antonakis, 2018; Northouse, 2018). New editions have broadened the research on leadership by adding more socio-cultural contexts accepting that there is diversity in how leadership is exercised. For this research, I follow Northouse's basic definition which views leadership as 'a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal' (2018, p. 5). This means anyone can practice leadership and it is not directly tied to holding a leadership position.

In this chapter, I review some research on women and leadership in education and community development sectors. As discussed in the previous chapter, the work of the *kominkan* professionals is multi-faceted and they play the role of educators as well as community developers. For this reason, I expanded the scope of review from education to community development work.

I firstly describe the mainstream leadership literature in education which is predominantly an American concept. This is followed by literature review of leadership by women. In the last part, I explain how these concepts have been adapted by Japanese scholars in analysing leadership practices in community learning in Japan.

Some scholars argue that sex differences in leadership styles do not differ greatly (Van Engen and Willemsen, 2004; Rey, 2005). From my professional experience and this research, I agree with scholars who argue that women have socially-constructed leadership traits and face specific barriers in exercising their leadership within a patriarchal system (Bass, Avolio and Atwater, 1996; Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010; Devnew *et al.*, 2017; Robinson *et al.*, 2017).

3.2 Leadership in education sector

Leadership is more than managing tasks and people. From Northouse's general and overarching definition of leadership which is about influencing and giving a sense of directions to take (2018), leadership in education have additional elements of leading to improve learning by children, young people and adults. Research on educational leadership is diverse. The subject of leadership ranges from individual teachers, school principals and university presidents, as well as education officials at different levels of governance (Leithwood, 2007). The majority of qualitative studies have evidence of what is considered to be quality leadership and they have been discussed through different perspectives (Gronn, 1996, 2010). Recognising that in practice leadership is multidimensional, I discuss here servant, transformational and distributed leadership perspectives in education (Gronn, 2002; Stewart, 2006; Stephenson, Harold and Badri, 2018).

Leadership is exercised in group settings and when a leader puts the group members' welfare before themselves, Greenleaf, who first advocated this kind of leadership in 1970s, called it servant leadership (Northouse, 2018, p. 227). Servant educational leaders are concerned with the development and empowerment of teachers, students, and communities they serve, and they appreciate ethical behaviours. Ten characteristics of the servant leader according to the Spears Center for Servant Leadership are:

- Listening receptively to what is being said and unsaid and being in touch with one's inner voice.

- Striving to understand and empathize with others.
- Healing relationships.
- Strengthening awareness: of self and others to better understand values, ethics and issues of power.
- Persuading rather than coercing.
- Balancing conceptual thinking and operational realities.
- Having foresight to understand the past, present and the likely consequences of the future.
- Serving the needs of others.
- Committing to the growth of self and others.
- Building community.

(Stephenson, Harold and Badri, 2018, pp. 20-21)

Servant leaders are good at improving performance and growth of followers and learners, organisational performance and achieving social impact (Northouse, 2018, p. 253).

Transformational leadership, like servant leadership, is participatory and consultative in making decisions. The discourse in transformational leadership puts emphasis on the process and not on the leaders' traits and characteristics. What stands out is that a leader leads towards one grand and shared vision (Bass, Avolio and Atwater, 1996; Bass, 1997; Bass and Bass, 2008). Four characteristics of transformational leadership are: Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass and Riggio, 2006). These characteristics help teachers to perform better and empower their leadership potential. This kind of leader is effective in carrying out reforms in education and schools as it encourages collaboration and group problem solving (Leithwood, 1992; Stewart, 2006).

The third kind of leadership is distributed leadership. Contrary to viewing leaders as exceptional and born-to-be Gronn (2002) proposes to shift the analysis from an individual leader's personality characteristics to how a group of people share leadership through informal and institutionalised arrangements. He argues that with increase in complexity of work required by educational leaders, education personnel have complementary and overlapping roles and responsibilities. The achievement of goals is not possible through one leader but requires a coordinated division of leadership responsibilities across the school and educational institutions.

These three perspectives of leadership are flexible types of leadership not based on having one strong person in a leader position. Rather leadership is exercised by education personnel at different levels through sharing of leadership roles and responsibilities. Features of these leadership and their 'hybrid' (Gronn, 2008, p. 155) forms will be applied in analysing female *kominkan* officials' leadership in Chapter Six. How this leadership is researched in community development context is discussed next.

3.3 Leadership in community development

In addition to leadership in education in previous section, I discuss in this section research on leadership in community development (Rank and Hutchison, 2000; Callanan *et al.*, 2014). *Kominkan* professionals have a dual and equal nature of education and community development to empower people and improve people's lives. They put emphasis on learning as well as taking action from learning. Research on the leadership approaches by community development leaders are highlighted here.

Rank and Hutchison research identifies three key leadership skills as perceived by community development leaders in U.S.A. These leaders are working as presidents and directors in the member organisations of the National Association for Social Workers. The association's code of ethics states that the main mission of social workers is to 'enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty' (National Association of Social Workers, 2017 preamble). The majority of research participants viewed their leadership for 'building community, communicating orally and in writing, and performing comprehensive analysis of social, political and cultural events' (2000, p. 500) as different from other professions. These are also the leadership skills needed by *kominkan* professionals as well in that they are leading for the empowerment of community people. The authors suggest that these three leadership skills need

to be integrated in the training curriculum for social workers as these skills are relevant for new and existing workers and leaders in this field. They also found five elements defining the concept of leadership for the social work sector. These were: '(1) pro-action, (2) values and ethics, (3) empowerment, (4) vision, and (5) communication' (2000, p. 492). Compared with other professions, social work leaders apply more participatory leadership and are people oriented. They need to have strong socio-emotional skills and advocate for the marginalised people as well as for the social work itself.

Looking at the need for more investment in leadership training in the social business sector in U.S.A., Callanan *et. al.* (2014) collected surveys from 200 leaders working in the non-profit organisations and social enterprises. Following leadership capability were ranked high by respondents: ability to innovate and implement, ability to surround themselves with talented team, collaboration and ability to manage to outcomes (p. 4). Close to half of respondents indicated coaching, cross-sector networking, time to experiment and taking a sabbatical as their choice of support for leadership development. Social work leaders are driven by a passion for mission and need to build a collaborative team around this mission. They also need to collaborate with others by reaching out to establish partnerships and seek help and advice.

These features of good leadership in social development are similar to the recommendations made by the National Committee which examined the required qualifications for social education officials in Japan as described in Chapter Two. New capabilities which were recommended for inclusion in the revised training curriculum for social education officials were the ability to collaborate with multiple partners and innovate. While it has not happened yet in Okayama City, many local governments in Japan are outsourcing the management and operation of kominkan to non-profit organizations (Otaka, 2017). Consequently, the recommendations for social business discussed here are also pertinent for kominkan and will be considered in the Chapter Seven.

The mainstream discourse on leadership discussed so far are genderblind or assumes the leadership is exercised by men in workplace. In the next section, I discuss literature looking at leadership by women.

3.4 Women and leadership

Blackmore (2013) writing from a critical feminist perspective reviewed the discourse on women and educational leadership. The discourse is not simply about counting the number of women in leadership positions vis-a-vis men. She argues that while there are multiple leadership perspectives, a feminist leadership perspective adds achieving social justice as another goal in the leadership discourse described in the previous sections which was genderblind. Genderblind discourse in leadership tends to not place importance on diversity in leadership and contexts. Drawing on Fraser's principles of recognition, redistribution and representation in sharing power (Fraser and Naples, 2004, p. 1117) help us to understand that leadership is about working towards a shared agenda in a manner based on trust and respect among people. Her work has been appreciated by feminist scholars in doing research in leadership in education and community with social justice lens (Canaday, 2003; Shakeshaft *et al.*, 2007; Blackmore, 2009; Arruzza, Fraser and Bhattacharya, 2019).

Blackmore also discusses the role of emotions and emotionality in leadership (1996, 2013). Emotions connect and disconnect people which is an important aspect of leadership. Without other people, leadership obviously cannot be exercised. She gives examples about how emotions are connected to power and politics and how they are important in individuals' learning, educational institution's change as well as in recognising diversity in society. Emotionality is a collective feeling which may arise from the unjust distribution of power and can push people to work towards change. It is also a collective feeling of respect for social justice and recognition of differences in contexts. It has been argued that women educators place importance on relationships and place value on emotions and feelings (English and Irving, 2015), bonding with other women serves as a source of strength.

In a collectivistic culture in Japan, this emotion of belonging features strongly in everyday life. Positive emotions and a sense of shame of not belonging to a

group play a role in bonding people towards a common agenda (Kitayama, Markus and Kurokawa, 2000). To build a collective feeling, people have meetings to reflect on achievements and challenges and then have drinks and meals together to either celebrate success or forget failures. This was a widespread practice at work and in community when I was working in Japan, but I hear from my friends that younger generations in Japan no longer appreciate this in workplace.

Lovell (2013) reviews the relationship between leadership and gender in male and female mayors exercising their leadership for community building in U.S.A.. In short, she writes how women experience leadership roles differently from men at the individual, cultural and institutional levels. In her literature review and analysis of interviews with mayors, she discusses that gender stereotypes of competitiveness and assertiveness of male leaders and kind, nice and helpful female leaders play against women when they exercise stereotypical male characteristics. Cultural expectations on women as wives and mothers also affect 'time, energy, and resources a woman can potentially give to a leadership position' (p. 428) and the extent to which they are 'heard' by other male leaders. At the institutional level, having access to resources and networks by women are limited in male dominated institutions. Her position is that addressing social structural issues in community leadership development programmes can improve women's leadership skills. Having a discussion among male and female participants on women in leadership can help men to understand the three levels of barriers faced by women. She recommends that mentorship would be a useful development tool for women. The community leader development programmes should be designed to reduce barriers for promotion and access to networks by women.

These differences and challenges faced by women in U.S.A. are encountered much stronger in Japan. Elderly men are still majority in the leadership positions in Japanese society and their traditional values that women's first work as being good wife and wise mother (Sakamoto, 2014) works against women both ways when women display motherly characteristics or when they show strong determination in work places. On top of stereotypical gender roles, women also face an age barrier whereby seniority-based hierarchy is followed in many places and occasions. As there are few women leaders, mentors and role models in

women's leadership development are needed to support women across institutions and sectors just like men have been in their workplaces (Chandler, 2008).

For a meeting on *Building Feminist –Leadership - Looking Back, Looking Forward*, held in Cape Town, South Africa in 2008, Batliwala reviewed the concept of feminine leadership and feminist leadership. Feminine leadership is largely found in the business sector and refers to 'collaboration, cooperation, collective decision-making, and above all, relationship-building' (Batliwala, 2011, p. 18); importantly, it does not question the gender inequality. Feminist leadership is defined as 'a dynamic quality that is present and can be enhanced in most individuals' (Batliwala, 2011, p. 27) and places emphasis on collective power and collective leadership models. This is in criticism of 'heroines' and single-leader models of leaderships. Sharron Mendel who is a leader in the Association of Women in Development defines the concept of a transformative feminist leader as one who 'actively work to eradicate inequalities, placing an analysis of gender relations at the heart of their actions' (Antrobus, 2000, p. 50).

3.4.1 Women's approach to leadership in education

Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft have collaborated extensively on women and leadership in education (Shakeshaft *et al.*, 2007; Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010; Robinson *et al.*, 2017). I explain in this section the five common themes on women and leadership in education they suggest based on review of their own research on women superintendents and their feminine approaches to educational leadership which pays attention to marginalised students done mostly in the U.S.A.. They are 'leadership for learning, leadership for social justice, relational leadership, spiritual leadership and balanced leadership' (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010, p. 6). These themes will be applied in the Japanese context in Chapter Six.

The first theme, relational leadership, means women lead through horizontal relations rather than hierarchical vertical relations. They aim to empower other people by using their power with them rather than exercising power over them. They are not afraid to share their power. This is reflected in how women leaders collect input by listening to diverse groups of people in making decisions.

Through listening with their heart, they are able to build coalitions and supportive networks to implement the decisions.

The second theme, leadership for social justice, is having a passion for work and bringing changes to lives of students, especially those who are having troubles with schooling. Women leaders pursue their passion in collaborative relationship involving parents, community and various stakeholders.

The third theme, spiritual leadership, views 'spirituality as a source of personal strength as well as a way to understand connectedness to others, and to the greater world' (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010, p. 14). Applied to the Japanese context, this maps on to the notion of practicing zen – finding peace and understanding oneself to find hope for good change.

The fourth theme, leadership for learning is about women leaders placing priority on instruction and improving students' learning in their work. '[T]heir hearts are moved by watching students grow and develop' (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010, p. 19).

The last theme, balanced leadership is about finding a balance between work and home. Women leaders are coping with double management at workplace as well as for family. The balancing of two demanding priorities does not only bring an extra burden but they are able to enhance their work with parents and community tapping on their first-hand experiences as mothers. This concept has been shown to be relevant in Asia where the double-day effect of taking care of household work in addition to professional work is more pronounced than in the Western culture (Shakeshaft *et al.*, 2007, p. 117).

They have also analysed barriers for women in practising educational leadership. Shakeshaft *et. al.* in 2007 reviewed changes in the categories of barriers women face from Shakeshaft' s early work in 1985. They write that women leaders in education no longer lack confidence or motivation – an interna– factor - to lead, but they lack a strong leadership identity of belonging to a leadership group. Sex discrimination is still common, and women experience more stress than men at the workplace. Examples of discrimination or intimidating tactics used by men include name-calling and silencing in meetings against a woman. Feelings of

belonging to a leadership group could be built by having mentors and female peers in leadership whom women can seek support and encouragement to address such discriminations. Sex role stereotyping like men as firm and aggressive and women as caring leaders continues to be a significant barrier. Family responsibilities remain a barrier for women in entering and moving up in leadership as well. This is more prominent in Japan where compared with other OECD countries, women have much lower participation in economic activity.

A more recent study reviewing several types of barriers faced by women concluded that the main barrier is prejudice and discrimination on women as leaders (Carli and Eagly, 2018). This is an external factor that women leaders do not have control over. The only power she may have is to influence other men and women to have more positive and nurturing attitudes towards aspiring women leaders.

The characteristics of servant leadership and transformational leadership share common traits with women's approach to leadership introduced in this section. One significant difference is the external factors like household work which influences women's leadership. Appreciation for what women are achieving as leaders are increasing in the business sector (Chamorro-Premuzic and Gallop, 2020) and men are realising that they should practice feminist leadership too. With more women overcoming the barriers discussed here and exercising their leadership and more men understanding them, community education in Japan has potentials to blossom. In the next section, I explain the relevance of these theories on leadership and gender for women in Japan with research concerning women working in *kominkan* in different cities of Japan.

3.5 Leadership in community learning in Japan

In writing about indigenous women in U.S.A. and their leadership in education, Minthorn and Shotton (2019) cites Fitzgerald (2002) saying that scholarship on educational leadership by women looks at women as a homogenous group and

has not paid attention to ethnicity or locations. To ground this research, in this section, I explain Confucius perspectives in Japan, their influence in social education in Japan and discuss some features of leadership in Japan with special focus on *kominkan*.

Historically, Japan has adapted Confucianism thinking from its neighbouring countries, China and Korea (Yamaguchi, 1998; Kim, 2009). People in these countries value harmony in family, community and societal life. They place group needs ahead of their own individual needs (Yang and Yorozu, 2015, p. 12). Social education, the term selected for community education in Japan, places groups over individuals in promoting lifelong learning. A global leadership and organisational behaviour effectiveness research programme called the GLOBE study characterised the Confucian Asian countries which includes Japan as having strong orientations for in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism and performance orientation (House *et al.*, 2004). While performance orientation is shared with the Anglo countries – U.S.A. and United Kingdom, charismatic leadership is not a strong feature in Japan. These countries value group and collaborative work than individual work to achieve results (Northouse, 2015) and are less segmented than other cultures (Triandes, 2004).

Nagatani (2011), who is an experienced *kominkan* coordinator, researched capacity development of part-time *kominkan* professionals in his city, Fukuoka. He conducted interviews with sixteen *kominkan* part-time staff and analysed continuing professional development using the following five categories:

- Training organised for *kominkan* professionals by public authorities

- Individual learning and development

- Learning through interactions with colleagues and group learning

- Learning through professional practices

- Advice/instructions from social education specialists who are their supervisors.

I find his five areas of capacity development as relevant to the process of improving leadership competencies by *kominkan* professionals in my research.

From the interviews, he concluded that the part-time *kominkan* officials in Fukuoka City are motivated to do good work and learn, however the professional roles and responsibilities of *kominkan* professionals are not fully recognised by supervisors and colleagues. They have to spend much more time on administrative work than planning and implementing education and training activities in their daily work. Applying Schon's reflective practices by professionals (1983), he discusses that the research participants are indeed carrying self-directed learning and reflecting-in-practice as well as reflecting-on-practice. The *kominkan* professionals are organising voluntary and informal exchange of information and experience through visiting each other's centres. They are also writing reports about the courses they organise and other activities and sharing their learning with *kominkan* directors and other colleagues. They expressed a wish to have more systematic training opportunities, to have seminars to reflect and discuss their work experiences, to gain approval to attend social education courses as part of their work and to be able to use *kominkan*'s budget to travel and attend conferences for researchers and practitioners.

Oyasu (2012) focused on the evolution of *kominkan* in Okayama City and its linkages with the community learning centres in other Asian countries. His main method was interviewing three different groups of *kominkan* stakeholders (*kominkan* professionals, management committee members and users/learners), coding their responses to into six broad categories: what is *kominkan*, participation by citizens, operational management, collaboration with other institutions, administration reform and future of *kominkan*. He applied triangulation analysis (Olsen 2004) by looking at the responses to similar questions by different groups of stakeholders.

In terms of *kominkan* professionals' profile and capacity development, he found out that they have multiple roles and tasks. Their work covers local government administration, community building and education. Some management committee members positively view the possibility of *kominkan* professionals to become *kominkan* directors in the future while the professionals themselves

acknowledge that there are certain benefits of having retired school principals and local government managers as directors. In addition to on-the-job training, *kominkan* professionals are actively engaged in mutual learning through monthly meetings and special projects cutting across *kominkan* (Oyasu 2012: 21-22). Their approach to research is not explicit but Nagatani and Oyasu could be classified as working within a constructivism paradigm accepting that their participants experience the *kominkan* differently.

Another study on professional development for *kominkan* personnel in Fukui City (Yoshimi, 2011) suggested individuals need to document their practices and to have regular exchanges with colleagues on their practices. There are more *kominkan* in Fukui City than Okayama City. Fukui City has *kominkan* for each primary school districts and districts with more than 5,000 people have three *kominkan* specialists. Okayama city has *kominkan* for each lower secondary school districts which has a larger catchment area than primary schools. Like Okayama City, the specialists are certified in social education official by attending courses organised in local university at the cost of local government. Unlike Okayama City, the specialists have short-term contracts and many of them were housewives before taking up the profession.

Yoshimi's (2011) study in Fukui City reviewed voluntary training activities by interviewing three women specialists. Following the completion of the social education official course, some specialists wanted to continue reflective practice (Schon, 1983; Smith, 2011) as a group. They documented their work individually, collectively discussed each other's work and published their practices in *kominkan* on regular basis. The publications were not simply activity reports but were written with the intention to inform new professionals and *kominkan* users to build synergies among *kominkan* professionals in Fukui City. Yanagisawa (Yanagisawa, 2008) who was the course director for social education official certification course in this city and continued to support and advise the voluntary group indicated that such reflective practice serves two purposes. One purpose is to research on the community learning process and development to improve practices by other people. The second purpose is to build the capacities of *kominkan* professionals to support people's learning (Yanagisawa, 2008). He connects reflective practices in Fukui city to Etienne Wenger's communities of practice approach (1998) and suggests that local and national networks among

practitioners and researchers has been building such communities of practice for social education in post-war Japan. Building on these practices, he further suggests that the considerations by Japanese government to setup social education courses at advanced professional training level equivalent to Masters and Doctorate levels as positive development. Reflective practice which is introduced in the certification course for social education specialists is neither a short term nor a one-shot activity. It should be seen as a long-term spiral loop from practice to reflection to improving professional practice.

The empirical research discussed here is largely building on reflective practice and transformative learning by *kominkan* professionals in Japan. Schon's work on reflective practice has been translated to Japanese by Miwa and Yanagisawa who are prominent social education scholars in Japan (Schon, 2007). Women as Learners: The Significance of Gender in Adult Learning by Hayes and Flannely has also been translated by Miwa together with Irie (Hayes and Flannery, 2009) and both books are being read by social education researchers in Japan. Miwa explains reflection-in-action as art-like practice and untold knowledge by practitioners, and stresses that the issue raised by Schon is that it is important to translate them into writing (Miwa, 2009).

Although leadership is not in the forefront in these research studies, when seen from leadership perspectives discussed earlier, I consider *kominkan* professionals as actively practicing leadership through their work. The concept of transformative learning (Cranton and Wright, 2008; Kegan, 2008; Mezirow, 2008) that adults can change and transform their frame of mindset is accepted and practiced in community education in Japan. The elements of transformative learning – critical (self) reflection and participating in dialogue to exchange different viewpoints and taking actions on the new learning - form the core of community education and training for social education officials.

From the standpoint that leadership for transformative learning can be nurtured, the next section deals with continuing professional development.

