

Issues and Perspectives in Moral Education in Japan

Setsuko Buckley

This paper will analyze the psychological and social problems that Japanese students currently face in school and their causes. Furthermore, it will investigate perspectives in moral education which may be most culturally responsive to these issues.

1. Problems

Today Japanese schools are facing serious student problems which are influenced by group pressures and group climate. Such problems include bullying, domestic and school violence, rejection of going to school, misconduct, drug abuse, classroom breakdown, and suicide.¹⁾ The problematic actions of those students are called *kire*, which is translated as *cut off*. J. Nathan describes this as *gakkyū hōkai* or classroom breakdown by stating that “In the mid-1990s, Japanese elementary school teachers noticed an alarming increase in unmanageable children.”²⁾ He continues that “By 1996, anarchy was epidemic in elementary schools and spreading upward into secondary schools.”³⁾ In this case, the problem no longer exists within problematic students, but the whole class must be involved and suffers from the power game.

From a psychological point of view,⁴⁾ in his book, *Depressed Symptom in Adolescence*, Inamura Hiroshi states that these problems tend to be recognized among rather elite students who first have experienced mild depression or maladjustment to their environment. These students tend to express mild nervous disorder, and then they may fall into domestic violence and eventually rejection of going to school. Even after solving these problems with therapy or other means, they may still cause trouble in school with bullying (or being bullied) and violence, and this may result in misconduct, drug abuse, classroom breakdown, and suicide.

J. Traiger views these problematic actions as violations of the most fundamental of educational values, because “the Japanese look to the school as a place to develop morals and cultural sensitivity in their citizens.”⁵⁾ In fact, societies socialize, acculturate, and reproduce themselves to be responsible citizens through education, formal or informal. Indeed, the school is a miniature of the society, it reflects on the society. Thus, linking schooling and moral values is crucial. Furthermore, prior to schooling, home is the minimal unit of society where parents reproduce children to whole persons. Thus, these problematic behaviors and actions are linked to home, school, and community as well as Japanese society as a whole; they include both psychological and social factors. Those problematic children suffer from not only a

psychological defect within them but also are a victim of a modern society's defects.

In fact, the most shocking incident happened in 1997, a fourteen-year-old youth was discovered to have committed a series of violent acts against several elementary school students in Kōbe.⁶⁾ G. A. Arai warns that "In the 1990s in Japan, the child and its development became the site of a newly intensified nexus of social anxiety."⁷⁾ Taking social anxiety as her focal point, Arai examines the production of the image of "the wild child." Her critique of social anxiety is focused on how a regular child could be changed into a wild one through the process of Japanese modernity. By comparing the Japanese child in the 1970s (who grew up during a period of economic success) to those in the 1990s (who went through recession after Japan's bubble economy), she argues that the psychological and social development of a child in the 1970s is different from that in the 1990s. Her nation-culture analysis links the uniqueness of the Japanese culture, especially the Japanese psyche, to Japan's modernity. This will be further discussed in the next section.

2. Causes of the Problems

Nathan, Inamura, Traiger, and Arai stated the problems from different points of view from which four major causes can be identified: 1) increase of one generational nuclear families, 2) cramming education system, 3) education as hierarchy, and 4) gap between Japanese traditional cultural values and Japan's modernity.

2.1. Increasing Nuclear Family

Today the majority of the Japanese families are nuclear units, maintaining the concept of *ie* (family or house). This concept means that family members harmonize and cooperate with each other and identify themselves as *uchi* (in-group) as opposed to the rest of society or *soto* (out-group). White (1987) describes that "the distinction of *uchi* and *soto* is an important part of the socialization of a child."⁸⁾ Traditionally, Japanese parents raised their children by conveying their knowledge, values, and moral behaviors. The father tended to act as the authority figure, especially on decision-making for the child. At home, the mother tended to care for and love the child, thus providing a great deal of emotional support. In addition, as Doi Takeo⁹⁾ states the child tends to be dependent or *amae* defined as the desire to be passively loved or the expression of the wish to be dependent, to be taken care of unconditionally) on the mother. Consequently, the relationship between mother and child is continued throughout a lifetime and the mother is always identified as one of emotional support or a giving agent. Under the high competition and mental pressure in Japanese education, the support system at home has been very important.