3.6 Leadership in community learning in other countries

One of professional application of my dissertation is to apply the findings on leadership and gender issues in community learning to other countries I work. This section covers a small selection of research on professionals working in the field of community education and development in other countries. I discuss them in comparison with the *kominkan* professionals in Japan.

Community-based institutions similar to *kominkan* are observable in Asian countries. Among these countries, community learning centres in Thailand are well established and supported by the government (Noguchi, Guevara and Yorozu, 2015; Duke and Hinzen, 2017; Yorozu, 2017). The Nonformal and Informal Education (NIE) teachers in the district learning centres have similar working conditions like the social education officials in *kominkan* in Okayama City. Their role in engaging the community members in local learning and development activities are crucial. In Thailand, local wisdom is appreciated in informal education and local development work. Community members with such wisdom are called upon to share their knowledge in the learning centres. Nonformal education work cover nonformal education programmes to youth and adults who had missed out on school education. There is however only one NIE teacher under government contract per district centre. They oversee several volunteer teachers working in the sub-district centres. A researcher in Thailand raises concerns that shortage of professional staff has impact on the quality and performance of nonformal education (Charungkaittikul, 2016). The NIE qualified teachers are preoccupied with administrative matters that they do not have time to develop and organise learning activities. Professional development opportunities are available through monthly meeting of teachers and conferences organised at regional and national levels (Oyasu, 2014, pp. 117–118). The central government report says the professionalization of NIE teachers need full support with improving teaching-learning skills through pre-service and in-service training, self-study and e-Learning programmes and better working conditions for volunteer teachers so that they do not change jobs (Duke and Hinzen, 2017, p. 19).

In a neighbouring country, the Republic of Korea, managers of lifelong learning centres (LLC) have multiple roles like the *kominkan* professionals. They are responsible to 'provide counselling to the residents; conduct studies on the local learning demands; manage the LLC operation committee; set up and manage education programmes; support study circles; and build a collaborative network with the local institutions and organizations'(Duke and Hinzen, 2017, p. 18). Their qualification and training system is more formalised than Japan. Both the managers and educators in LLC must complete training courses developed by the National Institute for Lifelong Education. The training course is divided into three grades which provides incentives for educators to improve their qualifications (National Institute of Lifelong Education, 2015).

Among the European countries, I consider community education and community educators in Scotland to share job profile and leadership orientation with *kominkan* staff. Lyn Tett and Ian Fyfe (2010) write that community education has reformist and radical traditions and community educators are change agents for social justice and democracy in Scotland. They are expected to play multiple roles which were previously the work of adult educators, youth workers and community workers. In response to the need for continuing professional development, the Standards Council for Community Learning and Development in Scotland was established in 2008 and has developed a code of ethics for the profession. The competence framework for community learning and development professionals developed by the council cover following topics: Know and understand the community in which we work; build and maintain relationships with individuals and groups; provide learning and development opportunities in a range of contexts; facilitate and promote community empowerment; organise and manage resources; develop and support collaborative working; and evaluate and inform practice (CLD Standards Council Scotland, 2018). These topics reflect the leadership orientation which are akin to servant leadership and distributed leadership discussed earlier in this chapter.

Community educators across countries have multiple and demanding tasks as the learning centres they work serve multiple purposes. Women form a large percentage of this workforce. The leadership characteristics required by community educators varies from public accountability in Indonesia (Pamungkas, 2019) to adhering to quality assurance frameworks in Ireland (Fitzsimons, 2017).

A key leadership role for community educators are to act as change agents (Fletcher, 1988).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed leadership literature from different angles and contexts: school education, community development, feminist, *kominkan* professionals in Japan and their equivalent organisations in other countries. I would like to restate that there are diverse ways to view and practice leadership and there is no one philosophy of leadership for community education. Because women face gender stereotypes and barriers as leaders, understanding their approaches to leadership and nurturing their ways of leading should be reinforced.

From various definitions and approaches to leadership I reviewed, a comprehensive definition of leadership I can aspire to and fits well with the *kominkan* professionals in Okayama City is this one quoted by Batliwala (2011, p. 29):

> Women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilise others – especially other women – around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic and political transformation for equality and the realization of human rights for all.

In the following chapters, I explore the leadership practices and aspirations of women working in community education in Okayama City taking a critical feminist perspective on leadership. The analytical approach and process I followed is discussed more in the next chapter.

Chapter 4   **Methodology**

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain my research process applying Denzin and Lincoln's five phases of the research process: the researcher as a multicultural subject, theoretical paradigms and perspectives, research strategies, methods of collecting and analysing empirical materials; and the art, practices and politics of interpretation and evaluation (2011, pp. 11–15). Boundaries of these phases overlapped and the actual process went through an iterative processes (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) with breaks in research that caused the research plan to extend from two-year to five-years.

4.2 Researcher positionality

I considered myself as a passionate participant of research on community learning, gender and leadership in Japan. I am an outsider to the research participants as I am in a different profession and I live abroad. As discussed in Chapter One, some research participants and I were in a similar situation of being passionate about our own work yet having a feeling that we were not progressing with our own career and had little prospect of promotion. In informal talks, we talked about going through mid-life crisis as professional women which Olesen (1991) recommended as an area that is under studied. In the workplace, we used gender stereotypes to our benefit at times and faced challenges because we were women among men who had more decision-making

power. Illustrative case is when we serve tea with a smile to colleagues to discuss solutions on an issue which was raised in a meeting whereby men in positions dominated the discussion. With tea and smile, we approach people and get support on our agenda.

At my work, when a new Director started, the scope of my work shifted from addressing literacy education challenges for adults in the developing countries to supporting development of government policy frameworks for lifelong learning in low and middle-income countries. My career in education development started from working for women with low literacy skills and facing multiple disadvantages. My first business trip was to Kolkata, India where I observed first-hand what life is like for people living in extreme poverty. Ever since then, my priority and interest has been to work for the marginalised population even though the majority of my worktime may be spent on drafting texts in the office.

For this research, I decided to have an in-depth review of lifelong learning policy in my home country and understand the working conditions and aspirations of women working in *kominkan*, the community education institution in Japan. Having a good understanding of how Japan has developed its professions in community education, I can contribute my knowledge to increasing number of middle-income countries which are debating whether to professionalise educators for adult education. If they do so, women who are working as volunteers or receiving only tokens as community educators could soon become professionals and lead community education in their respective countries.

Part of my research was done through desk research while living in Germany. I relied on English language resources available online from the University of Glasgow library and research papers in Japanese available from the Scholarly and Academic Information Navigator (https://ci.nii.ac.jp/) and public information from government websites in Japan. From April 2015 to March 2016, I was accepted to be a research fellow in the National Institute for Education Policy Research in Japan. During the summer in 2015, I was able to access relevant journals and books in Japanese in the institute's library.

4.3 Theoretical paradigms

In the course work for Doctorate in Education, I learned about the five research paradigms: positivist, post-positivist, critical, interpretivist, and constructivist. Among these major paradigms, I adopted constructivist paradigm in this research. Creswell (2018, pp. 7–8) writes that constructivist researchers develop theory or meanings inductively through the research participants' views on the research topic. To the constructivist paradigm, as the dissertation title suggest, I followed a critical feminist perspective. The aim of my inquiry was to understand how *kominkan* professionals think about leadership and gender in their work. The voice of research participants who are all women and my own voice are reflected in this dissertation. During the research process, especially the data collection and analysis stage, I could firmly choose to take the stand of feminist research (Tisdell, 2008). In the beginning, I was doing research about women working in *kominkan*. As I listened to their voice and reflected that their voice could be my own voice, my writing became more about doing research *for* women. Within the limitations of this research, one dissertation may not have the power to change and improve research participants life and work. After the interview, a few of them were presenting their roles in community education and development and professional development for the *kominkan* staff in national conferences. I appreciated that the interview we had had triggered their thinking about professional development and leadership.

In terms of ontology, I agree with Lincoln and Guba that reality is 'derived from community consensus regarding what is "real," what is useful, and what has meaning (especially meaning for action and further steps)' (2000, p. 177) and there is no universal or permanent truth (2000, p. 177). Through interaction with participants, as a 'passionate participant', my findings and conclusions will be constructed from research participants narratives on what actions and further steps could be suggested to enhance leadership among women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City and, possibly, other places.

To collect qualitative data, I visited Okayama City twice, in December 2015 and September 2016. I validated my initial findings with research participants during my second visit with follow-up interviews. To complement my two visits, I followed the activities of *kominkan* posted in Facebook pages and a mailing list called *winds from kominkan* (公民館の風) for *kominkan* practitioners in western part of Japan. The mailing list is edited by a senior social education official in Okayama city, who was one of my key informants, so I had access to the latest news and developments from Okayama City.

4.4 Strategies of inquiry

Here I explain strategies of inquiry I applied provisionally adapting a critical feminist constructivist stance. I also explain why I did not choose other strategies.

During the research, I carried out a document review of policy and practice documents available in print and online concerning professional development of *kominkan* staff. I used a bibliographic software called Zotero to record articles and documents I read or planned to read and for referencing. To organise printed documents, I used index stickers on which I wrote the initial of author and last two digits of year of publication. When the number of references increased, this organisation was practical in finding printed papers as I have not mastered reading and note taking using digital media.

There are three major associations for practitioners and researchers in this field in Japan. They are the Japan Society for the Study of Adult and Community Education (https://www.jssace.jp/English) established in 1954 with over 900 members, the Japan Association of Lifelong Education (Https://www.j-lifelong.org) established in 1979 and the Japan Society for the Study of *Kominkan* (https://www.kominkangakkai.net/) since 2003. The membership of these associations includes academic researchers and practitioners, including education related government officials and *kominkan* staff. I searched their

journals with keywords like *kominkan*, Okayama and women to get better understanding of how *kominkan* is discussed by academia and practitioners in Japan.

Following this review, which is discussed in Chapter Two, I wanted to interview approximately eight female *kominkan* professionals about their leadership skills training and development. Reflecting on the activities of *kominkan* is a process practiced by *kominkan* staff in their daily work so I expected that their reflection concerning their own skills training and development would be trustworthy and I would be able to get their critical views and standpoints. From the transcripts of semi-structured individual interviews, I identified some key issues common in many reflections by *kominkan* staff.

My topic is about and for women; I therefore read and applied a critical feminist methodology. This methodology allowed me to create room for my own feelings and reflections to influence my research and to see the gendered power relations between men and women. I chose to do individual interviews not only because it is a mainstream method in feminist qualitative research (Devault, 1990; Campbell and Wasco, 2000; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; McHugh, 2014, p. 150), but also because this method suited the research question and allowed an individual's experience as expressed by their own words.

Feminist researchers are aware that women-to-women talk has its own dynamics and influenced by gender-relations in society. The traditions of women's talk Devault refers to, 'working at self-expression and understanding, using the language to talk about our lives, and working at listening' (1990, p. 112) are also present in Japanese culture. Doucet and Mauthner (2008) reviewed feminist researchers contribution to interviewing as a method for data collection from the 1970s to 2000s. They discussed feminist researchers' approach to interview in building a non-hierarchical relationship with interviewees, being affirmative about having empathy and rapport with the interviewees. They also discussed the complexity in such an approach and the importance of researchers being aware of their position as an outsider having more power than the interviewees. McHugh (2014) further explains that feminist interviewing pays attention to this insider-outsider relationship between the researcher and research participants in co-constructing meaning. The purpose of doing interviews is to get an in-depth

understanding of research participant's experiences and feelings through the conversation with the researcher. Other guides on feminist research methods write that self-disclosure as good practice (Reinharz and Chase, 2001). These discussions informed my preparation for and approach to the interviews. I applied feminist interview methods by establishing non-hierarchical relations, building rapport and empathy with the research participants, and appreciating and using my own experiences and emotions. Such efforts to build relations in the research process can enhance quality of data as research participants trust the researcher (Campbell and Wasco, 2000, p. 786).

As an outsider to the research location, I tried to position myself closer to the research participants. I introduced myself as a member of staff of UNESCO supporting capacity development of people working in the field of social education. I explained that in many Asian countries the majority of staff in community learning centres are women. On a personal level, I shared with the participants that I am a mother of two children and my Japanese husband is the stay-at-home father and a freelance translator.

Questionnaire was one of the methods I considered in the early stage of research and decided not to choose as my method. Research by the National Practical Social Education Research Center on social education specialists (2010) used questionnaires collected through a call for participation by e-mail communication and a collection of responses using web-based questionnaire. They designed four questionnaires each targeting prefectural and local government education boards, social education specialists who are officially appointed by the local education boards, and graduates of training for social education specialists offered by the centre. Altogether, they had collected 3,461 questionnaires with roughly around a 60 per cent response rate. The report provides gender-neutral written testimonies by specialists on their perceptions of future direction of certification and training system and their career prospects. It did not pay attention if there were differences or similarity between men and women's career advancement. I tried to access this data set to carry out a gender analysis, but the data was not available.

As an individual researcher, it is not feasible for me to collect large sample of information from all over Japan like this research. Reading written statements in

surveys carried out by research institutions in Japan, I would not be able to judge if the responses were by women or men. In Japanese, more difference in oral communication between men and women are observable than in English by choice of words and ending sounds.

In research focused on women, Murata (2008) wrote a philosophical paper on the special skills and knowledge required by social education professionals in organising learning related to women's issues. Social education professionals, who were women working in *kominkan* in a city called Kunitachi kept records of learning activities on women's rights and children's day-care services organised in the *kominkan*. Drawing on these documents and reports, she explored specific attitudes and practices social education professionals need in the present context. The records kept by women such as meeting records had documented reflection-in-practice (Schon, 1983) by a woman social education professional and a group of women learners. Murata compared the impressions women learners had on the specialists' work and the social education specialist's reflections on her role in the learning process. Learners wrote that the specialist was accompanying and encouraging the learners and showing full understanding of difficulties women face with gender discrimination. The specialist made a conscious effort to support learners to make their own judgements by preparing common discussion agendas, moderating the dialogue and validating the conclusions from discussions with the learners to clarify the issues. She writes that the purpose of learning by women was not to become a leader or to contribute what they learn back in the society. Rather the purpose was to learn to make one's decisions and opinions which will help each of them to be an active member of society and therefore improve the public goods and services. Her research is in response to Matsushita's view (2003) that social education specialists are redundant in a highly educated society like Japan. Murata positions social education as adult learning to strengthen democratic society where individuals can exercise their agency and make their own decisions towards creating a positive society. For such learning, she argues that social education specialists are indispensable and systems to strengthen their capacities need to be enhanced.

Reading her paper, I felt that I did not have enough insights on day-to-day work life of *kominkan* staff to write a full dissertation building on personal experience

as a *kominkan* staff and detailed writing on the practice. Moreover, as I will explain in next section, it was important for me to have dialogue with professionals working in *kominkan* during my research process. I believed that direct communication would help me to connect their contexts with contexts of adult and community education policies and programmes in different countries that I had helped to design.

4.5 The Interviews – methods of collecting narrative data

Prior to the data collection, I visited Okayama City two times in 2014. The first time was to co-organise an international conference on *kominkan* and community learning centres with the Okayama City Government. It was my first time to visit my home country for work purposes and have an opportunity to talk with community education professionals in Japan. I realised that the challenges faced by *kominkan* today would soon be or would have already been faced by many countries in Asia where they have started to professionalise community education. The second time, I visited as a private person to meet with key persons in *kominkan* in Okayama City and to consult with them the possibilities for me to do a research on *kominkan* for my doctorate study. I participated as an observer in a one-day training session with representatives from all *kominkan* in the city. It was important to meet them since I was an outsider not living or working in Japan. Looking back, these two visits were essential for me to build trust and gain access to the research cite and participants in Okayama City (Kawulich, 2011).

During these visits, I learned that there were many women leading the work of *kominkan* in this city and they were articulate and expressive in the workshops I attended. Outspoken women are not so common in public places in Japan, so I was impressed. *Kominkan* staff from other places in Japan who were presenting in the conference were mainly men. This discovery made me think about focusing on women working in Okayama City.

For the ethics approval, I contacted the city government official in charge of *kominkan* as one of the official gatekeepers. He referred me to the key research collaborator in this research, Ms. River. She had taken over the official's work in the Central *kominkan* which had a double function to coordinate the work of all *kominkan* in the city as well as to run community learning centre for the neighbourhood. She was on secondment from the city government to the Central *kominkan* and very motivated in the work of *kominkan*. She had initiated a series of staff training sessions for *kominkan* staff. She was my gatekeeper who facilitated access and cooperation of the research participants (Wanat, 2008). Gatekeepers in qualitative research can make the research difficult (Ahern, 2014), but I was fortunate that she had a keen interest in the wellbeing and professional development of *kominkan* staff and thus was supportive of an external individual researcher.

She helped me with briefing the Central *kominkan* director and getting required approval and paperwork for research ethics approval while I was in Hamburg. Prior to the interviews, she shared my research project information (Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form in Appendix) with potential participants. Women who were interested in being involved in the project informed Ms River and she arranged my appointments. She also drove and accompanied me to different *kominkan* during data collection. During the long drive from one centre to another was good opportunity to chat with her about *kominkan's* work and people. When I visited *kominkan,* she introduced me to *kominkan* director and staff before I sat down with research participants for the interview. She was friendly and knew how to interact with *kominkan* professionals who are older than her and those who are younger than her. In other words, she was not a typical government official who could be formal and authoritative. Her character facilitated my visits to be unthreatening to *kominkan* professionals and users.

After the ethics application was approved, I interviewed ten professionals working as social education specialists in *kominkan* in Okayama City, Japan in December 2015. The date of interviews, pseudonym name and their positions are listed in the table 3. They were all women with at least ten years of work experience. I was able to interview one director, eight social education officials and one *kominkan* staff with a temporary contract. This meant I interviewed the

only women director at the time and one-fifth of social education officials (eight out of 38 officials in 2016) working in Okayama City.

Table 3 List of interviewees

Interview date	Name
21 Dec. 2015	Vivian (Director of *kominkan*)
21 Dec 2015	Nell (Social education official)
22 Dec 2015	Rosa (Social education official)
22 Dec 2015	Lynn (Social education official)
22 Dec 2015	Astrid (*kominkan* staff – 3-year contract)
24 Dec 2015	Regan (Social education official)
25 Dec 2015	Kaylie (Social education official)
26 Dec 2015	Kristy (Social education official)
26 Dec 2015	Chloe (Social education official)
26 Dec 2015	Taylor (Social education official)

My research participants were selected by Ms River through informed consent. She knew all the staff members working in *kominkan* as an overall coordinator of 37 *kominkan* in the city. Given the limited days I had in Okayama for the interview, four working days, she arranged my appointments with the staff members. The criteria for selection I requested were to select female mid-career staff of *kominkan* in Okayama City, Japan in the age range from 35 to 55 who was available for interview during my visit in December 2015. I did not specify details on purpose to have a wide range of female staff. I could observe that she had made efforts to have diversity in the selecting ten participants from

over 150 staff members in terms of years of experience, devotion to work and union activities. From conversations with her and participants, I also came to understand that the participants had a choice in agreeing to participate or not in my research. Ms River provided participant information sheet and a list of areas of interview questions which I shared with her and a few had indeed declined to be interviewed.

All interviews lasted around one hour in which I asked questions on the following four topics:

- Participants' career history with focus on most significant experiences and training opportunities.

- Participants' views on differences in approaches to work between men and women and their perceptions of leadership in workplace.

- Participants' future directions in their career; desired areas of leadership development.

- Advice for younger staff members.

The full list of questions I prepared in advance to guide my semi-structured interviews are in Appendix 2. As I approached the interview as having a conversation, I did not ask them questions one by one but decided which one to ask and changed the wording depending on the flow of conversation. The aim of first question was to collect information on their past professional work and continuing professional development activities. The second question was to find out how they viewed leadership and differences between men and women. This question turned out to be not straightforward. I will explain the perspectives they had about leadership in Chapter Six. I wanted to find out their wishes and dream in their work in the third question. My intention was to talk about from past to future. The last question, I included indirect questions to talk about leadership by their colleagues and their advice to younger colleagues. I took into consideration that they would feel more at ease and share more about their views about leadership in this way rather than asking direct questions about their own leadership orientations. The responses to this question were useful to

analyse what they perceived as desirable leadership characteristics for them in this profession.

During my visits to *kominkan*, I had two occasions to enjoy lunch and have conversation with users of *kominkan*. In one *kominkan*, nine female and one male members of linkage team (*Tunagari-tai* つながり隊) shared with me their voluntary activities to support elderly people in the community. Members who are in their 60s and 70s respond to requests from people who are more senior than them and help with cooking, cleaning, gardening or doing some errands. They expressed how much vitality (元気) they experience through their engagement in the team. In another *kominkan*, I joined an end of year hotpot lunch party with members of noisy chat group (*Waiga-ya* ワイガ屋) and *kominkan* staff members. Members of this group are senior citizens and they meet at *kominkan* to chat and have activities together such as supporting primary school in organizing extra-curricular festivals.

These two citizens' group were initiated by *kominkan* staff members who expressed that observing positive changes in people and community was their joy and motivation for their professional work. Younger staff members expressed that what is amazing about some senior staff members is to observe that the activities of these kind of groups are sustained even after the staff in charge are transferred to another *kominkan*.

In Okayama City, *kominkan* professionals are forced to transfer to another *kominkan* around every five years. My research participants had experience working in three to five *kominkan* and all expressed this rotation as being beneficial for their professional development. One saw the rotation as providing opportunities to learn about new communities, how predecessors have managed *kominkan* activities, and to work with different directors and colleagues. In the case when one has to work under a director who does not manage well or cannot work well with colleagues, they can look forward to the next rotation. In their daily work, they interact with wide range of users of *kominkan*, unlike other work environments, however, they work only with a few colleagues. How the rotation policy has a great influence on work morale among staff will be discussed in Chapter Six and Seven.

The interviews took place in one of empty rooms in *kominkan* where the interviewees were working. Their privacy was assured, and they could also show me their work such as announcements and wall newspapers or the café in *kominkan*. I used two tools to audio record the interview: a laptop computer and a mobile phone as a backup. During the interview, I took some notes but not so much as I was concentrating on having a conversation with the interviewers. In the evenings after I returned to the hotel room from the interviews, I taped my own comments.

Following insights from feminist interviewing in previous section (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; McHugh, 2014), I was conscious that my background, working in an international organisation and living abroad had made an impression on them. Further they had seen me present a paper at an international conference held in Okayama City the year before. While I tried to encourage the interviewees to talk, whenever they wanted to know about me, I openly talked with them about my work and life. I shared that I felt a 'glass ceiling' working at the same position with little prospect for promotion in my work. I think I was able to build a rapport with research participants not just for being women but that we shared passions for community education and development and had similar struggles in our professional lives.

With some of interview participants, I had lunch, dinner or coffee with them. The chat we had is not covered in this paper, but these occasions were important for them to feel at ease with me coming from outside. In Japanese culture, eating and sharing meals together are important moment compared with Western culture. The availability of a big kitchen in every *kominkan* signifies this. These kitchens serve as a place for emergency cooking in case of natural disasters in Japan, but they are used in normal times to cook for community celebrations and cooking classes.

I was able to collect narrative data through interviewing research participants. The interview schedule was intensive in order for them to be carried out during my short visit to Okayama City. I appreciate the support provided by Ms River and the research participants. The interviews took place during the year-end business in Japan which must have been a busy week for them. They approached the interview with open minds and in serious manner.

4.6 Interpretation and valuation of data

I discuss here the process I followed in interpreting and evaluating data for my analysis and how I dealt with the issues with translating from Japanese to English.

The first step is to find a good process to transcribe the audio interview data; I went through some trials and errors. I first tried to transcribe the audio data by listening and typing using a standard software, Windows Media Player. This was a time-consuming task, so I looked for and selected a software to transcribe in Japanese. The software, AmiVoice, had a function for automatic voice to text recognition. The automatic transcription was of very poor quality, so I still had to listen to the audio two to three times and make corrections with the transcript. It was still time saving and I also noted key points from the interview on post-it sheets with the indication of the time of the interview in my research notebook. For one interview, I attempted to translate her voice from Japanese to English. This I struggled even more as I was getting stuck with finding appropriate translation in English.

Returning to research after taking some months off, I found out that the software I used was no longer available to use. Owing to this, I searched again different options and choose to use Happyscribe.com. The machine transcription in Japanese based on Google was not perfect. Having the timestamp with text and voice, however, was very practical in listening to the audio record and making corrections on the printout of interview transcripts. I listened to the audio several time to relive the interview sessions and used the edited text to highlight key points and take note of points to remember. Listening to the audio, I could recall how the conversation was going rather than reading the transcript alone which had a lot of filler like *ma,* and *ne* between sentences. Tone of voice in the interview could tell me more nuances than the transcribed text. Like when the participant is feeling proud recalling the achievement of *kominkan* and when she says there were good (male) directors when she is saying it out of

being polite. In short, listening to voice was essential in interpreting emotional reactions.

In essence, I adapted the voice-centred relational method described by Mauthner and Doucet (1998) which has been pioneered by the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development (2014) and summary oral reflective analysis (Thompson and Barrett, 1997) to interpret, analyse and evaluate narrative data from the interviews. Both methods were pioneered by feminist researchers.

Voice-centred relational method involves the reading of transcribed interview text several times together with listening to the audio interview data. Each round of reading serves different purposes. The first round is to understand the overall flow and plot as told by the interviewees. The second round is to pay attention to the researcher's own emotional reactions and reflections. This is to be aware of the researcher's interpretation of the narrative data. Writing these reactions can take place in this round or in the next round of reading. One round could focus on the personal voice in the transcript to capture the interviewees own experiences and another round on relationships, how interviewees talk about their relations with others at home and workplace (Jankowska, 2014). The last reading is for contexts and environment to see the big picture. The reflexivity, researcher's own experiences and emotions play a role in this method (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). This means interpretation of narrative data is a co-creation of findings between the researcher and interviewees.

The summary oral reflective analysis also has rounds of reading and listening to the interview transcripts. This method places importance on contextuality. By listening to the audio interview data and recording researchers' reflection in audio format, researchers try to preserve the rich context which might be lost if analysing the transcribed text alone.

My original plan was to use template analysis (King, 2004) by creating codes or key terms. I could decide on broad themes from the interview data to consult with the interviewees in the group discussion. However, I found it difficult to create codes. Applying voice-centred relational method suited my approach to research to pay attention to individual research participants.

I listened to and read the interviews of the majority of research participants at least four times while for a few I listened and read only three times. The first time was to take note of key phrases by the research participants and the time. The initial impressions from my oral comments I recorded after the interviews and key phrases I picked up in the first listening later became my 'emotional responses' to the person on what I find as my reactions to the women's voices.

The second time was to transcribe in detail. Using the text from machine transcripts, I listened and made corrections to the transcripts. Although there were many errors in the machine transcripts and Japanese language has a lot of homonyms, I found this editing process to be more pragmatic than transcribing from scratch. What was practical is that the text had timestamps which facilitated returning to certain parts of the interview audio data.

The third time I listened and read to highlight using different colours and write notes on narratives which were about leading *kominkan* activities, continuing professional development opportunities they had and some personal life histories which had to do with other male colleagues and family members. Unlike Doucet and Mauthner (1998) and Jankowska (2014), I did not analyse personal pronouns. In Japanese narrative, saying *I* or *you* is not explicit so I did not highlight them. The statements I highlighted were used in writing significant thoughts and issues of each participant in the next chapter.

The fourth time my reading and listening in 2019 was to confirm and complement my first reading done in 2016. Even though there was a three-year time gap, I was giving preference to same narratives. In this round of reading, I came to realise that narratives which were shared by some research participants could have been the conversation they have in their union meetings. The shared vision and wishes of these women are highlighted in Chapter Six.

For the analysis on leadership and gender in Chapter Six, I approached the narrative data deductively and used the themes of feminist leadership by Grogan and Shakeshaft. They researched women's leadership in education mainly in U.S.A. context; I selected this as best fit from reading various literature which were discussed in Chapter Three and the narrative data. They identified five characteristics of leadership by women: relational leadership, leadership for

social justice, spiritual leadership, leadership for learning, and balanced leadership (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010). I coded the narrative data manually, assigning different colour to the five leadership themes. In order not to be limited to Grogan and Shakeshaft's framework, I used a sixth colour to code leadership characteristics which did not fit the five codes. Manual coding was done by highlighting on the printed transcripts in Japanese and the case studies I wrote in English in Chapter Five. The colour-coding were helpful to identify the place and visualise the volume of different themes. Comparing the highlighted text in Japanese and English, I identified any key narrative that should be added to the case study on each research participant and revised the case study. After this was done, I analysed each of the leadership characteristics and noted sub-themes to interpret what the specific leadership features illuminated in the case of research participants. The sixth extra category, I integrated them into the original five categories in the end because they were related.

To have some structure in analysing the interview data and respond to the women *kominkan* professionals' voice in Okayama City, I revised the themes from Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) and identified sub-themes for each theme. They are listed in Table 4. The analysis following these feminist leadership characteristics in detail will be discussed in Chapter Six.

As Schon (1995) described qualitative research as complex and messy, I relied on my knowledge and experience in analysing the interview data. As a woman, I could easily connect many concerns raised by the interviewees with my professional and life experiences. Those women's narratives were the ones I paid more attention while I neglected some narratives. Narratives I listened to but did not consider in the analysis had more to do with the daily work of *kominkan* and activities which I described in Chapter Two.

Table 4 Themes and sub-themes on feminist leadership characteristics

Original themes	Revised themes	Sub-themes
Relational leadership	Relational leadership: working with and learning from other professionals	• Coalition/team building • Sharing power vs. command and control • Communication and listening • Vertical relations (*senpai/kohai*) • Related terms: collaborative leadership / invisible leader
Leadership for social justice	Leadership for social justice as their agenda	• Change agenda • Gender equality and women's empowerment • Principles • Related terms: servant leadership
Spiritual leadership	Positivity leadership	• Positive orientation • Joyous • Hope • Emotions/emotionality
Leadership for learning	Leadership for transformative learning by community members	• Lifelong learning • Changes in *kominkan* users' life • Self-initiated professional development • Collaborative planning and collective vision-making
Balanced leadership	Balanced leadership	• Balance responsibilities at home and at work. • Understanding people's diverse needs • Patience to listen to others • Able to delegate work

Note. First column is from Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010). The second column is a set of theme headings which I revised to reflect the context of community learning in Okayama City. Third column is a set of sub-themes drawn from my analysis.

In cross-cultural research, the timing of translation, competencies of translators and the language of interaction with qualitative data are important considerations which should be reported in a research paper (Al-Amer *et al.*, 2015; Santos, Black and Sandelowski, 2015). In the beginning, I tried different timing of translating the narrative data from Japanese to English and struggled with many terms in Japanese which were difficult to translate. Considering the integrity and validity of findings in cross-language research (Twinn, 1997; Al-Amer *et al.*, 2015), I decided to keep the narrative data in original language and write the synopsis of their narratives and analysis in English. I translated the narrative text myself relying on my experience as a student who studied in English-Japanese bilingual university and have more than 10-year of work experiences in both cultures. I also used several online Japanese-English dictionaries[5] to find right translations in English. For culturally related terms which do not have simple translation, I provided explanation for non-Japanese speakers. For Japanese readers, I left some key terms in Japanese text in bracket for ease of finding the references. The translation of women's voice from Japanese to English also meant I made decisions in interpreting, condensing and polishing their narratives (Devault, 1990, p. 107) into individual stories as I wrote in English in Chapter Five. Doing this, I also paid attention to what was 'unsaid' in the interviews what Devault described as a feminist analysis using researchers' experience as women to listen and articulate silent issues.

4.7 Ethical considerations

My ethics approval application was submitted on November 2015 and approved before the interview took place in December 2015. I prepared a simple language statement and participant consent forms in English and Japanese. They are included in the Appendix 1.

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[5] For example, https://eowf.alc.co.jp/top and https://ejje.weblio.jp/.

Before preparing the documents for ethics approval, I consulted with the chief of social education section in the Okayama City Government to get his consent for me to do field research from 2015 to 2017. I requested my gatekeeper, Ms River's support to obtain signature of necessary papers.

The women I interviewed know who I interviewed, and they know each other well. Even though I used pseudonym in this dissertation, if they or people associated with *kominkan* in Okayama City were to read it, they are most likely to identify who is who. When I raised this issue in the second meeting with them, the participants reacted that it was not a concern for them. Not only that very few people would read a dissertation written in English, but many of them also knew the ups and downs of their colleagues' work that there was not much secrecy and privacy among them. Still, in the interview synopsis in Chapter Five, I have tried some parts to be generic and not name the *kominkan*.

4.8 Data validation

After my first reading of all research participants' transcripts in Japanese and second and third reading of four of them, I visited Okayama City in September 2016. I had an informal meeting over a dinner with Vivian, Nell, Regan and Taylor together and second individual interviews with Astrid and Chloe. I had originally planned to do a focus group discussion with all participants. This was logistically difficult to arrange so in consultation with Ms River, I prepared for a small informal discussion.

I informed them that my analysis of the interviews was coming with three conclusions: their leadership is about making environment for people to learn in enjoyable manner; professional development should continue to be supported; and career pathways need to be designed. As it was our second meeting, they were more relaxed and shared with me difficulties they or other colleagues faced under some directors. Younger group of research participants shared with me that they had started to discuss a future vision for *kominkan*.

4.9 Conclusion

The research process went through trials and errors and a shift in paradigm as well. As there were uncountable ways to approach research on community education, gender and leadership, it was hard to decide the methodology. In the end, I decided upon the constructivism paradigm using feminist qualitative methodology. As the research progressed, I found my voice. I chose semi-structured interviews as a method for qualitative data collection and ten research participants were mobilised by Ms River through informed consent. For the interpretation and evaluation of narrative data, I adapted the procedures of voice-centred relational method (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Jankowska, 2014) to allow deeper understanding of women's narrative through voice and text in Japanese and English. The interaction I had with the research participants during my second visit to get their reactions on the leadership characters discussed in Chapter Six and recommendations in Chapter Seven was reassuring and enriched my interpretations and directions I took in this research.

Chapter 5   **Women's views**

In this chapter, I will describe the working life of women and how they aspire to lead community education in Okayama City. For the ten women I interviewed, I highlight their perspectives on motivations to work, leadership, professional development, and future aspirations. Considering that the interviews were in Japanese and each was around one-hour long, I provide here a summary of their narration in English rather than translated quotes.

I first start with the women director and follow her with a group of women with ten to twenty years of work experience who were beginning to train newly joined *kominkan* professionals. The last group of women have more than twenty years of experience and they were pioneers in becoming social education officials in Okayama City. The summary presented at the end will form the basis of my analysis of gender and leadership in the next chapter.

5.1 Vivian (Director of *kominkan*)

Vivian is one of three female directors of community learning centre in Okayama City and the only director I interviewed. She is very popular among the community members. One of research participants joked that some community members followed her when she transferred to another centre. At the centre she directs, I was given an opportunity to join a meeting among '*tunagaritai* （つながり隊）' – an informal network of elderly people in semi-urban community who support each other. *Tunagari* means to connect, *tai* means a team, *tunagaritai* as a whole sounds like an action term wanting to connect in Japanese. Members volunteer to help other members and people who are older than them. Helping could be changing light bulbs to taking care of shopping when another member is

sick, etc. They have regular meetings in the *kominkan* and do outreach activities to invite more people to join. Although it was Vivian's idea to set up this group, from the talks I had with the members I could sense that the group members felt they were making the directions and recruiting more people to join. In particular, the elderly women were proud to have one man in the team.

Vivian is one of the first batch of centre directors who were selected through an open call thirteen years ago. Since then, she has completed two three-year terms as a director in the first centre, took one year leave and she was in the last year before ending her sixth year in the second centre.[6] She said she plans to retire and take care of herself and her family as the directorship has been psychologically tiresome. Although she did not say directly, from her talks I could sense that it has been a struggle negotiating with a group of elderly men who are managing the local community committees. Towards the end of interview, she said selfish people who do not listen to reason are the problematic ones that make unreasonable demands (to the centre). She also acknowledged that they are not only to blame. It is also partly the fault of past *kominkan* professionals who did not make the necessary adjustments to uphold the mission and roles of the centre.

For Vivian, volunteering in a preparation committee for the 14th National Women's Conference held in Okayama City in 1997 was a beginning of her empowerment. At that time, she had her own business managing a group of freelance announcers. She joked she shifted to management because she was not young and presentable to continue as an announcer. She was also teaching English to groups of children at home. The conference was a great success and the preparation committee organised with little help from the local government which allowed them to be dynamic. She learned a lot about women's empowerment issues from the preparation process which was over one year long. There were so many issues she did not know or think before such as domestic violence and human rights which were discussed in the thematic sessions on day two of the conference. Once it was over, she started thinking of

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[6] *Kominkan* directors in Okayama City have 3-year contract which can be renewed one time.

making use of her new knowledge through the *kominkan*. At the right moment, she found a call for gender equality advisor in a *kominkan*. When she called the *kominkan*, she was welcomed with open arms as there were not many who volunteered. As an advisor, she was responsible to organise courses on gender equality in *kominkan*. Since she felt that she could not do the tasks alone, she mobilised four to five other women whom she worked together in the conference to work with her. The course was developed and organised for three years and they have published a final report which was distributed to all *kominkan*s in Okayama City to record and share their experiences. Around that time, a group to rethink *kominkan* in Okayama City was formed among *kominkan* professional and citizens. She was often asked by the group to give a talk about the importance of *kominkan* and the absolute need for fulltime officials in *kominkan*. One of proposals by the group to the city government was to open the recruitment of *kominkan* director. When this proposal was accepted, her friends encouraged her to apply for the new openings. This is how she became a *kominkan* director.

5.1.1 Desired characteristics of *kominkan* professional

The work she likes at *kominkan* is planning new activities. The *kominkan* she is working celebrated its 30th anniversary this year. Vivian made sure that it will not be an ordinary celebration like the 20th anniversary, which she read in the report, and which the community leaders were expecting her to organise in the same manner when they appointed her for the second term. For the anniversary event, she mobilised students from each school in the community to give a talk about the next 30 years and interact with the community leaders. One of girl students gave an excellent talk about why she would not live in the community when she grows up and what is needed to keep and attract young people like her to live in the community. One of her main requests was to improve the quality of services and the environment for raising children. Planning this anniversary, Vivian and her staff required a lot of preparation and talks with people. She laughed that they even had to draft speeches for some senior guest Speakers. In the end, she was happy with the feedback she received from the participants who appreciated a chance to listen to children's opinions.

As important characteristics of *kominkan* professional, Vivian identified communication skills and cooperativeness. By communication, she explained that one must be able and like to speak with a whole range of people. Cooperativeness, she means not to pursue only her wish or make it too visible. During the interview, however, she added two more conditions for women to continue to work as *kominkan* professional. In her words, she said to have principles, to pursue principles and not to change principles. This she wished for younger women colleagues to pursue their own principles. Another one is building on previous work. *Kominkan* organises many activities every year. Whenever she organised activities, she paid attention to how to link or make best use of people who came together and learning that took place with the upcoming learning activities.

Finding community issues is one of central work of *kominkan* professional. At the current centre, the main issue she has taken up is welfare of elderly people. The community has many elderly people living alone. There was a time that solitary death incidents happened three times in a month. For her, social education should not be just organising club activities. She explained that she makes efforts to bring the voice of 'silent' people who are marginalised in the community to the attention of community leaders. People who are victims of domestic violence or school violence do not speak out. Social educators need to keep their eyes open to the concerns of such people and find solutions. There are so many elderly people in poverty in Okayama City. Community leaders tend to be ignorant about them and even deny that it is an issue in their community. She said it is the task of social education officials to bring it to their discussion table. Their response maybe slow or utter rejection, but one must keep raising the awareness to work towards response or action.

5.1.2 Invisible leadership in *kominkan* – *Kuroko*

When I asked her about her leadership style, her reply was that she does not give orders, but she finds it important to talk with her professional and follow bottom-up approach to managing the centre. She said she is doing the same with courses she organises in *kominkan*. She makes spaces for participation and collective decisions through dialogue. She does tell people the general direction

she would like to take but the details are decided with others. She commented that being accepted by community leaders was difficult in the beginning at both centres she worked as she had not worked in recognised positions such as school principals or senior local government officials. She felt frustrated when they would advise her not to make any changes or take initiative in *kominkan*'s work.

Another thing she takes care of as a *kominkan* director is to find positive things about her professional and *kominkan* users and tell that to the person directly as well as indirectly. She also mentions the name of person when she has conversation with them. When other people inform her about what is good about them to the person, it reconfirms what she has told the person and improves the working environment. She said there is no harm to hear compliments from different sources.

On appropriate leadership in *kominkan*, she used the term *kuroko-teki* (黒子的) leadership. This is a term coming from traditional performance in Japan who are dressed in black and controls the puppets or supports the main character. She explained that there are visible and invisible leadership. *Kominkan* professional needs to practice invisible leadership to support people's learning. To do that, one has to involve people from different backgrounds with different knowledge in dialogue, to be able to hear the voices of minority groups and lead them to actions. Doing this is difficult but she said the key is to let everyone talk.

5.2 Kristy

Kristy had 14 years of work experience in *kominkan* at the time of interview. She is a full-time social education official since 2009. As a mother, she has had to interrupt her work when she took maternity leave for her three young children. Although she was very conscious of the limited time she has for work, repeating several times that she cannot do over-time work and has to give up on interesting assignments, when I asked her about becoming a centre director one day, she was one of few who actually said that she is highly interested. She said

it will be a significant and important mission. In some centres, when the centre director changes, the 'colour' or atmosphere of the centre changes for good or bad. She sounded motivated to continue working and looking forward to the days when her children are grown up and she can use her personal time to meet interesting people and attend conferences and meetings taking place outside of her city for her professional development.

When she started working, she had a *senpai (先輩)* who worked with her for three years and became a role model for her. *Senpai* is a popular term in Japan for people who are in higher grades in school and university. She described her *senpai* as a mentor with a very positive and engaging personality. Community members talked about the *senpai* saying if we work with her, it is going to be OK. With her, we can do it. The *senpai* had the skills to make suggestions and pull out a person's capacities.

5.2.1 Open communication with users and colleagues

As there are a small number of colleagues in each *kominkan*, only three to five staff, she emphasised the importance of open communication. Her *kohai (後輩),* younger colleague, should not hesitate to discuss with her any ideas or concerns she has about her work. She is happy that her younger colleague is interested in the work of social education and is helping her to avoid problematic or discouraging situations.

The *kominkan* she is working is in the neighbourhood with young families with very high turnover due to work-related transfers. Still, there are also households living there for generations and elderly people. Kristy is making efforts to chat with diverse groups of users like young mothers and elderly women like her mother. To be good at this, she thinks being aware of a wide range of issues and keeping an eye on what is happening in the society is the first step of receiving or collecting information. The next is to take actions and meet and talk with people doing different kinds of work.