However, due to an increase in nuclear families, the parents' role in the Japanese family structure has been changing. The father's authority, especially on decision-making for a child's future at home, is declining and mother's caring role tends to be seen more as over protection and/or over interference. Consequently, the mother's support as the "education mother" tends to put more cognitive pressure to the child. Also, both parents tend to be more materialistic. This threatens the old moral structure and the parent's role model with it. Today, children tend to enjoy more Western cultural values as opposed to Japanese traditional values. This further

threatens the traditional moral structure. In addition, this cultural gap is intergenerational. Also, more and more Japanese youth go overseas in their early years because of their father's business and many of them bring back Western cultural values as their own. These children and Japanese students, especially teenagers, no longer value the rigid *ie*-type structure; they tend to pursue a more Western view which is seen as more self-centered. Thus, they pursue their own personal interests and their own academic success in school. This may cause social exclusiveness. Because of all of the above, children are tending to lose their direction towards their future and becoming more materialistic. This is threatening the moral construct of Japanese society.

2.2. Cramming Education System

Okano and Tsuchiya state that "A primary mission of Japanese education today is to develop a well-balanced mind, body, and morale and to produce self-reliant whole persons who effectively function in the peaceful nation and global society."¹⁰ Thus, in order to achieve academic excellence, students need to train themselves both morally and physically. The ideal is that, once these three components; intellectual, moral, and physical development, have become well-balanced, this will result in becoming "the whole person." This will then enable these students to set goals and persistently follow through.

However, the balance of these three components differs at the primary and secondary levels. In primary education, students learn to become "the whole person" by both acquisition of knowledge and social interaction. This type of cognitive and affective learning can be described as intimacy knowledge based on the intimacy model structure.¹¹ However, students tend to become highly cognitive learners at the secondary level, as T. Kasulis describes it; this fits the "integrity model"¹² as opposed to "intimacy model."¹³ E. Fukuzawa also describes the relationship between learning and teaching as the existence of the two worlds. "One labeled 'holistic' which emphasizes personal development and an experimental approach to learning. Other is a text-centered lecture format geared to transmitting information necessary for university entrance exams."¹⁴ Fukuzawa considers middle schools as a transition between the two worlds. Both Kasulis and Fukuzawa imply that Japanese children become more integrative or cognitive learners who separate themselves from the knowledge acquired as they become older.

Furthermore, research has shown that the cognitive style of Japanese children is considered highly field-independent in which they tend to learn the material without being affected by others or environments surrounding them.¹⁵ It is noted that Japanese children tend to be individualized in learning, that is, they tend to separate their ego from others. This tendency is derived from the entrance examination system in which student cognitive knowledge is tested and assessed in order to select and differentiate students. This then impacts on their possibilities of attaining higher education and their future career path.

Student cognitive learning is strongly related to competition. Students are forced to do hard work to gain high test scores and grades to enter a good university. This kind of highly cognitive learning may start earlier than the secondary level. Many primary

students attend a *juku* (a cram school held after hours that concentrates on cognitive learning), on average starting in the fourth grade. Japanese schools emphasize memorization and accuracy, and *juku* reinforces this approach. Thus, student motivation is usually extrinsic, that is the rewards for effort and persistence to win when going through the *examination hell* are defined outside the student by society. There is little intrinsic motivation or intimacy observed. Students tend to be isolated due to high competition and are forced to strengthen their ego. This means that there is both an enemy within to be subdued and an enemy without (their peers) to be defeated in order to win. This reflects on principles of *bushidō* (the way of the warrior). Under these stressful conditions and isolation, emotional and social problems such as bullying and suicides tend to occur in Japanese schools even when children are young. Furthermore, isolation from others fostered by this system may cause a delay of social development. Without recognizing the existence of others and the relationship with others, children cannot view the whole of reality and as a result, they cannot completely actualize themselves. Traiger states that “The social pressure to succeed may account for Japan’s high suicide rate—45% higher than America’s.”¹⁶⁾