5.2.2 Learning actively in *kominkan*

On activities: One of the initiatives she explained to me is a toy exchange activity in *kominkan*. Considering that there are many households with children in the community, she mobilised and worked with two women to organise toy exchange events. Profit-making is not permitted in *kominkan*, so people brought toys they do not need one day before the event and took toys they like the following day without cash exchange. This event has continued and now in the fourth year; it is held three times a year. The key 'mother' with whom she initiated the event has moved to another city, but the organisation of this event has been transferred to new group of volunteers and was going smoothly. Although it is a simple exchange of toys, mothers and fathers involved in the organisation are motivated to sustain the activities. When she discussed the activities' relevance to education for sustainable development, people got more excited.

For Kristy, participating in the summer intensive course for social educators, a few years back, resulted in gaining confidence in what she has been practising. It was a good opportunity to reflect on her work and be reassured that what she is doing is the right thing. Exchanging with other participants not working in *kominkan* and observing that their respect for *kominkan* increased during the course made her feel proud of her work.

5.2.3 Identifying key people as key aspect of leadership

Kristy's impressions of what leadership means in the work of *kominkan* is to think together and to agonise together at the same level with *kominkan* users. Yet at the right moments, *kominkan* professional shall give appropriate advice to move on. Good leaders in *kominkan* are able to find key people to support and create conditions for people to think together.

For the purpose of broadening her vision and experience, she treasured being able to exchange with out-of-box people in her work. In preparing courses, she works with experts from academia, non-profit organisations and people who have a passion in their work. When such people show appreciations of *work by kominkan*, she feels very proud of her work and has a higher sense of mission.

Her mission is supporting community people to have a fruitful life and shine (輝く) through learning in *kominkan*. When people tell her that she helped them to see a new world (perspective) and life is more enjoyable, she gets gratification from her work.

5.3 Nell

Nell is a single woman in her 40s living with her parents. She has been working in the past 16-years as a *kominkan* professional and the current *kominkan* is her fourth assignment. She did not specifically study to become a social educator and had little knowledge about *kominkan* before she accepted the work. Her first career choice was to become a local government official. She took the exam to be employed as temporary staff in *kominkan* as a practice for the exam to become a public servant. Although she had no motivation to become a *kominkan* professional when she started, she is now one of five mid-career professionals in Okayama City selected to train newly appointed short-term contract staff members. She enjoys the stimulating work in *kominkan* and has developed excellent professional relationships with her colleagues in the current *kominkan*.

5.3.1 Learning from the social education course, supervisor and training new professional members

She took the summer intensive course for social education after she worked for a few years. The course helped to link her practice with theory. After taking the course, she started to think about the role and potentials of social education and enjoy her work. She enjoys learning about the work of *kominkan* as well as mentoring younger colleagues in her daily work. Attending seminars outside of Okayama also helped to realise that *kominkan* in Okayama is special compared with *kominkan* in other cities. For example, in some *kominkan*, even though they are called *kominkan*, there are no activities engaging community people. Taking

the course in mid-career also provided the stimulus to be more proactive in the management and operation of *kominkan*.

She appreciates working with Vivian as she can learn about how to manage *kominkan* and associate with people. Her current team is excellent as the communication is open and she can seek advice from her director and colleagues anytime. One skill she would like to improve is communicating with large group of people in the community, which Vivian is excellent at. One notable advice Vivian gave her was when one needs to ask a favour, ask a busy person. Busy person is a doer; even when the person is not able to do it, he/she will name another person who can do it for you. A person who does not look busy will not do the task as he/she does not do anything. I thought this really applies anywhere around the world. Nell is observing and learning from Vivian how to chat with people. Vivian has a skill to adjust her talk according to people she is talking with. Nell views chatting as a combination of listening and responding.

When I asked Nell about her career development, she shared that she and her colleagues were concerned that *kominkan* might not still exist until the time of her retirement. In 30 years, *kominkan* may not exist at all or operate under a different name and different nature. Ideally, she joked that she would like to be a user and visit *kominkan* after her retirement and tease *kominkan* professional. She repeatedly said *kominkan* is 'fun' (面白い). She would like to continue working at *kominkan* as it is a fun job, but also she thinks that she is too old to change jobs.

In her training or talks with new colleagues, Nell emphasised that *kominkan* has a lot of potential and it is a fun job. She hoped that three important factors of *kominkan* professional were getting through to the newcomers, which are talking with people, letting people get to know you and 'teach' you about their community, and trying to go out of *kominkan*. The last point means not staying inside *kominkan* only but to visit people and activities in the community. If *kominkan* users were calling the professional as '*kominkan* professional' and not by his or her name, that means they are not accepted by people. There was no initial training when she started working and she had no understanding of what other *kominkan* were doing except for reading their bulletins. With four other *kominkan* professional, they have designed training activities for new

professional to understand different kinds of activities organised by *kominkan* and people to reach out to get advice. Preparation of training has been a meaningful reflection about her work. Knowing how others are doing the work is helpful for her as well; for instance, she had changed the exhibition in her *kominkan* as a result of finding out what was happening at the other centres.

5.3.2 Charismatic, collaborative and communicator as key features of leadership

For Nell, one of key role of *kominkan* professional is to facilitate all participants to say their views in a meeting and to create consensus-building environment which covers the conversations as well as room settings. She said that she was getting good at understanding the character of people and talking to them accordingly. She felt more confident in being able to advise younger colleagues on what to say and how to speak to different people. In talking with and leading people who are older than her, she sometime talks sweet and shows dependence. Asking them how to do such and such (懐に飛び込む) works to gain the trust of people. Leadership in *kominkan* means being a pacemaker, asking people to listen to her and making sure everyone is able to express their opinions. In the end, important characteristics of *kominkan* professional is the ability to attract people like a magnet. This includes people of all ages from young to old. She said, with a laugh, that chatting is one of her main work.

Kominkan's activities enable people both the users and professional to grow and empower themselves. Working with the *tunagaritai* (connections group)[7] in her current *kominkan*, she was able to experience first-hand how people, even at old age, are able to transform and become empowered in a positive sense like the concept of transformative learning by Mezirow (2008). Everybody involved, including herself, was able to empower themselves together. One example of transformation is a shy woman gaining confidence to speak in public and voice her opinions.

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[7] Tunagaritai is explained in Vivian's summary (Section 5.1).

For women to exercise more leadership, Nell thinks the prejudice elderly men have about women needs to change or we have to simply wait until the next generation for women to gain the respect within the community to be leaders. This is more so than women themselves getting support or training. It is the elderly men who play central roles in the local governance and they say that women and children should stay out (おなごのくせに). When Madam Vivian became a director, some men in the community said a girl child has taken over even through it was a second centre for Madam Vivian to serve after successfully running her own business for many years. Observing women participating in *kominkan*, she personally thinks women can play leadership roles in many fields. It is just that women themselves think they must give preference to men or that's men's work (男性を立てなきゃ). She jokingly said she / women would like to have power（権力）.

Nell raised concerns about the differences in employment conditions between the officially employed professional and one-year contract professional is a concern. Before everyone had one-year contracts and were equal in terms of low salary and no job security. The fact that one professional in each *kominkan* is an official staff of local government while others are not, causes some tension in the workplace and lowers morale.

Nell has had different directors and she enjoys working with the current woman leader, Vivian, who is proactive and encourages them to work together. On the extreme end, she had a director who said upon his appointment do not expect me to do anything or ask any question as I am only in this 3-year temporary job (腰掛) until I can get a pension. She felt it was fortunate that she had a more senior colleague as a buffer between him at that time. Nowadays, she is the senior colleague and her turn to give time to younger colleagues who have issues or questions. At the same time, she tries not to intervene or say too much and try to understand younger colleagues' ways of working. She has been fortunate with colleagues as she knows some colleagues suffer from relationships with their colleagues and even get sick.

5.4 Lynn

Lynn was working in her fifth *kominkan* assignment at the time of interview. She was trained as a schoolteacher, but she decided not to be one after the on-the-job training. She was not interested in a profit-making business when she was searching for a job, so she found the advertisement for *kominkan* staff attractive. She is married and has one child. Since the last ten years, she has been working as social education official. She said she is not a career-oriented person, so she postponed taking the social education specialisation course as well as the exam to be a social education officer while her child was small.

Users of current *kominkan* where she is working are older than other *kominkan*, they are mostly women in their 60s, 70s and 80s. With them, she tries to speak loud and clear and slowly with respect. She also follows with written message on paper to have clear communication with them otherwise, they might say that they did not hear about it or forget about it.

What she pays attention to when designing courses at *kominkan* is to select a topic that is important for the community, a topic that could improve the lives in the community. For example, latest one she organised was a course on living with people with disabilities. She invited a deaf person to give a talk and participants also visited her house to learn what kind of support she would like and what is not needed. Lynn said her course may have only small numbers of participants, but she is happy when she can observe changes in the participants.

When we talked about difficulties of working full time while raising young children, she shared that she suffered from morning sickness when she was pregnant. At that time, other colleagues in *kominkan* were men and they showed no understanding that she was working without eating well and even asked her to carry heavy things. She said even though *kominkan* has small number of staff, she will back up when she works with a pregnant women or mother of young children. She remembers how difficult it was to ask for help or take leave when her child was young

She worked under a women director for one-year only five years ago and recalled how the woman director was different from other *kominkan* directors. The women director was talking with every colleague regardless of their positions, including the night-shift temporary staff, and paid attention to what was happening in the centre in making decisions. She was also social and considerate to other people. After Lynn transferred to another *kominkan*, she learned that the woman director knew what she was good at and had given her chance to excel in that area during her last months in *kominkan*. She thought it was amazing that the director was paying attention to each professional's competencies and strengthening them.

Lynn was not interested to be a *kominkan* director. For women who are single, she said the status of social education official is important for them to make a living. For married women like her, she said some find the temporary position convenient. They do not have to transfer and have less responsibility at work. Lynn feels that as a social education official, the director has more expectations on her than other colleagues. She has been lucky that her husband did not have to transfer to another city which would have required her to quit her work.

When the relations with her director and colleagues are not going well, Lynn did think about quitting many times. On the other hand, she feels happy working when she is having good conversations and relations with *kominkan* users and gets motivated from attending the meetings among social education officials in Okayama City. They meet every two month and exchange their experiences. They have also formed project teams to pursue common issues such as childcare and disaster prevention. Working with other officials, she is able to understand other ways to looking at issues. She also thinks her background as a married woman with a child is beneficial to her work at *kominkan*. Users feel more comfortable talking with her.

In describing her leadership style, Lynn explained how she is taking care of her partner, a temporary staff in *kominkan* while saying that she is not a leader. Considering that she is a social education official, which means she earns more income, she tries to be considerate to her colleagues. She adjusts the workloads so that the temporary staff do not have to work over-time or stay late and that she is able to take annual leave. She also tries to make the temporary staff's

work meaningful; but the temporary working conditions makes it difficult. Learning from her experience working with a woman director, she also tries to identify other staff and users' strength and help them to enhance those skills or aptitudes.

5.5 Regan

Regan is growing to be a leader in the *kominkan* in Okayama City. She is active in the union and said she is one of few who has spoken with all staff members in Okayama City. Like many others, her first choice was to become a local government official. She explained that this was a choice any women who wanted to work long years would make because unlike the private sector companies, the local government offices not expect women to quit after marriage or pregnancy. Some local private companies did not even consider applications from university graduate women when she was searching for a job. She had taken the courses for social education official as well as a librarian during her undergraduate years and got certificates in both. As she could not pass the civil servant exam, her university encouraged her to take the exam for *kominkan*. After she passed the exam to be contract-based *kominkan* professional in 1999, she has worked in four *kominkan*s. She became a social education official eight years before the interview.

Regan felt that she has been very lucky with the *Kominkan* Director as well as senior colleagues (*senpai*) who had a large influence on what she is today. Her *senpais*, Susy became a *kominkan* director and Taylor who is one of research participants was the first batch of professional to get social education official status in *kominkan*. Both were very passionate about *kominkan*'s work and good at engaging community people. *Kominkan* directors she worked with were former school principals or local education bureau personnel appointed by the local government. In close to ten directors she had worked with, she had an opportunity to work with a director who was selected through an open call for a vacancy. From him, she was made conscious of the core mandate of *kominkan* –

to offer the best possible learning opportunities to people – and how to work as a team, distributing routine but necessary work and making time to focus on the creative work of managing learning activities *in kominkan*. While working with these directors and *senpai* involved a lot of stress and pressure, she was able to learn a lot from them. They helped her grow. If she did not meet them, she said she might have quit years ago.

She thinks the role and position is a factor in improving her leadership skills. When her *senpai* was transferred, she was no longer the junior professional and felt more responsible for her work. One day, Regan aspires to be a *kominkan* director. As she knows the daily business of *kominkan*, she thinks she can do a lot to improve the working environment for younger professional members in *kominkan*. She was fortunate to have both excellent and bad role models in leading *kominkan*. Not many in Okayama City have experience working with good role models which implies that excellent Centre Directors are not common. Managers from the school education field who become a *kominkan* director tend to think and behave like 'god' that his decision is right, and his professional and community members cannot question him.

She enjoys working with the *kominkan* users, crying, and laughing with them. She likes to observe people learning vividly and transforming and empowering themselves. She does not want to be a top-down person but works at the same level with users.

When I asked her what characteristics or competencies are required to be a successful *kominkan* professional: Regan said it is important opening one's self to people (自己開示). This, men tend not to be good at. *Kominkan* professional members have to work with all kinds of people. It is natural that there are people one does not like or are not able to have good conversation. With these people, she tries to see good things about them and find topics to talk with them. *Kominkan* professional should be able to ask for support – asking users could you do this? – and able to compliment, distribute responsibilities yet take the final responsibility. Another factor is being strong in the face of criticism (打たれ強い). *Kominkan* users will say many different things and sometimes they are harsh.

In Okayama City, differences in the working conditions among the *kominkan* professional do affect people. She sometimes hesitates to encourage contract-based employees to do more. She said if responsibility and conditions are not appropriately provided, one cannot do their best. *Kominkan* Directors are also contract-based employment which explains why some of them are not motivated to work.

In recent years, following the advice of *senpais*, she started attending conferences outside of Okayama City. Attending and presenting her work in conferences for social education helps her to broaden her perspectives and understand how other *kominkan* are operating. She firmly believes that *kominkan* professional should continue to learn. *Senpais* often said to her to study and study even though she is already busy with daily work. Meeting people outside the daily work context expands one's network so it is important.

At the time of the interview, she was concerned about how to strengthen the forces among *kominkan* staff. The social education officers with professional permanent status in *kominkan* has been selected from the pool of one-year contract-based professional who were already working in *kominkan*. There is a plan however by the city government that they will start to transfer local government officials with social education certificate to work in *kominkan*. These officials, like her got the certificate while in university and are not necessarily either motivated or suitable to work in *kominkan*. She was worried about the morale of *kominkan* professional and as well as how to engage new professional who may not share the vision of Okayama City's *kominkan*. Okayama city's *kominkan* became known in Japan because of the dedicated work by *senpai* but what could happen in next ten to fifteen years? She sees the need to build public opinions and changing the mindset of local government officials managing human resources to appreciate the value of work by professionals working in *kominkan* who have gained expertise in managing *kominkan*. *Kominkan* activities contribute to improve the quality of life in Okayama City as well as in other communities in Japan.

One example of her initiative is place-making activities for children after the school. Place-making is a core function in Okayama City's *Kominkan* Strategy which means to create a place to gather, a place to learn and a place for active

participation. In her previous *kominkan*, she worked with several volunteers to run after-school activities for children during the weekdays. *Kominkan* provided a safe and fun place for children who may otherwise have to stay home alone until their parents returned from work. A variety of activities were offered such as working on homework, going on excursions, playing inside and outdoors. This work helped her to discuss with volunteers the responsibility of looking after children, how to communicate with them, etc. It was also an opportunity to learn what children like and are thinking these days.

She commented that as she is not married, she has been able to work as social education official in *kominkan*. She said if she had married or had children, she might not have pursued to be an official. She is determined to improve the work of *kominkan* for both single women as well as women with family responsibilities.

5.6 Astrid

At the time of first interview, Astrid was pregnant and during the last weeks before she was starting maternity leave. I also had a second individual interview with her after she gave birth as she expressed a wish to meet me when she could not join the group discussion. She was the only professional who was not a permanent social education official. She had been working for 12 years in *kominkan* and although she did not say clearly, she implied that she did not pass the exam to be selected as a permanent social education official in the *kominkan* where she was working.

The *kominkan* she was working in was relatively new as the community joined Okayama City through a merger. It was more rural than other community and not so welcoming to outsiders like her.

5.6.1 Training

She participated in the social education specialist certification course in her fourth year. Like others, she said the course helped her gain confidence. Before the course, she was not thinking highly of her work. To get the contract job, there was no certification nor prior experiences required. While she did enjoy her work and her supervisor from University praised her work and told her it was important, she did not take her profession so seriously. The course, however, taught her the historical development of *kominkan* and through the exchanges she had with *kominkan* professional in Kyoto where she took the course, she realised that she is a *kominkan* professional from Okayama City which has its own dynamics.

She also appreciates the lectures and training sessions organised by the staff unions, prefectural and city government. What she values is the opportunity to meet and exchange with her *senpai* and learn from their experiences and seek their advice when she participates in such training.

She has been fortunate to participate in most of training organised by the Central *Kominkan*. Professional from other *kominkan* took turns to participate in monthly training sessions and she observed that there were challenges with sharing the training content and results within the same *kominkan*. The monthly training was organised as a series and always had some tasks to apply at work. Through this training, Astrid said she gained confidence that she will be able to find a solution even when things were still not clear and thus work with some room to breathe in planning and organising courses in *kominkan*.

Responding to my question on what message or advice she would give to younger professional, her message was to be more committed (本気) to the work. She said if you do your best, something will change for good.

5.6.2 On leadership

She talked about two women leaders who are doing excellent work in *kominkan*. How they approach their work seemed very different. One can engage and work towards revitalising the community with people around her, *kominkan* users and

community members, on her own. Another one is able to build a great team in *kominkan*. For her, she said the term leader and leadership sounds too strong. It sounded as if a leader needs to be strong. The *kominkan* directors and *senpai* she admires are very soft and have flexible minds. In a way, they can 'use' men or in more politically correct terms, influence and solicit support and engagement from men.

She has not met a male role model in her work. It might be because there are more women working as *kominkan* professional in Okayama City. She would like the value of *kominkan* professional's work to be appreciated more and working conditions to improve accordingly. That way, more men may find it attractive to work in *kominkan*. She thinks it is important to have both men and women working in *kominkan* as it brings in different perspectives and ways of working.

5.6.3 Coordination

Astrid shared her experience with two major activities in the *kominkan*. One was publishing community newspaper called '*Pirica (ピリカ新聞)*'. Around ten women who are both newcomers and old timers in the community has been publishing news about their community and family life. This has been operating more than five years. Another one was called a 'future school （未来塾）'. People in their 30s and 40s who cherish their community and would like their children and grandchildren to feel proud that they are from the community got together to make their rural community a more attractive place to live. In this community, young people were moving out as there are limited work and life opportunities.

As a professional staff of *kominkan*, her role was to coordinate these two group activities. Lessons she has learnt from this work is that her contribution is providing support to realise the vision and wishes of people, she said to turn a dream into reality. To do that one has to pull together diverse ideas and wishes of people and mobilise the support of others to get things done. She said one cannot be nice all the time to do this right. Sometimes, she tended to behave like one of the members in the group, then she realised that she is expected to give some directions. If she kept listening to discussions, participants will start

to build frustrations from going nowhere. So, she has learned to coordinate and steer the discussions.

That is something she has found a way from her past 12 years of work. She thinks it is not possible to be taught by someone, but one has to be trained through practice. After about ten-years, dealing with different topics but similar situations whereby community peoples' talks are going through considerable rounds, she came to understand that even though the direction to take may not be sure and progress is slow, she is sure it is moving forward considerably. Confidence she brings to the group discussions translate into finding a way forward in group dynamics.

In the first interview, she said she feels that she is needed in the *kominkan* and she leaves home in the morning everyday telling herself that she is going to do good work. She may not be doing excellent work, but she was sure that she is doing her best. At times, she was worried what will happen to the on-going activities in *kominkan* when her maternity leave starts. She also thought it is the responsibility of *kominkan* professional to set the directions so that participants can go on their own.

She could not imagine herself to be a *kominkan* director in future. Before she got pregnant, she imagined that she would quit to focus on housework like her mother had been. Her father said contract work is not a career. Her *senpai* who gained the professional permanent status is doing wonderful work and she sometimes hesitated whether she had the ability to work as a permanent professional. Yet now, she feels that she wants to continue as a *kominkan* professional. She is convinced that her being a professional permanent staff will be good for the *kominkan* as well as the community it serves. I think as she gains more experience and gets official status, she may change her mind and aspire to be a *kominkan* director.

In the second interview, Astrid said one-year maternity and childcare leave has been good for her work as she gained new perspectives. She realised that she needs to improve skills to do teamwork. Before, she was carrying too many tasks by herself and was not able to delegate. Raising a child, she understood she needs to accept help and learn to rely on other people and share work. She

learned this through getting the support of her husband and parents to take care of the new-born baby. Furthermore she observed, while visiting *kominkan* as a user to attend activities with her baby, how her colleagues were supporting each other in the *kominkan* and covering her leave very well.

The next four women are experienced social education officials who have over twenty-years of work experience in *kominkan* and are active in staff union work. They led the movement to upgrade *kominkan* in Okayama City in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They are well respected and were appreciated as *senpai* (senior colleagues) by other professionals.

5.7 Rosa

Rosa started as a part-time administrative staff in *kominkan* when she was about to turn 25 and was working in her sixth *kominkan* at the time of interview. She applied to the work following advice from her family that *kominkan* work will be not demanding and she could continue to work after marriage. This has not worked out this way. She is single and dedicated to her work at *kominkan*. She was not committed to her work in early years and often wondered if she should continue to work at *kominkan*. Her attitude towards work changed through the movement to upgrade *kominkan* in Okayama City in her 30s and when she became a social education official in her 40s.

During the movement in the late 1990s, *kominkan* professional often got together by themselves and with users. With other professionals, she could exchange talks about *kominkan* work and get advice. They often discussed that the *kominkan* staff is a professional work and not a work to be done by temporary staff. The exchanges she had with other colleagues were tough sometimes as colleagues were reviewing each other's work and giving frank and critical suggestions on what should be improved in their work. She considered them more as comrades than colleagues as they fought together to get the right to have a social education official status and the first batch of eight women,

including herself, who became officials were under heavy pressure to perform well after they were appointed. They worked seriously as they had to make a case that all *kominkan* should employ social education officials because their professional work has a positive impact on learning and development in Okayama City. Otherwise, other colleagues may lose their chances to be social education officials.

5.7.1 *Kominkan* Directors

Rosa considered *kominkan* directors to play important role as a face of *kominkan* as well as to encourage or discourage *kominkan* professional's work. She had good experiences working under a woman director. She was a retired school principal well connected with leaders and schools in the community. She was also outgoing and caring. Although some men have it, Rosa said women tend to be more caring and pay attention to people's feelings which she thinks is an important skill for *kominkan* professional.

With some directors, she had to endure and try not to get discouraged despite not getting approval to do certain things or being micro-managed. She thinks selecting right profile of director is more important than giving training to newly appointed directors. She said we should not be hiring directors with no prior experience with social education. The open recruitment of director was intended to bring in fresh ideas and motivated community leaders like Vivian. This recruitment system, however, has been misused by some directors. Directors, who were appointed after retiring from local government or school serve for three-year, and they applied to the open call for succeeding director position and served additional two terms. She said nine years as a director in one *kominkan* is too long and the dynamism of *kominkan* suffers. Although three-year may be too short to fully understand the community, if directors are selected from the community, she viewed it is an appropriate length.

Rosa would like to be a director. She however prefers to be a temporary director after she retires at age 60. She had also started thinking about what to do afterwards. She would like to relate to the field of social education and was playing with the idea of starting a small cleaning business. Through visiting and cleaning elderly people's home, she hopes to make them happy. She said that

the act of cleaning and living in clean place helps people to have lucid state of mind.

5.7.2 Rewarding work

She feels proud about her work and very rewarding. She also hopes that younger colleagues, *kohai* also feel the same way and she has high hopes with their work. She said unlike other public servants who are her friends, *kominkan* professional's work is appreciated by people and we work along with them and not treat them like an enemy and be defensive about our work. In her work, she does not think about how to lead activities but what should she be doing as a *kominkan* professional. What is it that only she can do to support the wishes of community people to become a reality? She simulates what she can do to achieve their wishes. She gets gratification when users tell her that they became happy and full of energy coming to *kominkan* and when she can observe changes in people.

She herself has been influenced by the exchanges she had with people visiting *kominkan*. The majority of users are children and people in their 60s. The elderly people in their 60s have energy, time, and motivation to participate in community development work. From chats she has with *kominkan* users, if she finds that Mr A and Mr B can do such and such things and thinks they can work together, she will introduce them to each other and gets encouraged when they come and ask for her advice to initiate certain activities for the community.

She was concerned that more than half of workforce in *kominkan* have temporary contracts. She hopes that they will not lose hope and aspire to be a social education official one day. For that, they should be prepared, and she often talks about the joy of her work with *kohai* and encourage them not to quit. She finds it difficult to find appropriate ways to convey this message, but she keeps trying especially when there are *kohai* who feels discouraged by *kominkan* director like she had gone through. When they are young and starting a new job, three-year term of director is too long for them to keep their hope for next director and therefore quit their job at *kominkan* prematurely.

She is also fond of organising activities for children and she believes that *kominkan* should be a place where children can interact with different people. She believed that it is important that children meet and learn from adults with diverse backgrounds when they are growing up.

5.8 Kaylie

Kaylie was the most experienced among the interviewees and a pioneer despite her labelling herself as *hetare* (へたれ), a weak disciplined person. She started working as administrative assistant in *kominkan* in 1983; she had no clue about the work of *kominkan* nor stepped into *kominkan* before. She said she got the job in *kominkan* through nepotism and not through open call for applications like other colleagues. She took the social education official course in 1996 and was appointed as a time-bound official in 2001 and a permanent official in 2005. At the time of the interview, she was a chairwomen of staff union and working in her 7th *kominkan*. She had taken one-year leave from work when her child was born.

She has experience with the preparation and opening of two new *kominkan*. At that time, *kominkan* professional were not involved in the design of *kominkan* and when the new building was built and furniture were placed, she and her colleagues found the facilities not suitable as *kominkan*. There was no open space and high bookshelves in the secretariat room made it difficult to see *kominkan* users and did not give a welcoming atmosphere. From this experience, she together with other colleagues made a request to the city government to consult *kominkan* professional when they open new ones. This has become a practice for new ones that are under construction.

She also pioneered learning and development activities targeting children in *kominkan*. In the early years of her career, one hardly saw children in *kominkan*. It was considered that children will damage the Japanese rooms or break stuffs in the kitchen room. Now a days, there are many activities in collaboration with

schoolteachers and children. What she started recently is to work with university students. After some encouragements from her, a group of students started club activities in her *kominkan*.

In response to users saying they do not know what is happening in *kominkan*, she is the one who started writing and distributing *kominkan* bulletin in her second *kominkan* assignment. The monthly or bi-monthly *kominkan* bulletin has become a standard practice across all *kominkan* in Okayama City. Bulletins are circulated in the neighbourhoods and recent issues are also available online.[8]

5.8.1 A Lifelong learner

Concerning the social education specialisation course she took in late 1990s, it helped Kaylie to take the work more seriously and be conscious of the contribution she is making to the purpose of social education. She enrolled in the Open University in Japan in the year she was appointed as a social education official in 2005. Her motivation to enrol was to learn in a variety of area to improve her work. She took courses such as community building methods, crisis management, disabilities and had completed her university degree in 2016. She said as she is a lazy person, she had to enrol in the open university to force her to study. At the same time, she emphasised that *kominkan* professional needs to be a self-directed learner. When we take up new themes and issues, if we do not have deep understanding of the issues, we cannot talk with experts or people and the *kominkan* activity could go into wrong direction. Even though she completed her study, she was still considering taking some more courses in the Open University. They were offering interesting topics such as disaster prevention and elderly people's welfare and she appreciated the quality of textbooks which were easy to read, informative and up to date.

She did not like studying during the student years, but she considers herself to be learning together with *kominkan* users every day at work.

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[8] http://www.city.okayama.jp/okayama/okayama_00078.html

5.8.2 Leadership

She sees herself to be an approachable leader in the union work and with *kominkan* users. People can say anything to her and not worry about making her upset. She said she tells people that she is not able to do things without help. Early in her professional life, she tended to take on work all by herself and not good at asking for help. The turning point came when she was the only professional working in the *kominkan* as the director post was in transition and another colleague was on sick leave. She then had to manage the community festival hosted by *kominkan* by herself. She was new to the community and the work was overwhelming that she was forced to seek support of community people, especially elders who knew people in the community and how things could be done. She then realised that people appreciated helping the work of *kominkan* and has since then learned to ask for support.

In her 30s, she had a strong wish to be a *kominkan* director. There were many things that could make progress or move things by *kominkan* director only. As a staff, she faced an invisible wall to get things done. Now a days, she is not sure if she wants to be a director. She was more concerned with her health. For younger professional, however she thinks it is important to build career pathways so that they can aspire to be a director while keeping their official job status. (note: *kominkan* director position is a three-year contract without full set of benefits as local government employee in the case of Okayama City.) She said it is high time to work towards such a system for the advancement of *kominkan*. Partly because of the three-year term of directors, there are many directors who get defensive (守りに入る) and not take any risks. Work of *kominkan* can continue without much change under such directors but *kominkan* cease to be a lively place for learning and community development.

As a role model of leader, she identified one *kominkan* director who gave a freehand to organise activities. He said that he would take all the responsibilities and he gave her support when needed. She felt at ease under him and was able to try new activities. She does not feel at ease with leaders who are proactive and overly self-confident. She said maybe that is reflection of her complex or low self-esteem.

The joy she has from *kominkan* work is observing changes in people. When she notices that a person is taking initiative or approaches her with ideas to start something new, it makes her happy. When people she supports form a group or club and sustain their activities on their own, she really feels happy. She spoke of an elderly man whose life had changed through his participation in *kominkan*. He found his *ikigai* after retirement with volunteering in various activities in *kominkan*. A *kominkan* group interested in local history, she has been supporting them by promoting their activities whenever there is a chance. Nowadays, when a tourist group visit the community, one of the members gives a talk. She is doing that for other groups and considers her key role in the *kominkan* is serving as a receptionist guiding people to the right groups. She thinks that *kominkan* can serve as a kick-off place for individuals and groups interested in contributing to community development. She is putting more weight on supporting their initiatives than organising her own courses. She prefers to be a '*kuroko'* like Vivian mentioned than to be a frontrunner.

One piece of advice she has for *kohai*, younger colleagues, is to learn to prioritise what is important at work and to think deep of their own future. Work at *kominkan*, every task may seem important and time-consuming that some colleagues tend to work long hours. She recommends focusing on few important tasks and finish them in one go and ask for support with other tasks. She was concerned that some *kohai* were seriously working hard and long hours that they may burnout unless they learn to change the way they work.

She was trying to see the work of *kominkan* more holistically these days. In Okayama City, works of *kominkan* are not well known by public and there is also problem within that professionals in *kominkan* do not know about each other's work. For community to develop, she thinks *kominkan* is not enough, diverse incentives are needed for a community to develop as a whole. Community governance is currently managed by generation older than hers. They are connected with each other from childhood and various neighbourhood activities and thus able to organise themselves. Her generation does not have such connections and it is even weaker for younger generations who might be new or not know anyone in their neighbourhood. For the community to function well, she thinks her generation has an important role to build links from older generations to younger generations in community governance. She feels that she

needs to learn more about society building to find a right angle to approach this issue through *kominkan* and other means.

She gave an example of disaster prevention activities in *kominkan*. At the request of local government, *kominkan* has initiated organising lectures in schools and public places about disaster prevention. Fire service and crisis management unit in government are helpful with sharing information. On the other hand, when it comes to preparing local crisis management plans in case of earthquakes and floods together with citizens, they are either too busy or do not appreciate planning with citizens. In information sessions she organised, people rightfully ask where they are and what is their role. She has not been able to respond well. As a former temporary staff, she has not been able to really talk on par with government officials on this matter.

I found Kaylie to be a doer even though she talked negatively about herself. Perhaps reflecting the leadership role she has in the union, she showed concern about the *kominkan* and community at a holistic level.

5.9 Chloe

Chloe is another experienced *kominkan* professional. Her colleagues referred to her as one that changes the community wherever she is transferred. She is married with two children. Unlike others, she somehow tended to stay longer, seven to eight years in each *kominkan* since she started to work in April 1990. She was working in her fourth one at the time of the interview. Since 2005, she has been a permanent social education official. During my visit to her *kominkan*, I had an opportunity to join a lunch party with elderly people's group who were celebrating the end-of-year occasion. The concept of this group called *waigaya* (わいが屋) was to get together, chat and enjoy life together.

5.9.1 Motivation

She was working as a temporary staff in the Okayama City Government Office when she became interested in the work of *kominkan*. She met Ms Sugimura, one of pioneer women director of *kominkan* in Okayama City, giving a talk about her work in a series of workshop on how women can work long-term. Ms Sugimura was a charismatic person, and her talk was about how much fun her work is in the *kominkan*. She can do what she wanted to do in full force. Inspired by her, Chloe decided to take the exam to be a temporary professional for *kominkan*.

Chloe was quite open and frank with her talk. I could see that she is a fighter and sticks with her agenda when she is at odds or face challenges. Her first *kominkan* was in a small remote part of Okayama City. When she first started, daily work was like just house-sitting. It was not at all what Ms Sugimura discussed as a fun and meaningful work. Her colleagues pitied her for being assigned in remote and sleeping community but that made her even more determined to improve the work of *kominkan* and make it the most viable *kominkan* in the city. She made a request for higher activity budget which the central *kominkan* supervisor questioned if she could deliver but still approved the proposed budget. She ensured that the money was well spent. From organising local festivals to cherish fireflies in the first *kominkan*, she learned how to link *kominkan*'s activity with other organisations.

5.9.2 Work and family life balance

When her children were infants, she really struggled with work. They would get high fever or sick when it was most difficult for her to take leave and stay home. So, she had 'battles' with her husband asking him to take leave as she needed to be at work. Her husband was not so cooperative, saying those earning less income should do more domestic work. With this kind of incidents, she started to think deeper about how women could develop a professional career while taking care of child raising, household work and all. Chloe considered divorce on a few occasions. Although her husband has not changed, she said her children changed the dynamics at home. They now ask their father why father you only

do work? Mother is doing more than work, she is working, doing community work as well as household work.

5.9.3 Training and self-development

In her talk about career development, she repeated two key terms: widening the scope of her work (幅を広げる) and learning（学び）. There was no initial training on social education when she started to work at *kominkan*. Considering that taking the social education official certificate course in her third year was meaningful for her. The course enabled her to link her practice with theories and government legislations. Understanding how *kominkan* is part of national education policy, she realised she should not just do what she wants at *kominkan* but be a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983).

She is a member of two national associations on *kominkan* and social education and tries to attend their study circles or research seminars. With her family responsibilities, however, she is not able to go every time she wishes to do so.

She is also active in a local network for raising children in Okayama. Through this network, she was able to meet members with different professions like doctors, nursery schoolteachers, etc. Chloe said one tends to limit the thoughts and action in terms of *kominkan* activities; but exchanging with people with diverse thinking and experience opens one's way of working.

By her second *kominkan* assignment, she said she felt that *kominkan* professional is her true calling (天職) and understood what Ms Sugimura meant by fun work. Chloe was able to expand her network, not only build a working relationship but human to human relationships. Ideas started to come up like water flowing from a pond with just a small stone. She is motivated to try new challenges and able to expand her scope of work by herself. She has developed into a different person considering that she was a shy introvert as a student.

When dealing with a new issue at work such as for planning a course, she has learned the importance of talking with different experts to understand and organise requests from the community. She would read on the topics but talking with experts helped her to understand more clearly. She gave an example of

community welfare for elderly people. Caregivers, social welfare officials and social workers and local community committee members can give diverse perspectives on how to deal with welfare for elderly people. This diversity can make things complex but understanding the complexity is important learning and involving them is essential for a successful solution to community issues.

Giving another example of developing a Community Wikipedia, she shared that the strength of *kominkan* is connecting people and various resources in the community. To develop the Community Wikipedia, she connected learners in the photography club with computer expert in *kominkan* and school students with elderly to document local heritage in the community. She also said it is not all about linking people but also paying attention to who to exclude at certain times. To understand the relationships or power dynamics in the community, talking with diverse people in various settings in the community helps.

5.9.4 Communication skills

In a second interview with her, she stressed the importance of communication skills in *kominkan*'s work. Using a term of making efforts to talk with people (声かけ), by choosing right words and tone, her advice to younger colleagues is to always check if you understood what another person expressed. She said after one listen, one needs to respond and say what you said is this and this? There are chances that one misunderstands the intentions and asking also helps to clarify other person's thoughts.

The main message she is conveying through her work at *kominkan* is each person needs to take initiative to change the community. If people only follow orders of someone at the top, there is no community development. *Kominkan* activities can develop many people to think and act. This kind of activities are not looked favourably by some community leaders who are mostly elderly men. They are however not confronting her or the *kominkan,* so she continues to have dialogue on ways to improve the daily life in the community. The courses she organises, she does not end it with just lectures or talks by experts. She tries to steer the course participants to take specific actions; it could be presenting the knowledge to others or starting a new activity addressing the issues discussed.

She hopes that such ways of thinking can be applied by people in their family, workplaces, and community as well.

5.9.5 Directorship

Concerning the *kominkan* director in Okayama City, she thinks that current social education officials working in *kominkan,* including her, shall be one in near future. Backed by a movement to have more women in management positions in Japan, there is a small wave to have more women directors. For *kominkan* professional members to be promoted as director, she sees the need to change some local government administrative procedures so that social education officials can keep their status and work as director. She mentioned that in general, people in Okayama City still have a rural mentality and view women as not suitable for management work. One could see that in school principals. Even though there are more women principals in primary schools, it is still rare in lower and upper secondary schools. She also thinks women themselves need to have the courage to do management work so changing the mindset is required by both sides – the employers and employees. As there has not been a case of full-time social education official to be appointed as a permanent director, one needs to be a pioneer and model for others to follow.

Now directors are not selected from social education institutions or people with social work backgrounds. Chloe said it is not productive and it is not clear which entity (local bureau of education or local government office) is responsible for hiring a quality director. She mostly had retired school principals as directors. With some, she could not have a good relationship with at all. It made her upset that one did not trust the public or community people. One director was saying it does not make sense to explain things as citizens do not understand. She had one director whom she was able to learn a lot. He had a background in public administration and could advise her on the position of *kominkan* in Okayama City administration and how community people can approach local parliament to influence the debates and decisions.

During the interview, she mentioned she is contemplating starting a salon for cancer patients and relatives. She would like to respond to *kominkan* users who mentioned that they would like to have a place to go besides the aftercare

salons inside hospitals. As cancer is a serious health issue, and other professional who may replace her do not share her experience as a survivor of cancer, she was not sure in what style to start such a salon in *kominkan* and how the activity could be sustained after she transfers.

5.10 Taylor

Taylor is one of experienced professional in Okayama City and was working in her seventh *kominkan* since she started to work in 1986. She studied social education while in the local University. In 2001, she became an assistant specialist with a time-bound contract. After the union work, she became a full-time social education official in 2005. She was my last interviewee and we talked longer than others. She shared with me a few articles she wrote on the struggles to gain professional recognition. She was the first batch of *kominkan* professional who could be sponsored by local government to participate in the social education official course organised by Okayama University in 1996. Almost all interviewees referred to her has a *senpai* they look up to. She is also well known in the *kominkan* community in Japan as the Okayama City's *kominkan* professional. She regularly attends annual national conferences on *kominkan* and Social Education. She has written about her work as well as the movement to improve the working conditions of *kominkan* professional in Okayama City. She was most articulate and was choosing her words carefully so as not to be too critical of others.

In her view, core mandate of *kominkan* professional is to accompany and support the empowerment of individuals through learning activities and to support community development at large. She shared with me that through one of the first course she organised, which was on 'women's issues', she was able to learn the fundamentals of the *kominkan* professional. This course was a series of sessions with ten to twenty women. She built layers of learning by identifying what shall be the learning agenda through casual chats and course discussions with women. She had to work very hard as the issue was touching upon each

participant's life – questioning how one should live. The course sessions were intense with some women not able to stop crying or having difficulty to talk. At that time, she was around age 30 and much younger than the women participating in the course. She tried to be sincere and provide as much possible information and advice. This experience illustrated the challenging yet very satisfying work of the *kominkan* on the potentials of learning by adults and how it can enrich and empower one's life. Even with the changes to themes such as child raising or environmental protection, Taylor said learning in the *kominkan* is about reflecting and making changes in one's daily life and surroundings in conversation with other people. Her talk reminded me of the work I supported in building leadership capacities of young rural women who are facing multiple disadvantages with education, early marriage, and parenthood. The training sessions with them were very emotional and intense one which also built alliances among the young women participants.

Taylor talked about how she is 'learning' for her work and life. She was conscious that she is the one doing most 'learning' among the professional in her *kominkan* in terms of committing time and money as well. With experience and maturity, she has learned to share the rationale and purposes of the course she organises with her Director and colleagues. Without building a shared understanding, she has learned that one cannot get support and go far. It is better when the director is supporting your course rather than pulling things into another direction.

I asked her what the main changes in her work were when she became a full-time professional from a temporary professional. She became a full-fledge social education official in July 2000. The most notable change was that she became more confident in consulting with city government officials. She also noticed changes in the reactions by those officials toward her. They allocated more time for discussions with her to find solutions to community issues.

5.10.1   On directorship

Kominkan Directors have temporary positions with maximum three-year appointment. Before the open recruitment was introduced a few years back, directors were appointed by the city government from recently retired city

government officials or school principals. Majority of them had never dealt with social or adult education. Taylor raised that having to guide newly appointed directors from zero knowledge every three-year or so is tiresome. Even though they do get an introductory training on *kominkan*, she has had to explain what it means for adults to learn and grow through participation in activities organised in *kominkan*. So far, she has had only one woman as a director and that was only for six-months. She thinks it is important to have gender-balance in the meetings organised among directors. If only one or two women are in such meetings, although she has not attended any of these meetings, she thinks it will be difficult for women to speak up. She observed from union activities that men tend to give preference to institutions and principles while women tend to be more flexible. Like the men and women making up the society, she sees it important to have both perspectives represented in the directors' meeting.