The cramming system of education, especially the entrance examination hell, tends to emphasize mind only and to overlook moral development of students. Today many students do not seem to learn moral values in school; as a result, there is a lack of morals among students. Furthermore, students do not have clarity of their relationship to society; they do not know how to relate their lives to their surroundings or how to deal with the dynamics of the surrounding world. They tend to lose the process of valuing in areas such as choosing, prizing, and behaving, and this results in making them lose direction towards their future.

2.3. Education as Hierarchy

The Japanese education system is highly top-down and bureaucratic. The transmission of knowledge is based on the centralized curriculum and guidelines by the Japanese Government. D. M. Berman states that “The university entrance examination sets the education throughout the country, the high school entrance exam, as the primary education, serves to stratify the student population into an educational hierarchy throughout the prefecture.”¹⁷⁾ This describes the tracking system and the legitimating of knowledge which reflects the centralized control of education.

The current classrooms follow that social hierarchy. The teacher, who has been trained as a top authority figure in that system, tries to control students in the classroom. Especially, as the older the students become, the more authoritarian the teacher becomes, because at the secondary level, teachers need to transmit their specific discipline knowledge to the students in a highly text-oriented, teacher-centered teaching style. However, another role of the teacher that of homeroom teacher is to provide students with academic and life guidance based on his or her own professional and personal experience. This helps students and the teacher develop mutual trust and understanding with each other. This also builds connectedness to classroom as *ie* members.

The development of peer relationships is encouraged in the Japanese traditional *ie*-

type structure in the classroom. Each classroom has a homeroom teacher and around 40 students. Inside a classroom there are several *han* (a small group) which consists of five or six members. This is a very hierarchical system with the teacher as the top authority figure. In addition, each classroom has a student leader (male) and a sub leader (female), and each *han* group has also a leader and a sub leader. This structure is highly top-down, yet contains a community-oriented approach so that every student feels a sense of belonging, caring, and harmony. In each classroom time is spent on a daily basis for integrating students together as a homeroom and/or through other school activities. Building this *ie*-type structure is recognized more at the primary level through the lower secondary level. From this structure developed the idea of *senpai* (senior) and *kōhai* (junior) roles for students or teachers in their relationships in the extracurricular activities. This is especially true in sports clubs, as well as among all teachers and students. Personal development is to be enhanced within the structure as a miniature of Japanese society. However, sometimes the distortion of hierarchical relationships causes *ijime* (bullying) which is becoming a very serious problem in Japanese schools.

Student attitudes and behaviors have been changing due to rapid changes in Japanese society. Japanese youth are becoming more liberal, but they tend to be more self-centered and not do develop their morale and self discipline. Especially those who have experienced symptoms of depression and violence may be opposed to the highly hierarchical and bureaucratic teacher and they may cause trouble in their classrooms. Consequently, there is a clash between the traditional teacher's role and these troubled students. This is a serious problem which can result in *gakkyū hōkai*.

2.4. Japanese Cultural Values vs. Japan's Modernity

Historically Japanese placed great emphasis on sharing and cooperation, which is identified as their traditional group-oriented cultural values or collectivism. Thus, child moral development has been focused on traditional cultural behavior and human relationships, which are highly valued in the Japanese education system. Although developing moral constructs is an ongoing process, it is emphasized at the primary level of education. However, as students progress to upper levels they are forced to become more highly individualized in the classroom as they work hard work to individually attain goals through competition. At the upper levels student cognitive learning is especially geared toward academic excellence, especially in math, science, and literacy, and student learning is an individual pursuit, not a group activity.

Yet, it is felt that the concept of the whole child still is carried out in the homeroom because of teaching moral education. In addition, through school extra-curricular activities and social interactions, the student's whole self is being nurtured. Thus, the cognitive side of education is felt to be assisted by affective learning activities producing a moral support system. This method has aided Japan's rapid economic growth since the post-war period until the 1990s. Japanese education produced highly literate and numerically skilled high school and college graduates as the frontline workforce and this has increased Japan's high productivity. In this sense, competition and individualized learning have been very successful. This was also assisted by

coeducation for equal educational opportunities and centralized uniformed curriculum. W. O. Lee points out that up to 1990s “priority in national interests is put forward to the individual welfare for the citizens, which geared toward Japan’s economic success.”¹⁸⁾ In fact, because of that, the majority of Japanese have enjoyed the progress of an ever increasing quality of life up to the 1990s.

Japan is still considered as a collective-oriented society in which mutual assistance and community life are highly valued. However, Asano Makoto points out that Japan’s economic success has brought more influence by Japanese corporations on governmental education policy, because “corporate culture is characterized by ability-based hierarchical competitiveness and assimilation or exclusion of heterogeneity.”¹⁹⁾ Asano furthermore argues that “students are included in this corporate culture in which they are expected to conform to group norms and standards, while the need of the individual are suppressed. Relationships based on personal rights and responsibilities are not permitted. Students had to adhere to the over-strict rules, and were not allowed to participate in decision making.”²⁰⁾

However, the economic shift after the bubble economy in the 1980s was replaced by recession in the 1990s caused a clash of authority and collectivism in Japanese corporations. Lee states that “The ideal of the good life had changed considerably in Japan. This seems to indicate a shift away from values of altruistic empathy, self-sacrifice, and asceticism, and toward individual-centered, liberated, joyful altruism.”²¹⁾ This means that Japanese traditional collectivism no longer matches Japan’s changing society or the new cultural values of Japanese youth. Consequently, home, school, and society are no longer powerful enough to control and educate Japanese youth with its hierarchical authority.

In addition, information technology has caused Japanese youth to be isolated from others and inculcated them with materialism. As a result, a child’s mind and his/her social experience became more self-centered and exclusive which is defined by researchers as becoming “capsulated.” Those children who failed academically and/or emotionally have difficulties in connecting with others and become troublemakers. Some children who excelled in their cognitive learning, but failed in their socialization also have psychological and social problems. A. Miller²²⁾ identifies those as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Their capsulated condition continues on to their later lives as a loss of self. Their recognition of the loss of self appears as this disorder. A lack of moral values and a lack of clarity of values cause them to isolate themselves from others, and also have a loss of direction towards the future. This means they cannot actualize themselves in the society as the individuals.

3. Issues of Moral Education in Japan

So, the critical issues of education in the rapidly changing society of Japan should be addressed. Furthermore, a strong linkage between education and moral values should be emphasized. What should teachers learn in the relationship between values and teaching and how should they work with values in the classroom in order to enhance student moral development, personal growth, and other indicators of school performance? The first step to answering those questions is to seek out a history of moral education and its policy changes according to the education reforms and

curriculum changes performed by the Ministry of Education.

3.1. History of Moral Education in Japan

The traditional main subject, *Shūshin* (self-discipline), had been developed since the Meiji Restoration and throughout WWII, with an emphasis on filial piety, patriotism, and loyalty to Japan under the strict political control of the Japanese State. It was taught as moral education in the elementary school curriculum. However, due to the defeat of WWII, Japan was forced by the U.S. Government to change its nation to embrace modernization and rationalism. This resulted in the abolishment of *Shūshin*, Japanese history, and Japanese geography which reflected the ideas of Japanese nationalism and militarism.

Furthermore, *Kōmin Ka* (Civics) was temporarily established as a criticism of *Shūshin*. This new subject was aimed at concretely guiding moral values in student's daily life, teaching respect for spontaneity, self-initiative, individuality, and its development, and cultivating rationalism. The new Japanese Constitution in 1946 and Education Fundamental Law in 1947 supported this democratic movement.