To rectify this, she thinks the current *kominkan* professional should increase the momentum and be ready and determined to take up the director positions. Because the *kominkan* professional were temporary positions, majority of professional were women in Okayama City. She thinks it was a good thing as women are closer to community people's perspective. They need to pioneer and prove that *kominkan* director having professional expertise in social education and being women are beneficial for Okayama City's *kominkan* and city's development. She said every one of us had had problems having a good relationship with one or the other directors in the past. Some are good directors, but some are oppressive and not open to having conversations with *kominkan* users or staff members.

Although Taylor herself has not decided if she would like to be a kominkan director telling herself that she likes organising courses, I think she will say yes if she is asked to be a director while keeping her status as local government official. She expressed a couple times that there are certain things that only the director can do or make changes especially when the *kominkan* needs to introduce substantial change in the community. The director can build different relationships with the local school management and local community governance. In the past, she said there were two women who became directors after working many years as temporary professional in *kominkan* in Okayama

City. Both did excellent and notable work as director, so she and other colleagues are lucky to have these role models.

5.10.2   *Kominkan* professional as a producer of their own learning

Kominkan professional should be proactive learners in order to do a good job. Taylor gave two after-work activities which have been effective in broadening her perspectives and improving her work as *kominkan* professional. First is holding official positions in the Okayama City Employees' Union. She has been serving as an official in the union for more than twenty years. This experience not only helped her to build networks with city government officials working in different departments, but she has also gained an understanding of how city governance works and which direction it is heading. This insight into city governance which is closely linked with and influenced by the prefectural and national government has been informing her thinking of the role and contributions of *kominkan* in Okayama City.

Another extra learning activities is participating in various national associations for social education. The Japanese National Association for Social Education is a network among researchers and practitioners. She has been attending their annual conferences ever since she participated in the first year she started to work. Attending these conferences are not considered part of work for many *kominkan* practitioners in Japan. They participate therefore by taking leave, spending their personal money and – *tebento* (手弁当) which means to bring your own lunch, in literal translation, so the conference fees and accommodation are set at a very reasonable cost. Those who come are committed people who are highly motivated to share and learn from other people's experiences.

Taylor recalled her first participation was a shock to her to observe that what she is practising in Okayama City is not up to the practices in leading *kominkan*. As she continued to participate and start to present her practice, she received a lot of encouragement when her peers from other cities commented that Okayama City is taking initiatives or doing a good job.

She was puzzled why younger colleagues do not go to these conferences; they have similar opportunities, yet they do not come forward. She mentioned that Chloe used to go with her until she got busy with family life and she can continue travelling and participating because she is single and has fewer hassles to deal with. For her, studying through books is one way but direct listening to leading practitioners and researchers is more effective in getting inspired and transforming that as energy for the next work is effective. Unless one gets exposed to such opportunities, one does not get the motivation to tackle a new challenge. Giving such opportunities to more *kominkan* professional in Okayama City is an issue for her; as if telling herself, she said she should not give up asking her peers to join her. Otherwise, the *kominkan* practice in Okayama City could be ignorant to what is happening outside. She used a Japanese saying a frog in the well (井の中の蛙), meaning being ignorant about the surrounding by limiting oneself to small area.

She also said she would like to support building a society where women can do productive work while raising children. It should not be only single women who can put in long hours like men to have meaningful employment. Young women are performing much better than young men these days. She had recently attended a presentation session on volunteer experience by high school students. Only girls were presenting and only about 10 per cent of those receiving certificate of volunteering were boys. She noted that women are doing better in city government official entry exams as well.

5.10.3   Escort runner to lifelong learning journey

In discussing leadership in community education, Taylor's stance was that it is different from school education. The role of *kominkan* professional, including the director, is to be an escort runner. Listening to community residents' concern or issues, identifying common issues, and supporting them to address the issues. The advantages of learning activities in *kominkan* is that the role of teacher is not fixed. Participants can learn from each other's experiences and a good facilitator or speaker from outside would leave saying he or she has also learned from the dialogue.

In her view, the professional work of *kominkan* is to setup such open and critical dialogue environment, observe changes in individuals, and encourage the participants by talking with them. When there is trust built with the participants, the professional may not only encourage but inspire them so that he or she will put in more efforts.

5.11 Conclusions

The ten women professionals I interviewed were all enthusiastic and serious about their work. I would like to reflect here some common themes and what stands out from the interviews and the summary I have written. A focused discussion on leadership by women in community learning will be discussed in the following chapter.

The women professionals, eight of them were social education official with full benefits of local government employee, were proud of their profession yet concerned that majority of their colleagues in *kominkan* are working with short-term contract which does not give young people incentives to stay in the job long enough to gain experience. The majority of them were also looking forward to one of the social education officials currently working in *kominkan* to become a fulltime *kominkan* director. These two issues were frequently discussed in the weekly union meetings and thus were a shared concern of *kominkan* professionals in Okayama City.

Many of women research participants mentioned their work at *kominkan* as a fun job. They enjoy the interaction with community people and planning and organising learning courses and activities. In community education, I believe, based on my professional experience as a trainer, having fun and practical activities is an important factor for adults to actively participate in any learning activities. Although they used the term 'fun' (楽しい) to describe their work, it also means they appreciate the value of their work and how they are able to transform (Cranton, 2013) and empower users through learning and development

activities at *kominkan*. At the same time, Astrid mentioned she wished *kominkan* professional's work to be valued more by the employer, the local city government.

Like Nell said, users of *kominkan* immediately sense the mood of staff working in *kominkan* so being able to enjoy one's work is important in creating welcome learning environment in *kominkan*. Work at *kominkan,* however*,* is not all the time rosy. They also expressed some anxiety and frustration they have with work. Personnel working in each *kominkan* is small, so the relations they have with *kominkan* director and colleagues – *senpai* and *kohai* has impact on their daily work. I could sense that exchanges they have with colleagues working in other *kominkan* provide counselling and support measures when the working relations get tense. Among the thirty some social education officials working in *kominkan* in Okayama City, they know each other and there seems to be a supportive environment among women which were built through years of working to upgrade the status of *kominkan*.

The five-year rotation policy in Okayama City *kominkan* seems to play important role in their career development. Regan said serving more than five years would not bring benefit to the *kominkan* as *kominkan* officials' motivations and drive for work may not be sustained. Transferring to a new *kominkan,* going through the cycle of understanding the community dynamics, mobilising volunteers, initiating community development work and learning activities are serving as effective professional development to improve their competencies as social education officials and just not to do business as usual. Participating in staff union activity, even though it takes away time from regular leave they have on Wednesdays, the only day of week when the *kominkan* are closed, they are able to benefit from special lectures, build networks with other local government officials and colleagues. Another important opportunity mentioned by some of them were the annual conferences organised by national associations for *kominkan* and social education. Participating in these conferences broadens their perspectives and gives them inspiration. When they report on their practice in such conferences, this gives them an opportunity to reflect on their work and get advice and encouragement from other professionals.

In the 1990s, *kominkan* professional in Okayama organised a successful movement to empower themselves and get the local government to upgrade the status of *kominkan* professional from one-year temporary contract to a local government official. The women I interviewed who were part of that movement recalled the movement as a deep learning experience for them. Becoming a local government official was important on many grounds. At a personal level, it allows *kominkan* professional to be economically independent and not worry about social security. On a professional level, a senior government official in Okayama City said *kominkan* can play its role and functions fully when it has professional full-time professional to support community people's learning. Learning activities in *kominkan* often go beyond annual cycle so if a professional can only plan and commit for one-year, learning activities will not be rich.

A few participants commented that temporary staff contract is a reflection of gender inequality in Japan. It is not clear which comes first. Is it because women are suitable as *kominkan* professional, the position is a short-term employment contact or is it because of temporary contract that more women than men agree to the contract? It is probably both ways, as Chizuko Ueno, well known feminist scholar in Japan commented in an interview that it should not be only women being told to work more or less to take care of family life (Nomura, 2015). Both men and women should be able to adjust their work to have a good work-life balance.

The status of *kominkan* professional in Okayama City was in the transition phase on two fronts. Firstly, the appointment of one social education official for each kominkan was achieved and there is a growing demand to upgrade the status of other *kominkan* professionals who are working on short-term contracts. The second transition is the move to have more women, experienced social education officials, to serve as *kominkan* director. To encourage current social education officials to accept the appointments, I concur with Chloe and Taylor that local government needs to consider giving them a right to keep their local government professional status. In near future, more women should apply and get selected as directors. Currently there are only three women directors out of thirty-eight *kominkan* directors in Okayama City; this is very far away from gender equality. Moreover, to ensure professionalism in *kominkan*, new directors shall be filled by people with experience working in social education.

In most cases, the research participants did not have strong motivation to work in *kominkan* at the time of application. The work experience has made them professional community educators. I would like to note that many mentioned in the interview that some of their colleagues had to quit for different reasons. In the case of Japan, more than half of women who are working and have higher education degree interrupt their career for several years due to societal expectations on women to be responsible for unpaid housework and childcare as well as the employment practices which steer women to take up part-time or temporary employment to be dependent of their husbands (Suzuki, 2016; Zhou, 2015).

Community issues they address through learning activities and various other activities like festivals and bazaar in *kominkan* show deep sympathy and understanding of marginalised people in the community and those with less power to defend their rights. The issues were diverse and concerned elderly poor people to people with disabilities, but they were working to ensure that learning through courses are transformational for participants.

The women I interviewed were indeed professionals and leading community education practices in Okayama City. In the next chapter, I will focus on their leadership characteristics and what measures are desirable to enhance their leadership.

Chapter 6 Analysis of feminist leadership characteristics

Female leaders in education no longer need to fill the male leader
stereotype in order to be successful; rather, they can simply be
themselves and pursue their dreams without the added pressure of
being someone they are not (Luongo, 2012, p. 83)

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is an analysis of the findings of my second research
question which investigates the concepts and frameworks for leadership
characteristics among women *kominkan* professionals in Okayama City. In the
previous chapter, I discussed the professional development and aspirations of
women *kominkan* professionals through individual stories. In the following
sections, I will explain my analysis of the perceptions of research participants
drawing on the feminist leadership characteristics of Grogan and Shakeshaft
(2010), outlined in Chapters Three and Four. Differences and similarities from
the American context to Okayama City's context will be explained to validate
and understand extent to which their feminist leadership framework applies in
Japan.

The five feminist leadership characteristics I used for the analysis on how women
kominkan professionals are building and leading community learning, were
introduced in Chapter Three. They are: Relational leadership; leadership for
social justice; positivity leadership; leadership for transformative learning; and
balanced leadership. This analysis in this chapter will be structured around these
five characteristics, the first being *relational leadership*. I will end with findings
on feminist transformative leadership by women kominkan professionals in
Okayama City which are first practiced through their own transformation in

professional life and transformation of individual learners and the community through their invisible leadership.

6.2 Relational leadership: working with and learning from other professionals

Grogan and Shakeshaft together with other researchers analysed the 2015 mid-decade survey by the American Association of School Administrators (Robinson *et al.*, 2017) and found that women administrators appreciate relationships and teamwork in the workplace. The women leaders in education in the U.S.A., such as superintendents and school principals, were more open to soliciting inputs from parents and teachers compared with men leaders. Robinson et al. (2017) named collaborative and networking approaches by women leaders as relational leadership, which includes characteristics such as being caring, courageous and visionary in building coalitions. Good communication has an important role in this leadership characteristics and it includes listening well. They found that women leaders are more into sharing power than having great power (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2009).

Likewise, many women in my research commented how they did not like the hierarchical leadership styles of male *kominkan* directors who were not able to change from how they were leading as school principals. In fact, many women I interviewed hesitated to view themselves as leading community education. They did not have a positive image of 'leadership' in Japan. Astrid said people exercising leadership are sometimes called a conductor or a ruler. These are associated with images of one man making undemocratic decisions for a group such as in workplace based on seniority hierarchy in Japan. Usui *et al.* (2003) point out that one of psychological barriers women in Japan have in pursuing leadership positions in the workplace is that they are over-embedded in the traditional division of gender roles which positions the ideal woman to be a good wife and wise mother. On the other hand, they viewed themselves as '*kuroko*' in

the words of Vivian and pacemaker in the words of Taylor; always being supportive and providing critical advice when needed. They preferred to be an invisible leader.

Vivian as a *kominkan* director actively engaged others to work with her. There was a strong emphasis on collaboration and partnerships which I consider as an example of practicing horizontal relational leadership. She would mobilise other women to work with her which is a form of shared leadership and distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002). She also emphasised the importance of dialogue in collective decision making. In her view, communication skills and a cooperative attitude are important to lead *kominkan* activities. Her approach was appreciated by Astrid, who said that Vivian was a strong example of teambuilding leadership.

An example of good communication skills was shared by Chloe. When having conversation with other people, she said she consciously checks if she understood them by responding and confirming what the other person has said. This helps to clarify when she could have misunderstood another person's intention.

Kristy who jokingly said chatting is the main task of a *kominkan* professional described that they manage communication in *kominkan* activities like a pacemaker in marathon who supports a runner to set their pace to run long distance. She sees her role in community meetings as facilitating all people to have opportunities to listen and respond and intervening to conclude and take actions forward. They also adjust their communication depending on with whom they are having a conversation. During the interview, Lynn spoke quietly but when she talks with elderly users of *kominkan*, she said she pays attention to speaking loudly, clearly, and slowly. For women working in *kominkan*, these communication skills are an important feature of practicing relational leadership (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010). Attention they give to communication with *kominkan* users is an illustration of being a transformative educator, building trust and working with people (Cranton and Wright, 2008). They also appreciated discussions with peers – colleagues as well as users - whom they can relate and respect as their 'in-group'.

Although authoritarian directors were not preferred, many women appreciated the vertical relations – *senpai* and *kohai* – among the *kominkan* professionals. *Senpai* is a senior officer with more experience than *kohai*, a younger officer with less experience. It is a typical hierarchical relation in schools in Japan which is also applied in workplace settings. Their relations were mutually beneficial and is a type of mentor and mentee relationship. Nell and Regan who were mentoring newly appointed staff were themselves learning from the experience. Planning for training sessions gave them an opportunity to reflect on their work and interact with newly appointed staff. This gave them a renewed sense of purpose as *kominkan* professional. These vertical relations provided support and encouragement to address barriers to leadership faced by women as discussed in Chapter Three (Shakeshaft *et al.*, 2007, p. 108).

Another way to discuss relational leadership would be collective leadership (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010; Batliwala, 2011). To practice relational leadership, Nell mentioned one must be open. Opening up about herself as well as being open to ideas and initiatives to be accepted by *kominkan* users. Nell and Kaylie were exercising leadership by asking for help in running activities in *kominkan*. As a staff union leader, Kaylie wanted to be an approachable leader. Through their work, Astrid and Kaylie learned not to carry all the work by themselves but to work in collaboration with others. There is a limit to what one can achieve on their own. While sharing the decision-making power, they give some directions sometimes and take responsibility for the results. This intervention is needed at times when the group discussions are going in circles and there seems to be no clear consensus. The research participants' relational leadership can be considered as reflective practice. Miwa (2009) explains reflective practice for community educators as starting from understanding other people (learners), building trust and opening conversation to enrich learning activities.

The research participants talked about their experiences with sharing power and decision-making in designing and implementing *kominkan* courses. By sharing power, they are able to have more power to lead (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010). They are walking along with *kominkan* users following the transformational learning approach (Cranton and Wright, 2008). One unexpected finding of this research was that research participants were making selections on whom to

engage and share power. They were not involving everyone but mindful about selecting appropriate people. Kristy mentioned Vivian's advice to ask busy people for help as they are doer. Chloe said, while she involves and links many people, she also pays attention to whom not to ask for help or to introduce each other. To practice relational leadership in community learning in Okayama City, it seems that one must identify key persons to work with yet maintain a cohesive group setting to keep everybody informed and consulted.

6.3 Leadership for social justice as their goal

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) described that women feel more comfortable leading for a social justice cause than leading to have more power or money. In the case of women school leaders in U.S.A., the most notable social justice issues were concerned with creating equitable learning regardless of race and ethnicity. This type of leader is mission-oriented and passionate about changing the status quo: 'Several studies cast women's approach as "servant leadership" … women seek to serve others by being the facilitator of the organization, bringing groups together, motivating students and staff and connecting with outside groups' (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2009, p. 23). The description of this leadership characteristic corresponds with what the research participants considers as their goal.

Kominkan staff who have more than twenty-years of working experiences like Chloe and Taylor recalled their first experiences in working on gender equality issues as one of the triggers for them to be more devoted to their work. Back then, women's employment opportunities were not widely available, and women's rights were beginning to gain momentum in preparation for the World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995. Women participating in women's empowerment courses organised by *kominkan* began to take actions for themselves and their community in partnership with *kominkan*. Tanaka (1997), a social education official working in Okayama City, writes that from these activities she learned that people are able to develop and improve themselves

through learning. Activities which were initiated by a group of women volunteers in 1990s like community libraries and sign language circles have been sustained and are still active today in Okayama City.

All the research participants had a strong commitment and passion for social justice. Each of them had identified specific justice issues in the community in which they were working. Vivian talked about using her role as *kominkan* director to bring the voice of silent – marginalised people in the community like the elderly people in poverty. For Chloe, her concern was about family members of people with cancer. For Lynn, she was organising activities for people with disabilities so that their needs can be understood by other people. As mentioned in the literature review on leadership in Chapter Three, they are practicing from a critical feminist perspective in their work as a leader in community education (Blackmore, 2013).

Vivian's message to younger people 'to have principles, to pursue principles and not to change principles' demonstrates her leadership for social justice. For example, her principle and main concern was to bring the voice of 'silent people' to local meetings among the community leaders and to initiate concrete community actions to improve welfare for elderly people. Identifying their community education work as social justice work is shared by other women educators in research that has studied the commitment of women educators for social justice in Canada and U.S.A. (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010, p. 11; English and Irving, 2015). It is important to note Brookfield's warning (2010, p. 223) that adult educators' principles to serve people may open to exploitation and manipulation resulting in overwork and burnout. Leadership for social justice needs to be exercised with balanced leadership to have a healthy and sustainable work-life balance.

In the very early stage of their career in *kominkan*, most research participants did not have prior knowledge or experience nor a strong interest in the *kominkan* work. Through the exchanges they had with *kominkan* users and colleagues, the women I interviewed had learned to identify and understand the important issues in community. In other words, they have gone through a transformation (Kegan, 2008) to become a feminist and professional in community education. They exercise leadership for social justice through

working on change and learning agenda in *kominkan*. They do not only look at the root of problems, they also try to identify hope in the communities they serve which is akin to spiritual leadership which I discuss next.

6.4 Positivity leadership

Grogan and Shakeshaft noted that women leaders connected leadership together with spirituality, for example the Christian faith or search for ongoing peace and self-understanding. Having conscientious raising and faith gives hope and energy to address social justice. Spirituality for them also sees themselves as part of greater ecosystems connected with other people and a sense of responsibility for others. Women leaders lead with 'passion and hope' (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010, p. 17) to push their change agenda. They called this third leadership characteristic as spiritual leadership.

Talking about god or religion, which was common in women leaders interviewed in Grogan and Shakeshaft's review of research in U.S.A., did not come up in my interviews. The Japanese context is very different, in this respect, to the U.S.A. First, religious activities are not allowed in *kominkan;* in fact they are one of three forbidden activities in the *kominkan*. In the broader Japanese context, talking about religious faith is not common and the majority of people are not serious about regularly going to church, temples and shrines. Buddhism and Shintoism are practiced in parallel in everyday life as well as applying Confucianism to seek a balance in life.

The women I interviewed talked about hope and finding the positive sides of people and the community in their work. Astrid was working with young adults in her rural community to make it an attractive place to live. They initiated a date route for young couples and prepared a guidebook targeting young people in Okayama City to visit their village and discover rural heritage. Vivian and Chloe had the passion to support elderly people to find their *ikigai* – a reason to live, which recently became a popular term in English. They were facilitating elderly

people to meet and support each other and enjoy life. Without '*tunagaritai*' or '*waigaya*', activities organised at *kominkan*, elderly people may simply stay home alone, become unhappy and lose their zest for life.

Lynn and Nell's strategy in their communication with people were to identify people's strengths and enhance their skills. The learning activities they organise, they were including elements of celebrating local heritage in the community. Local traditional recipes and dance or local eco-system are used attract people to participate in courses organised by *kominkan*. Several of women referred to the *kominkan* work as fun and enjoyable work. Their work is appreciated by *kominkan* users, unlike the work of civil servants. Rosa said her friends working in local government offices are often receiving complaints from citizens that they talk about citizens like their enemy. On the other hand, her work gets compliments from *kominkan* users so she would talk about citizens as collaborators.