Then, in 1947 *Kōmin Ka* was expanded and included under the new means of *Shakai Ka* (Social Studies), and the new 6-3-3 education system was established. This new subject sought to enable students to understand their civic lives and to enhance their attitudes and abilities for developing their social experience. Consequently *Shakai Ka* became the core for all educational activities in Japan. In 1951 the curriculum guidelines indicates that the ideas of *Kōmin Ka* as moral education is not only part of education, but should permeate all parts of education. Thus, the ideas of *Kōmin Ka* and all encompassing *Shakai Ka* expanded into all subject areas.

In 1953 in the improvement of *Shakai Ka* was sought to introduce democratic moral education based on respect for basic human rights. This change further heightened the role of social studies and used it as a tool for understanding civic life.

Dōtoku (Moral Education) was then enacted in Japan in 1958 and it was taught for one hour a week in elementary and junior high schools. Tokunaga and his group²³⁾ account for this addition, stating two directions of *Dōtoku* in post war education: Creative-oriented moral education vs. social order type of moral education. They argue that the former is seen in the principles of *Shakai Ka* in which a new order is pursued by the use of problem-solving approach in a changing society, while the latter is seen as the maintenance of social order in a rather stable society. *Dōtoku* enacted in 1958 was the total replacement of the pre-war *Shūshin*; it was based on the Fundamental Education Law under the Japanese Constitution enacted in 1947. It was aimed at cultivating virtues such as a respect for basic human rights and a democratic mind with an emphasis on self-discipline and a humanistic approach. It is identified as a social order type of moral education, because it articulated the content of moral themes as the new social order under the moral guidelines.

However, there was a critique at that time that moral education did not permeate all subject areas and that it was not different from other subjects that were strictly regulated by the national curriculum guidelines. Also, two schools of thought were sought in moral education: one is moral education as one organic side of entire education activities; and the other is moral education which is different from entire

school education activities.

3.1.1. 1966 Central School Commission Report

In 1966, the Central School Commission released a report titled, *Kitaisareru Ningenzō* (The Expected Image of Human Being). This means what the ideal human being should be like. During that time Japan's economy had been growing and thus the Japanese Government pushed a project of diversification of human capabilities to meet the needs for this growth. The report emphasized the internalization of patriotism and loyalty to Japan through self awareness. In other words, this emphasized the need of the individuals to make themselves useful to society. Thus, by using one's own abilities the nation would prosper and the individual would feel fulfilled. Instead of strict political control by the Japanese State, this report made the development of capable individual citizens as the purpose of education. Based on this report, the curricula in public education were revised, starting from 1968 through 1970 in which the importance of moral education was emphasized. After that, the revisions of the curriculum were periodically made with more emphasis on moral education.

However, it should be noted that the report still showed the importance of the existence of the Emperor as a symbol for the nation, but not a political one. Since WWII, Japanese education has been utilizing a uniformed curriculum, based on collectivism. This approach continued the practice in which moral education and education as a whole were used for Japan's national interest. This helped the economic success of Japan as well as maintained respect for the Emperor. This tendency implies that the revised policy of moral education went backward to that of *Shūshin* represented by nationalism. This was also the conservative reaction to the previous ideas reflected in Education Fundamental Law and Japanese Constitution which emphasized on equality and individual human rights.

All of this led to a period of confusion of moral values and instability with "education at risk." Student strikes and demonstrations occurred in the mid-1970s, this showed strong undercurrents in the education system against a return to the nationalism of the past. Furthermore, during that time students started failing in schools academically and socially, which is translated as *Ochikobore* or falling out and spilling. This was mainly caused by the Japanese rigid education system, especially entrance examination which may dehumanize students through the rigidity of learning. This resulted in bullying, drugs, school violence, and suicide. Thus, this has proven that moral education did not permeate schooling.

3.1.2. 1984 Temporary School Commission Report

Due to "education at risk" in Japan in 1984, the Temporary School Commission proposed to the Ministry of Education a policy of reforming moral education with an emphasis on respect for individuality, self discipline, and self responsibility. This proposal aimed at two improvements. Those were an emphasis on essential learning necessary for being a Japanese citizen and on respect for Japanese culture and tradition. This policy change was positive; it emphasized critical thinking and individual questioning of larger social issues, instead of strict control.

In 1984 through 1987 the traditional link among mind, morals, and body was changed. It became morals, mind, and body as stated by the Temporary Educational Commission. As a result, moral education became more important. During that time, a psychological approach was adopted at home. This means that a focus of the education policy was shifted from a social group approach to a more individualistic approach. This was reflected in abolishing “Social Studies” (*Shakai Ka*) and adopting two new things, “Life Science” (*Seikatsu Ka*), which combined *Shakai Ka* with science, in elementary school. Second, “Social Studies” was replaced by “Civics,” “Geography,” and “History” independently. Further, it should be noted that “Japanese History” was no longer a required subject; instead, “World History” became required. In addition, moral education became more important than before in Japan. This reflected the number of student social problems which may have been derived from the strict political control by the Japanese Government.

The abolition of “Social Studies” meant a separation of politics and education. Prior to the education reform in 1984, objectives and content of high school “Social Studies” included more economic and political perspectives instituted by the Japanese Government and which were derived from Capitalism combined with Nationalism. The revision of the high school curriculum seems significant in a sense that the development of a whole person as a Japanese citizen should not be connected with a political agency, but should rather be connected with basic moral values of freedom, respect, caring, and responsibility and with a human nature. Also the abolition of “Social Studies” in elementary schools means upon entry into school there is a need for understanding the relationship between human nature in both natural and social environments. These curriculum changes imply that there was a shift from Japan’s nationalistic and capitalistic perspectives of education to a more democratic and humanistic mind of education. Thus, schooling and moral values became more significant with the goal to enhance civic rights and to improve the quality of human life.

3.1.3. Further Changes in the 1990s

In the 1990’s, due to the globalization and bubble economy’s collapse, the education policy in Japan was forced to change again. In 1996, education reform was sought to empower children for living a more balanced life and to provide them with more spare time. The purpose of this reform was to change the cramming system of education, which only emphasizes the mind, into a more student-oriented education which emphasizes more creativity, and a self-taught, and self-learning approach. Thus, “An Education Reform Program” planned by the Ministry of Education in 1997, was aimed at fulfillment of a child’s heart (*Kokoro*). The term, “*Kokoro*” has many meanings in Japanese. However, in this case, “*Kokoro*” may be translated as “heart” which contains courage, ethics, and moral values needed to empower the self and to improve the quality of human life.

However, the ideas of “An Education Reform Program” took a top-down approach, it did not reflect the voice of the majority of Japanese citizens. Thus, further measures were needed for the real education reform.

3.1.4. National Council for Education Reform in 2000

In 2000, the Ministry of Education announced “*Kyōiku Kaikaku Kokumin Kaigi*” (National Council for Education Reform) which contains three missions of education toward the twenty first century. Those were 1) a respect for Japanese tradition and culture, 2) self awareness as a Japanese citizen, and 3) contribution to developing children along with self identity. This was seen as a new thought about education which contains more humanistic and global perspectives and it influenced the policy of moral education.

In order to put the program of education reform into practice, the Ministry of Education and Science distributed “*Kokoro No Nōto*” (Notebook of Heart) to all the elementary and junior high school children (1.1 million) throughout the nation in 2002, at a cost of 7.3 million dollars. This notebook has four levels: G1–2, G3–4, G5–6, and junior high school students. Each text contains four common themes: 1) self development, self help efforts, and self control, 2) courtesy, caring, and communication, 3) awe of life and sensitivity, and 4) social rules and social order. The content of “*Kokoro No Nōto*” seems to reflect a new type of “expected human being” in which children are expected to cultivate themselves by cooperating with others, loving the country and their ancestors, and following social order. There are three characteristics of “*Kokoro No Nōto*”: 1) self learning, 2) a record of childhood emotional development, and 3) a spiritual bridge between school or community and home. This “*Kokoro No Nōto*” approach seems to highly reflect the current approach to moral education. In a sense, “*Dōtoku*” tends to be encapsulated in “*Kokoro No Nōto*.”