Here, I would like to make strong connection between the spiritual leadership, emotions and emotionality as discussed in feminist leadership in education (Blackmore, 2013; English and Irving, 2015). Regan spoke about crying with joy when activities are concluded with success and how they pay attention to what the *kominkan* users' sense when they visit *kominkan* staff's room indicate how they attach importance to people's emotions. They are building 'a collective experience of emotionality' (Blackmore, 2013, p. 147) through the *kominkan* activities. Sharing the pleasure of success with open expressions of emotions are passed on to *kominkan* users. Kristy talked about supporting *kominkan* users to have fruitful and fun life and exposing them to new horizons. Many research participants used the term *joyous*（楽しい）as a feeling to share the joy of community learning and development. Rosa likes to observe changes in people and how they become happy and full of energy. Like Chloe with multiple roles as mother, worker and volunteer, many women participating in *kominkan* lead busy lifestyles. For this reason, it is important to make the atmosphere in *kominkan* as a fun place for women to gather for learning (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015).

The group of senior women *kominkan* officials – Rosa, Kaylie, Chloe and Taylor – were comrades, in the words of Rosa and Taylor. They co-lead the movement in

late 1990s to improve kominkan system in Okayama City by sharing a belief that their work is significant and cannot be left to part-time employment. Through their dialogue with *kominkan* users, they were able to reaffirm that their demands to be recognised as social education officials is not fulfilling selfish will, but it is good for the public. This shared emotionality strengthened their request to improve *kominkan* activities and their working conditions.

As discussed, spiritual leadership practiced by research participants in Okayama City did not have a religious and spiritual flavour but their leadership was closely associated with emotions (English and Irving, 2015) and hope. They were sharing joyful and positive emotions and building harmonious environment to engage *kominkan* users to participate actively in community education with positive feelings. I consider these building of positive emotions as Japanese equivalent to spiritual leadership by women. Thus, I renamed this type of leadership as positivity leadership.

6.5 Leadership for transformative learning by community members

Grogan and Shakeshaft's fourth feminist leadership characteristics is called *leadership for learning.* They say that a number of studies confirm that women favour instructional leadership or learning centred leadership in education. Changes women leaders introduce are often about improving students' learning. In addition to the focus on teaching, they equally pay attention to staff development. For staff development, they follow collaborative approach – they enjoy planning and vision-setting together with staff. This is so because 'their hearts are moved by watching students [and staff] grow and develop' (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010, p. 19).

Concern about supporting people's learning and empowerment were common in women's narratives. It confirms that community learning which is the first

activity defined in the national standards on operation of *kominkan* (National Kominkan Association, 2009, pp. 195–196) and a plan for *kominkan* in Okayama City (Uchida and Shigemori, 2015) is also their commitment. Many participants also tell themselves that *kominkan* professionals must be lifelong learners themselves before encouraging people to participate in learning activities.

Those who are active in union activities were using their rest days, which is Wednesday, to get together, do critical reading of articles in a monthly magazine for practitioners issued by the National Social Education Association, and discuss issues to improve their work. For them to meet on their day off indicates their strong commitment to professionalism and collective learning and action. Their reflection on practice in group setting are also very much in line with transformative learning theories of Mezirow (Mezirow, 2008; Miwa, 2017). Cranton and King (2003) argue when educators do critical analysis of their practices and apply their new or changed perspectives, that is transformative learning in professional development. In addition to these union-organised learning, many of them were putting efforts as lifelong learners. Kaylie was taking Open University courses; Taylor was actively participating in national professional and research associations to widen their scope of work which Chloe mentioned as essential in career development.

Nell said about the main task of *kominkan* professional is to talk with people, talk with users and talk with people outside *kominkan* and invite them to share their expertise through *kominkan* activities. In her work, she sees users as well as staff growing and empowering through learning activities in *kominkan*. In conversations with community people, *kominkan* officials are exploring and learning about community issues. Cranton and Write (2008) called these type of educators who build relations with learners as learning companions. Terms Taylor and others used were *kuroko* – invisible supporter.

There were different emphases on how the women are practicing leadership for learning. One of key responsibility of *kominkan* officials is to plan and organise courses. The topics they select and how they run the courses is where they can exercise their leadership for learning. Lynn chooses topics that could improve the lives of people in the community. Vivian and Taylor said planning for and organising courses in *kominkan* as the most enjoyable part of their work. Chloe

said she puts emphasis on helping people learn to think and act differently which they could apply in other spheres of life. On the other hand, Kaylie was more into supporting *kominkan* users to initiate learning activities. She said her role is to act as a receptionist to guide the right group of people to meet and work together.

Astrid commented that her work is providing support to turn people's dream into a reality. What Astrid and younger *kominkan* professionals saw as fitting for the community education by *kominkan* is facilitator or coordinator of learning by community people. For them, it is important that they are not making decisions by themselves but pulling out ideas and actions from participants and facilitating group learning. What they see as good community educator is very much like the educators following the transformative learning of Mezirow (Cranton and Wright, 2008; Mezirow, 2008) discussed in Chapter Three.

The women *Kominkan* professionals were conscious about their own learning journey and placed emphasis on changes and transformations through learning by *kominkan* users and community at large. On top of their professional work and professional development opportunities organised by the central *kominkan*, many were pursuing their own professional development. They also try to find a good balance between work and life which is the last type of leadership.

6.6 Balanced leadership

The last leadership characteristic by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) is called 'balanced leadership'. Women leaders often have double duties of management, managing their own households while also managing in the workplace. Thus, they must learn how to balance family and their professional lives. Their own mother often served as their role model or counter-role model. One study in Great Britain says women school principals feel that their status as mother are beneficial in dealing with students' parents (Coleman, 2007, p. 395). The same study found that men in leadership positions in education were much less

concerned with work-life balance. This was because majority of them had their household duties done by their spouses.

This type of leadership was also evident in the data; work-life balance was a common theme in all the interviews. In community education, women viewed leading by carrying all the responsibilities and tasks by themselves as not beneficial for *kominkan* users. They said such an approach could demotivate users to actively participate in *kominkan* activities. Like practicing relational leadership, *kominkan* officials should not be too concentrated on his or her work but leave room to participate in other activities. For example, Chloe's participation in local child-raising activity group has been beneficial in building networks with other professionals concerned with children's welfare issues. She has tapped into this network to identify speakers and moderators in the courses she organised. Having time to watch TV, read books and meet friends are important in life and can inspire *kominkan* officials in their daily work.

Kominkan officials who are mothers, six out of ten research participants, all said that their experience of being a mother was beneficial to their work and their relations with *kominkan* users. A few also spoke about how the experience they have in taking care of their parents enriches the courses and activities they organise for elderly people.

Being a mother did have negative impacts on their work though. Working mothers had to make choices in their work. Lynn has had to postpone taking the exam to be a social education official; Kristy relinquished participating in conferences and gave up expanding her responsibilities at work to take care of her family. Such decisions by women balancing work and life must be common among married women. The Global Gender Gap Report reported that women in Japan spend four more times on household chores than men which is much higher than other developed countries (World Economic Forum, 2019, p. 11).

From a slightly different angle, several women pointed out the need for work-life balance by all. They do not want to increase the number of women who are *kominkan* directors by having more women who are working like men, meaning putting in long hours of work and neglecting family and social life. They would like women who may have family and/or other interests to be directors. Such

women would be more balanced and tend to have the patience to listen to people - which is the key task of *kominkan* staff (Katano, 2016).

Balanced leadership is not only by and for married women with children. Kaylie spoke about her concerns on her *kohai*; younger staff members were working long hours. In her words, they need to learn to focus on important tasks and get help for other tasks. For them to become leaders, she said they need to change how they prioritise and delegate work. Lynn and Rosa were also managing the workload of their colleagues; supporting them to learn balanced leadership.

On the roles played by *kominkan* staff, Murata (2008) argued that women are doing good job with understanding the issues in community, doing *yobikake* (呼びかけ greetings and casual talks with participants), developing relevant learning content, methods and documenting learning taking place in the community. These were echoed by research participants too. I see doing well in these professional roles as a salient result of balanced leadership.

By and large, in practicing balanced leadership, one learns to make difficult choices in balancing work and life, and is able to work in a concentrated manner. Such a person also understand that people have different needs and requirements and are flexible in adjusting the courses and activities that are organised in *kominkan*.

6.7 Conclusion

The experiences and perceptions of the research participants were analysed through Grogan and Shakeshaft's feminist leadership characteristics in this chapter. This research reveals both similarities and differences between the feminist leadership characteristics in education in U.S.A. and the community learning context in Okayama City. The relational and collaborative leadership in Okayama City appreciated team building and sharing power like in U.S.A. but vertical relations among colleagues (*senpai* and *kohai*) was recognised and

nurtured. Leadership for social justice and leadership for learning were very much practiced in the social education contexts with adults in Okayama City. Feminist agendas were learning topics in *kominkan* with women as the majority of learners. Japan is at the forefront of super-aging society and many learning agendas were concerned with *ikigai* of elderly people and how community people can live with them. Women *kominkan* professionals were acting as invisible leaders (*kuroko*) to change people's perspectives and actions through community learning. One major adjustment I made with Grogan and Shakeshaft's framework to fit the Japanese context was to reorient spiritual leadership to positivity leadership. In this leadership characteristics, I included the extra leadership characteristics I identified which were building hope and joyous learning environment, and strengthening bonds with colleagues and participants through shared emotions.

The analysis in this chapter discussed the five feminist leadership characteristics separately for clarity. However, there are no clear boundaries, and these characteristics overlap and complement each other in practice. I would like to acknowledge that there are differences among the research participants in how they exercise leadership influenced by their work experiences, marital/family situation, and age. Therefore, feminist leadership characteristics discussed should be consider in a holistic and integrated manner. Although Grogan and Shakeshaft (2013) called these set as diverse collective leadership, I should like to call the set of leadership characteristics among women *kominkan* professionals in Okayama City as feminist transformative leadership. For them, their main objectives in practicing leadership are to bring about transformation in individual adult learners and the community.

Many women I interviewed were practicing feminist transformative leadership by going through their own transformation. They have undergone the required process of becoming a critical feminist (Antrobus, 2000), introduced in Chapter Two. From their work at *kominkan*, they are aware of their own personal transformation from being a naïve college graduate to a dedicated *kominkan* professional, consciousness-raising and internalisation of feminism by working towards the full-fledge social education official status.

Sato (2019) who is an experienced researcher in social education in Japan said leading community learning by *kominkan* staff is like being a *kuroko*. Vivian also used this term to explain her preference for invisible leadership, providing invisible support from behind like the *kuroko* actors in Japanese traditional plays who control the puppets or support main actors. In my view, community cohesion and active participation of people in *kominkan* activities is evidence that their leadership is effective.

In Okayama City, where one commented that women are 'shining', one important finding from this research is that there is a pool of qualified women *kominkan* professionals aspiring to be *kominkan* directors. This is similar to a study by Grogan and Brunner (2005) which concluded that lack of aspirations by women do not explain the low share of women among superintendents in U.S.A.. While I understand that collective leadership is effective in working towards social justice (Blackmore, 2013), I also believe that there should be more women in the director-level positions. The Japanese national target of 10 per cent to 30 per cent of women in leadership positions is too low. The target for *kominkan* in Japan should be at least 50 per cent considering that the majority of users and staff are women.

While building the courage and will among women *kominkan* professionals to be *kominkan* directors, as Nell said, women need to be more confident about playing leadership role and do less of 'letting men stand (男性を立てる)' which means to let men play leading roles while women play supportive roles even when women maybe making decisions and taking actions behind the scenes. At the same time, men, especially elderly men like the former prime minister Mori need to learn to respect women and acknowledge women taking leadership actions in Japan.

In the final chapter, I will discuss more about the need to support continuing professional development of *kominkan* professionals to strengthen feminist transformative leadership in community learning in Japan.

Chapter 7   **Final discussion**

7.1 Introduction

When I started this research, the Abe administration's Gender Equality Bureau had announced its target to have 30 per cent of leadership positions to be held by women in all spheres of society by 2020. From a feminist equity perspective, I would say the target was set too low, yet this low target was not reached. By 2019, only 11.2 per cent of leadership positions were held by women in large companies of more than 1,000 employees and 15.8 per cent in the case of special designated city governments of which Okayama City is one (Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office in Japan, 2019, p. 2, 2020, p. 21). According to the gender gap index of the World Economic Forum, Japan's ranking has declined from 80 in 2006 to 121 in 2020 while other countries have made progress. The rank is low despite high scores in education and health parity. Very low indicators in economic and political spheres are not helping Japan to reduce the gap in gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2019, pp. 31, 201).

More drastic measures are needed in Japan to achieve the international sustainable development goal on gender equality, namely to 'ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life' by 2030 (United Nations General Assembly, 2017, p. 6). Unless Japan has more women in leadership positions and the society sees that women have diverse leadership styles and skills, prejudice and discrimination women face in exercising leadership will be persistent (Carli and Eagly, 2018).

At the *kominkan* level, it has been a unique place to learn and discuss how to make Japanese society more equitable with respect to gender equality and social justice, and initiating actions at community level. Tsuji (2017) analysed the reasons behind the increase of women mayors in Japan and found that many of them were active in community development work through *kominkan*, or a staff of *kominkan* before they were elected. *Kominkan* has played a role in empowering women to take political leadership positions. As more women gain confidence with exercising leadership through *kominkan* activities, more women in Japan may take up political and managerial positions. This research has found that women working in *kominkan* are exercising leadership through their actions in community learning without fully appreciating their styles of leadership. Although this research is based on a small number of women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City, the feminist transformative leadership characteristics may be effective beyond the community learning and development settings in Okayama City.

The research questions of this dissertation on leadership of women working in community learning were to: understand the public education policy and professional development frameworks concerning *kominkan* in Japan, explore concepts and frameworks for feminist leadership characteristics in community learning and development, understand enabling factors in the career and leadership development of women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City, and formulate recommendations to support women to lead community learning.

In this concluding chapter, I would like to discuss how to enhance leadership by women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City in Japan by underlining the findings of the research work. Firstly, I outline five conditions I appraise as necessary to revitalise community learning through *kominkan*. Women I interviewed were wary of the future of *kominkan*, I suggest that valuing the communitarian approach would ensure the environment and raison d'état of *kominkan*. Secondly, I will make recommendations to strengthen leadership by women in *kominkan* in Okayama City and Japan in general, revisiting the feminist leadership characteristics that guided this analysis of the data. In relation to this, the dissertation's contribution to knowledge on gender, leadership and community learning is discussed. Recent developments in Okayama City will be discussed to appraise the relevance of Okayama City's

experience for other localities. I will end with final reflection to my professional work.

7.2 Communitarian approach to community learning

As findings of the first research question, I illuminate my understanding of public education policies and strategies concerning *kominkan* and how *kominkan* can be viable through a communitarian approach. These are based on the literature review of policies and research on community learning in Japan and other countries discussed in Chapter Two, and my professional experience in this field at the international level,

To build capacities of individual's autonomy and social order, which is the main goal of community learning, communitarian philosophy discussed in Chapter Two calls for:

> (1) basic material and institutional supporting structures and resources, (2) training and knowledge, (3) non-humiliation, respect, and dignity, (4) a protected space where autonomy can be practiced, (5) structures that permit dialogue and communication. (Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004, p. 234)

As a passionate supporter of *kominkan*, I suggest here how these five conditions can enrich the considerations for public policy on community learning and their professionals in Japan. These conditions are foundations for *kominkan* professionals to exercise their leadership for community learning.

Applying the first condition, material and institutional support structures and resources, *kominkan* would require an extended core public financial support to maintain the facilities and social education experts. If the fiscal policy calls for a cost-benefit analysis to increase the budget, I suggest that one should recall the key role *kominkan* played in the aftermaths of 3.11 triple disasters – earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown - which resulted in over 20,000 deaths in Japan in 2011 (Japan Society for the Study of Adult and Community Education, 2019;

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015; Fackler, 2011). At that time, *kominkan* was the central place to meet the basic needs such as distributing food and offering shelter. *Kominkan* also provided activities and a place for the wellbeing of elderly and orphaned children. Fackler (2011) reported that communities with strong community networks where people knew each other and had experiences working together were able to organise themselves in the days following the 3.11 crisis. In communities where *kominkan* was functioning and active, the emergency response and recovery was efficient. To make up for the closure of small *kominkan* in remote areas over the last decades, public support to the *kominkan* should extend to other types of community learning centres and activities in Japan which are initiated and managed by community people and do not receive regular budget support from the government.

Concerning the second condition on training and knowledge, a significant feature of *kominkan* is that the content of training and activities are decided and designed by *kominkan* professionals at the community level through dialogue with local people. Unlike privately funded learning centres, which there are many in urban areas, Murata (2008) states that the *kominkan*'s core mandate is to foster democratic society. *Kominkan* has traditionally offered space for women and the elderly to discuss issues concerning them. Such learning is not the central function of lifelong learning courses provided by other educational institutions. Definition of knowledge by Dewey (1927, p. 158) as 'a function of association and communication, it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned' is treasured in many *kominkan* and shall continue to guide the *kominkan*'s knowledge activities.

The third requirement is a condition for non-authoritarian communitarianism. The traditional practice of ostracising community members should not happen in the 21st century in Japan. Unfortunately, there is trace of this today. In a village, family members of COVID-19 infected person faced ostracism very recently (Takaku, 2020). To change such practices and the mindset of people, *kominkan* as a local public space should continue to offer a comfortable and safe space for women, youth, and socially disadvantaged groups to practice their autonomy by participating in democratic processes, community service and learning to exercise leadership roles. In short, *kominkan* should continue to

place social justice issues at the centre and work to engage disadvantaged people in community learning and leadership.

The last requirement to have structures to promote dialogue and communication is another important feature of *kominkan*. Unlike other educational institutions, *kominkan* is a suitable place for inter-generational dialogue where children, youth, working-age adults, and elderly people come together to participate in different activities. Such occasions are becoming more rare in the age of nuclear families in Japan. For successful dialogue in *kominkan,* the responsive communitarians' principles of open participation, dialogue, and shared values should be practiced facilitated by *kominkan* professionals (Etzioni, 2003, p. 9). The special characteristic of *kominkan* – integrating the residents' voices - is noted by a central government official, Iwasa (2010) who was a director of social education in the MEXT. He emphasised that the merits of *kominkan* will be reduced if this characteristic is lost.

As for the question on values which are backbone of national policies, it is on Confucius-Shintoism values (Han and Makino, 2013) which values harmony among people and nature. Policy makers need to understand what bonds individuals to a community and what mechanisms support to build a new public common (Han and Makino, 2013, p. 450). K*ominkan* activities are effective at training new generations of community leaders and actors for community building. Makino give examples of *kominkan* which are sustaining the community by forging a balance between individual identity and society (Han and Makino, 2013; Makino, 2013b).

In a panel discussion on learning cities organised by the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning, Makino says, 'the community life of the *kominkan* had been forgotten, and had failed to be captured in the perspective of the urban modernity of lifelong learning' (quoted in Holm, 2014, p. 24) but it is not too late if national policies related to *kominkan* is changed. The public opinion surveys on lifelong learning in Japan have shown that *kominkan* and local community learning centres are the most favoured venue for lifelong learning over the last years (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2012, 2016, 2018). This popularity should be recognised and drawn upon in

national and local government policies and strategies to promote lifelong learning and the new public commons.

Contrary to the communitarian approach, the performativity agenda promoted by neo-liberal policies coupled with slow economic growth is leading to neglect in the professional development of kominkan professionals in Japan. The national and local governments are not hiring new staff, nor offering continuing training opportunities to professionals as before. The probable future of this scenario is a decline in the support network to maintain the community education and community itself. Rebuilding communitarian society needs leadership and the preferred mode may be feminist transformative leadership which shares power to achieve its goal. When feminist transformative leadership is exercised by *kominkan* professionals and *kominkan* users as well in communities throughout Japan, the society can build strong foundations to be more caring, sharing and fair.

7.3 What measures will support women working in Okayama City *kominkan* to lead community learning?

The second question on feminist leadership characteristics was explored deductively. From the literature review on leadership and women discussed in chapter four, I selected the feminist leadership characteristics of Grogan and Shakeshaft as a best fit for my analysis. The narrative data from the in-depth interviews affirmed the five features of feminist leadership characteristics of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010).The features from American context required some reinterpretation but the five characteristics as I adapted to Japanese context were:

- Working with and learning from other professionals through relational leadership.

- Leadership for social justice as their goal.

- Positivity leadership.

- Leadership for transformative learning by community members.

- Balanced leadership among work, family, and wider community.

In Chapter Six, I discussed how these features of feminist leadership characteristics were practiced in Okayama City. The major adaptations are in the first, third and fourth leadership characteristics. Within relational leadership, I introduced vertical relations (*senpai-kohai* relations) among colleagues. Japanese type of mentoring function served as providing role models in leadership with research participants. I rephrased Grogan and Shakeshaft's spiritual leadership (2010) as positivity leadership. Female *kominkan* professionals were sharing the joy of learning and hope for community through their work. Under leadership for transformative learning, they appreciated the transformation of *kominkan* users, even among the elderly population, and the community achieved, through community learning, more so than what they themselves achieved through their work. The balanced leadership by women featured strongly in a patriarchal society in Japan. Considering the holistic and integrated nature of these leadership characteristics by women kominkan professionals, I propose framing them as feminist transformative leadership.

One notable finding is that women value leadership that is less visible. Many research participants discussed Japanese alternative names for invisible leadership such as *kuroko* (back-stage support) and pacemaker runner in marathons to explain how they prefer to be learning companions (Cranton and Wright, 2008) rather than dominant leadership styles.

Kominkan staff have the responsibilities to plan and coordinate learning activities for community education and development. To lead this learning process in the community, they themselves need to be a conscious learner and evolve their knowledge, attitudes and action as a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983). I would like to give three recommendations to government policy makers

to support such women working in *kominkan* to truly excel in leading community education in Okayama City and Japan at large.

The first recommendation is to continue to provide and diversify continuing professional development opportunities. It is commendable that the Okayama City Government is providing financial support for *kominkan* professionals to participate in the course for social education officials organised by the Okayama University every summer. The City is also employing part-time staff to cover during the professional's study leave. I would recommend the city to continue this support since all the interviewees appreciated the opportunity to take the courses in the early phase of their profession. These courses were very important for the participants. Learning in formal courses enhanced their understanding of the theory and practices and served as a turning point with respect to their identity as professional community educator.

This course is offered only at one level; designed for professionals with minimum two-year work experience. The city could offer support to experienced *kominkan* professionals to pursue continuing professional development. From 2020, Japan introduced a new curriculum for social education specialists (社会教育士). For the research participants who are certified as social education officers (社会教育主事), it is possible to get social education specialist certification by completing two new subjects in universities offering recognition of prior learning (Hirakawa, 2019). The new subjects are support measures for lifelong learning and management of social education. Both subjects cover skills useful for preparation as *kominkan* directors. This new certificate is not bound to local education bureau's appointment and certified professionals could work in corporations and non-profit organisations as well. This change could open opportunities for the research participants to expand networking with community educators working in diverse settings.

On professional development, training opportunities needs to be diversified responding to the knowledge, expertise of *kominkan* professionals as well as new community issues in Okayama City. As advocated by Hirakawa (2019), an advanced course on community learning at masters level could be considered for many of women I interviewed. The new social education specialist certification

could develop different levels like in the certification system for lifelong education educators in South Korea that recognises professional specialisation in community learning (National Institute of Lifelong Education, 2015). Course development could learn from the experiences in Scotland to define leadership competencies of community educators (Education Scotland, 2017; CLD Standards Council Scotland, 2018).

Equally important to formal training is on-the-job training which was organised by the Central *Kominkan* in Okayama City. Their approach is effective according to what was recommended in a larger-scale national study commissioned by MEXT Japan (Libertas Consulting Co. Ltd., 2014, pp. 152–155). The suggested approach in the report is to train through daily work by placing emphasis on action and reflection and integrate discussions and workshops within training sessions and form teams as leading community education cannot be done by one person. The Okayama Model for promoting education for sustainable development through community learning could be also promoted as a model for on-the-job training or capacity development of *kominkan* professionals in other parts of Japan and other countries. The same study also suggests that leaders or rather mentors should have competencies and characters to 'pull,' 'connect' and 'consolidate'. These are just like what the *kominkan* professionals in Okayama City said, to be able to encourage people to discuss, listen carefully and summarize discussion points to encourage people to take actions.

The second recommendation is to improve the employment conditions and career prospects of *kominkan* professionals. In addition to the rotation policy in place, which was appreciated by research participants, the city government could also consider assignments in the local education bureau or prefectural lifelong learning centre. The city could benefit from the *kominkan* professionals' feminist transformative leadership, in particular their expertise in having good ear to listen to people and skills to work with diverse groups of community people (Makino, 2013b). For *kominkan* professionals in a secondment or transfer, it could be a good leadership training for them to gain insights into the local governance which Chloe and Taylor had gained through the union work and found the insights to be practical for the work of *kominkan*.

The city government should also change the local regulations to create pathways for social education officials to become a full time *kominkan* director with full benefits of a city government employee. The collective feeling by the research participants about the *kominkan* director is that there is a need to improve their selection criteria. It should be requisite for the *kominkan* director to have prior experience with social education and moreover have the attitude and heart to open up and work together with community people. This recommendation is not new and was proposed in the 1967 guideline on *kominkan* (National Kominkan Association, 2009). What would be best is for experienced and motivated *kominkan* officials to be promoted to *kominkan* director. If a director position continues to be viable as a post-retirement work, passionate social education officers may change their jobs as they gain experience. For example, I have met a number of women who were staff of *kominkan* or community learning centres and changed their job to manage their own not-for-profit organisation driven by their leadership for social justice.

Good practices in place in Okayama City which support balanced leadership, such as maternity leave for staff with time-bound contract should be continued and expanded to cover paternity leave and elderly care leave which are provided for full-time employees of local government. In the long run if the economy in Japan were to improve, more *kominkan* professionals should be hired as full-time employees, or as in Sasebo City, offer ten-year contract to professionals who complete the social education specialist certificate (Kanda, 2019).

The third recommendation is to facilitate networking and mutual learning among practitioners of community education. Currently, a few *kominkan* professionals in Okayama City were participating in annually organised national conferences on social education or *kominkan* at their own initiative and cost. If participation in such conferences can be considered as part of work and training subsidy can be provided to cover travel cost, the bottlenecks women working in *kominkan* face will be eased and they will be able to participate more easily. Despite promoting progressive social justice thoughts, the management of these

associations and networks are still mostly men.[9] With regular attendance, more women could nominate themselves as office holders in the national associations like Chloe suggested, and contribute to shaping capacity development of *kominkan* professionals. Within the Okayama Prefecture, more occasions for networking across different providers of community learning and adult education could be fostered. Such occasions will increase the opportunities for women *kominkan* professionals to participate and build networks.

Implementing these three recommendations would strengthen the professional development and leadership of community education and development in Okayama City, especially for the large share of mid-career women working in *kominkan* like the research participants. Moreover, as their leadership is concerned with improving the quality of community learning, leadership training is expected to enrich learning by *kominkan* users and community members. In the next section, I discuss the contributions of this research to knowledge.

7.4 Contribution to knowledge

This research, based on narrative analysis of women working in *kominkan,* sheds light on what they want and need to lead quality community learning in Okayama City. Having a nuanced understanding of the ways women exercise leadership in community learning is a first step in planning training and support services responding to the demands of women community educators and thereby improve the quality of community learning. This dissertation could be a first study enhancing our understanding of the intersection of gender, leadership and community learning in Japan. Moreover, the research will serve as a base for

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[9] For example, the Japan Society for the Study of Adult and Community Education had 10 women and 37 men holding office in 2020/2021.

future studies on feminist transformative leadership in community learning in Japan and other countries.

The literature review did not identify leadership characteristics of women working in *kominkan* in Japan. I conducted keyword search in the [CiNii](https://ci.nii.ac.jp/en/) (Scholarly and Academic Information Navigator https://ci.nii.ac.jp/en/) database and the National Diet Library (https://dl.ndl.go.jp/) database in Japan, using combinations of Japanese terms for *kominkan*, women, gender, and leadership. A few self-reflective papers by *kominkan* professionals on their work written from women's empowerment perspectives (for example, Murata, 2008; Tanaka, 1997) were discussed in Chapter Two and Three. The majority of research on *kominkan* covered the learning and empowerment taking place in *kominkan*. While research on educational activities of *kominkan* in Okayama has been published (Oyasu, 2012, 2014; Didham, Ofei-Manu and Nagareo, 2017), they analysed the learning and development activities from the perspectives of *kominkan* users and community members. In short, the observation by Sugiyama (2012) that the research drawing on women's perspectives on women's leadership in school education in Japan is weak is also confirmed for community learning in Japan.

Moreover, the feminist leadership characteristics from North American contexts (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2010) adapted to *kominkan* in Okayama City can be used as a reference in future studies on leadership in community learning covering other localities in Japan and elsewhere. The majority of *kominkan* professionals in Okayama City are women. There are also other cities in Japan where women are the main workforce in *kominkan*; as discussed in Chapter Two, in these cities *kominkan* professionals have short-term contracts with little career development prospects. In my professional practice, I have visited community-based learning centres for adults mostly in Asian countries. In many of them, from Mongolia, Thailand to Kyrgyzstan, women were working as community educators. Like in Japan, their high devotion to support learning and development in their community is not recognised and is weakened by unstable working conditions. Further studies on their profession could improve the quality of community learning and their working conditions.

Although this study is based on a small sample of women participants, these characteristics offer some insight to effective leadership characteristics in community learning. Feminist transformative leadership is not practiced by women only as the name may imply. Both men and women may practice these leadership in community learning in Japan and other countries.

Grogan and Shakeshaft together with feminist scholars are actively leading an international academic network called *Women Leading in Education Across Continents*. The goals of this network include: 'to describe issues which either are barriers or facilitators regarding the ability of women to attain the highest levels of educational leadership; [and] to bring those issues to life through an analysis of the lives and stories of women within the group' (Women Leading Education Across Continents, 2019, p. 4).

This dissertation could be a contribution to this network by including women *kominkan* professionals' experiences from Japan. Prior research applying their framework in other countries exist (Lyman, Athanasoula-Reppa and Lazaridou, 2009; Fuller, 2013; Naidoo and Perumal, 2014; Torrance *et al.*, 2017) but no papers in Japanese academic databases (https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ and https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/) could be identified.

7.5 Future of *kominkan* in Okayama City

There are new developments in *kominkan* in Okayama City. Since the time I interviewed women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City in December 2016, I have followed their *kominkan* activities through the Facebook pages of *kominkan* and the city government's webpage on lifelong learning (https://www.city.okayama.jp/0000013582.html). For women whom I interviewed about leadership in community learning, I observed that they pursued the issue further and were taking initiatives to inform other people and improve leadership training for *kominkan* professionals. In other words, a Hawthorne effect was observed in research participants. Merrett (2006, p. 143)

explains the Hawthorne effect as an unexpected outcome caused by research participants' awareness of being observed in the research. Chloe, who had given up on participating in national conferences due to family responsibilities, participated and presented about capacity building of *kominkan* staff in a national conference organised by the Japan Society for the Study of *Kominkan* in 2017 (Nagata, 2018). Ms River who coordinated my interview has been invited to several national consultation meetings organised by MEXT in Tokyo (Practical Social Education Research Center, 2019, pp. 344–345). She has been advocating for more robust continuing professional development for social education professionals and more research on *kominkan*. While researchers doing experiments and longitudinal observations are critical of the Hawthorne effect on the research results in their contexts (Oswald, Sherratt and Smith, 2014); in my research, I consider them as positive effects of my research, in particular the conversations I had with the research participants in 2016-2017. It is likely that they have continued to think deeply about leadership and professional development and have found opportunities to reflect and share with other stakeholders.

Another new development I observed from distance is the organisation of the annual festival by *kominkan* in Okayama City. At the time of the interviews, there were individual *kominkan* organising community festival or neighbourhood learning festivals. Regan, Nell, and others talked about a need to have stronger advocacy about the activities and achievements of *kominkan* in the interviews. They are members of the executive committee that organised a city-level kominkan festival in 2018 and 2019. The festival's report is a good documentation of learning and achievements by *kominkan* in Okayama City (Okayama City *Kominkan*, 2019; Okayama Central *Kominkan*, 2018).

In 2019, Okayama City has adopted its new ten-year strategy to promote *kominkan* (Okayama City Education Bureau, 2019). A new development in this strategy is the establishment of a working group attached to the *kominkan* promotion unit in Okayama City Education Bureau. Members of this working group are social education officials working in local *kominkan*s. This is a small welcome step towards my second recommendation on improving leadership training discussed in previous section. Members of this working group will be responsible to monitor the implementation of the *kominkan* strategy and

promote community education at city level by partnering with *37 kominkan*s and other community learning institutions and networks. I can imagine key officials who were involved in the annual *kominkan* festival will build on their experience in planning and organising the festival, exercise their leadership capacities and influence city administrations to improve social education services in the city. The new strategy positions *kominkan* as going beyond the core functions of meet, connect and learn together, towards taking proactive actions to support the future development of the city.

7.6 Reflection on this research to my professional work

Through this doctorate research, I have been able to redefine how I view and understand leadership in community education by women. I would like to apply this understanding to my profession and be more proactive and positive with exercising leadership in my team, my organisation and when I work with education partners in different countries. Conversations with research participants have motivated me to continue supporting people who are leading community education in other countries. More importantly, I would like to put more efforts to mentoring younger women in my workplace.

The research has also provided an opportunity to do an in-depth reading on the developments of social education in Okayama City and Japan. Now I can talk with confidence about my home country's experience --- its success and lessons learnt and introduce appropriate experts from Japan. This will give depth to advice I give to other countries in my professional practice.

To verify and find more about women's leadership in community education, I would like to find partners to carry out an international research on women working in community education. Such research can apply the voice-centred relational method to address local languages spoken in the participating countries and could apply action-research orientation which I think is suitable for this topic, but I could not apply in this research due to logistic arrangements.

At a personal level, I have been positively influenced by my research participants. Time has passed during my doctorate course that I have reached a late-career stage in my professional life. During the next and probably my last decade in professional life, I intend to be a more conscious reflective practitioner and document more about my own thoughts and learning from work and be a proud practitioner of feminist transformative leadership.

Appendix 1 Consent Forms

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

参加同意書

Consent Form

研究のタイトル：「女性公民館職員のリーダーシップ能力形成の課題と展望－岡山市の公民館のケース」

Title of Project: What women want to lead community learning and development: a case of *kominkan* in Okayama City, Japan

研究者：倉田　理加

Name of Researcher: Rika Yorozu-Kurata

1.　　私は本研究に関する参加者の手引きを読み、理解したうえ、内容について質問をする機会も得たことを認めます。（I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.）

2.　　私の参加は自由意思であり、いつでも理由なく参加を撤回することができます。（I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.）

3.　　私はインタビューを録音することに同意します。（I consent to interviews being audio-taped.）

4.　　研究ペーパーおよびほかの文書で使用される私の苗字は仮名であり、研究者がその仮名を決めます。（I agree that a pseudonym family name provided by researcher will be referred in the paper and any publications arising from the research.）

5.　　私は本研究に参加します。（I agree to take part in the above study.）

_____　　　_____　　_____

参加者の名前　Name of Participant　　　日付　Date　サイン　Signature

倉田理加　Rika Yorozu-Kurata

_____　　　_____　　_____

研究者　Researcher　　　　　　　　　　　　Date　　　　　　　　Signature

Appendix 2 Interview questions

In the semi-structured interview, I asked questions around four items below in December 2015.

0 Introduction

I introduced the plain language statement and requested to sign the letter of consent and Email address to contact after the interview, if I have any questions.

1 Brief career history

I kicked off the conversation by asking since when the participant started working at *kominkan,* in which ones they have worked. I also asked if they had any other work experiences.

2 Career development

Main occasions when the interviewee lead learning by *kominkan* users and/or community people in their career.

What changes she observed after acquiring the qualification for social education specialist.

[backup question] are they participating in professional networks?

3 Leadership and women

For Ms X, what does leadership mean in *kominkan*'s work?

Compared with other places, there are more women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City. Are there points where women are better?

Looking at their colleagues, what do they see as women's style of leadership. How about men's style of leadership?

4 Wishes and advice

For more women to work in leadership positions like *kominkan* director, what kind of support or training would be useful for women working in *kominkan*? Any bottlenecks or glass ceilings that need to be overcome?

What advice they have for new and younger staff members?

Appendix 4 Ethics approval

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Application Approved

Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

Staff Research Ethics Application ☐   Postgraduate Student Research Ethics Application ☒

_____

Application Details

Application Number: 400150052

Applicant's Name: Rika Yorozu-Kurata

Project Title: What women want to lead community learning and development: a case of Kominkan in Okayama City, Japan

Application Status: **Approved**

Start Date of Approval: 11/12/2015

End Date of Approval of Research Project: 30/6/2017

_____

Please retain this notification for future reference. If you have any enquiries please email socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk.

Appendix 5 Plain language statement

参加者の手引き

Participant Information Sheet

1　研究のタイトルと概要　（Study title and Researcher Details）

女性公民館職員のリーダーシップ能力形成に関する調査研究

What women want to lead community learning and development: a case of *kominkan* in Okayama City, Japan

参加者の皆様にはにに私の教育博士課程の研究（指導教員：ボニー・スレイド）に参加協力してもいいとの同意をお願いしたく思います。同意をいただくにあたり、研究趣旨を理解するため、下記の研究目的や方法について参照してください。必要であれば他の人に相談したり、私にご質問やご意見をお寄せください。参加するかしないか検討してください。ご一読ありがとうございます。

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of requirement for my Doctorate in Education degree (supervisor: Dr Bonnie Slade). Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

2　研究の目的（**What is the purpose of the study?**）

本研究は岡山市の公民館で働いている女性職員が生涯学習活動をコーディネートしていく上、および将来的にリーダーシップをとるための能力形成の課題と展望を理解することが目的です。博士論文として平成２９年６月中旬に大学に提出する予定です。

The purpose of the study is to understand what women working in *kominkan* in Okayama City want to lead community learning and development. A doctoral thesis is expected to be completed by mid-June 2017.

3　なぜ私が参加者として選ばれたのか　（**Why have I been chosen?**）

研究のため、下記のカテゴリーの参加者が８−１０名必要です。

　　（１）　岡山市の公民館職員

　　（２）　女性、年齢３５歳から５５歳

　　（３）　２０１５年１２月か２０１６年１月上旬にインタビューに参加できる。

I am looking for eight to ten participants who meet the following criteria:

(1) Staff of *kominkan* in Okayama City, Japan

(2) Women in age-range from 35 to 55.

(3) Available for interview in December 2015 or early January 2016.

4　研究への参加協力の自由意思と拒否権　（**Do I have to take part?**）

研究へのご協力くださるかどうかはご自由です。また、いったん参加協力に同意した場合でも、いつでも同意を撤回することができます。その際には何の不利益も受けません。研究への参加協力の可否はどうぞ遠慮なくお知らせください

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Your participation is on voluntary basis to support my research.

5　研究に参加した場合に行われること　（What will happen to me if I take part?）

あなたは個人インタビュー（２０分から４５分）に参加します。公民館職員としてのこれまでの経験および研修や能力開発の機会およびリーダーシップ養成に関する要望などについて質問します。会話は録音され書き起こしされます。都合が悪い部分で録音の一時的な中断は可能です。

その後、私がインタビュー内容を分析した結果をまとめるので、他のインタビュー参加者のみなさんと一緒にその分析結果について確認したうえ、ご意見をいただきたく思います。拘束時間は最大２時間を予定しています。

You will participate in an individual interview with me for around 20 to 45 minutes. I will ask you some questions concerning your experience as a staff of *kominkan* and professional development opportunities that are available for you and your wish for further leadership training opportunities (if any). The conversation will be audio-recorded and transcribed. We can pause the audio-recording at your wish.

After I complete my analysis, I would like to invite you and other interviewees for a group consultation on my findings. The purpose of this consultation is to verify and correct my understanding from my documentation research and findings from thematic analysis of interview data. This shall take about 120 minutes.

6　プライバシー及び個人情報の取扱い　（Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?）

個人情報保護のため、研究ペーパーに記載する仮名を使用します。音声データとプリント資料などは鍵付キャビネットおよびパスワード保護をします。本研究の過程で収集されたあなたの情報は、極秘扱いし、すべての電子記録は 10 年以内に削除されます。

Yes. In my research writing, I will select and use a pseudonym. Audio-recorded data and paper documentations will be kept in locked cabinet / have password protection. All information, which is collected about you during the course of the research, will be strictly confidential and all electronic record will be deleted within ten-year.

不正行為または潜在的な害の証拠が発見されていない場合において情報保護は厳密に保障します。場合によっては大学は関連する法定団体/機関に連絡する義務があります。

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

7　調査結果について　（What will happen to the results of the research study?）

研究者である私はグラスコー大学の教育博士課程の課題として本調査結果をコース・ペーパーとして２０１７年６月に大学に提出します。研究の参加者全員が了承する場合は、岡山市の公民館関係者に研究結果を公表してもらってかまいません。ただし研究参加者が少人数のため、個人情報の保護できない可能性あります。仮に私が本調査結果を大学の研究課題以外に使用する場合は、個人情報の保護には十分な配慮をいたします。

I will submit a thesis to the University in June 2017. If the group of interviewees agree, you may share my findings or the paper with your colleagues. In this case, due to small number of research participant, there are limits to the confidentiality. In case of other uses, I will observe your confidentiality.

8　研究の審査について　（Who has reviewed the study?）

本研究の計画内容は、グラスコー大学社会科学カレッジにおいて倫理審査を受け、承認されています。

The College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has reviewed this research project.

9　研究に関する問い合わせ先　Contact for Further Information

倉田　理加　Rika Yorozu-Kurata

Ｅメール：r.kurata.1@research.gla.ac.uk

研究の過程で問題などありましたら、社会科学カレッジ倫理担当　ムイル・ホウストン（Ｅメール　muir.houston@glasgow.ac.uk）およびボニー・スレイド（Ｅメール　Bonnie.Slade@glasgow.ac.uk）にご連絡ください。

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer Dr Muir Houston, email: **Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk and Dr Bonnie Slade, email:** Bonnie.Slade@glasgow.ac.uk.

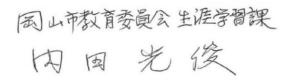# Appendix 6 Approval to use a map

Permission to use a map

On behalf of the Okayama City, I authorise Rika Kurata to the following material within the electronic version of her EdD thesis:

Where are the Kominkan Centers? (map of kominkan)

Page 42 from the Ren Men Men : ESD Practices by Okayama Municipal Kominkan.

Issued by Okayama City in September 2014

I understand that the thesis will be made available within Glasgow University's online theses repository (http://theses.gla.ac.uk).

岡山市教育委員会 生涯学習課

内 田 光 俊

Mitsutoshi Uchida

Education Bureau

Okayama City Municipality

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