3.2. Current Issues

However, “*Kokoro No Nōto*” does not seem to be functioning well under the current moral education regime. Three issues may still need to be addressed. Those are 1) emphasis on the maintenance of social order, 2) its psychological approach focused on only feelings, but not on critical thinking or problem-solving, 3) no actual human relationships with peers.

Ozawa Makiko²⁴⁾ points out that current moral education in Japan is based on the maintenance of social order by strict administration and on the psychological approach by the use of school counseling which was adopted in 1998. He further states that this top-down approach, combining hardware with software to try to acquaint children to their expected human figures, is not working well, because there is no self-awareness or creativity. As a result, children tend to be rigidly molded. As Miller identifies, this may be typified as an “Education of the Darkness” (*Yami Kyōiku*),²⁵⁾ in which children cannot see reality or themselves, instead they tend to find a false self, and consequently they cannot be released due to the illusion of the self discipline and education. Thus, a hard type of moral education as a tool for the maintenance of social order does not work well in current Japanese schools, because, strict social order in education as hierarchy may cause bullying and classroom breakdown.

However, a soft type of moral education such as a counseling approach only focuses on one’s feelings; it does not cure a student’s deeply painful mind. Those children who are troubled at school do not have connection to others; their

psychological problems cannot be solved within themselves. Here social defects can be seen as hindering factors of moral and social development. Those are a lack of time for play, a lack of space to play, and a lack of interaction with friends. Isolation from others may cause a delay of social development. Without recognizing the existence of others and the relationship with others, children cannot view the whole of reality and as a result, they cannot completely actualize themselves.

4. Culturally Responsive Moral Education

4.1. Needs for Empowering Children and Teachers and Their Relationships

Today Japanese youth are losing direct moral and social experience, due to the increasing nuclear family, “cramming” system of education, education as hierarchy, and gap between Japanese traditional cultural values and Japan’s modernity. This implies that they cannot either find reality or themselves. Thus, moral education needs to include student social development to avoid isolation from the reality. Furthermore, there is a need for empowering children and teachers and their relationships. Three perspectives can be sought: 1) emphasis on student direct moral and social experience, 2) emphasis on care and responsibility in collectivism, and 3) fusion of Japanese cultural values and democracy.

4.1.1. Student Direct Moral and Social Experience

First, moral education should be focused on more direct moral and social experience, linking educational experience with people and the community. The acquisition of theoretical knowledge through readings is not enough to understand reality. Understanding and helping others through direct interactions with one another promotes cognitive, social, and moral development of the child. L. S. Vygotsky recognizes the reciprocal relationship among language, culture, and thought. He states that “Thought development is determined by language and the socio-cultural experience of the child. The development of logic is affected by a person’s socialized speech, and intellectual growth is contingent on the mastery of social means of thought, or language.”²⁶⁾ Children are developing moral values along with their socialization process. Thus, his ideas, in which the mind is linked with social development, may account for the importance of child direct learning experience through socialization.

4.1.2. Care and Responsibility in Collectivism

Secondly, emphasis on Japanese collectivism should remain. M. White states that “Moral education is to be aware of one’s responsibility as Japanese.”²⁷⁾ Japanese place emphasis on sharing and cooperation, which is identified as traditional group-oriented cultural values. This collectivism still is an important part of moral education. Thus, student moral development should be focused on traditional behavior and human relationships, which are highly valued in Japanese education system. She identifies “the essence of moral education as diligence, endurance, ability to decide to do the hard thing, wholehearted dedication, and cooperativeness.”²⁸⁾ This seems to be the base of Japanese common sense and moral construct which determines Japanese cultural identity.

D. Kerr²⁹⁾ also seeks morality of care and responsibility, as opposed to the theory of morality of justice and reasoning established by L. Kohlberg.³⁰⁾ His perspective may give a direction to moral education in Japan. This inclusiveness of the self and others will help develop mutual respect and care for one another and it will result in taking responsibilities for one's thought and action.

4.1.3. Fusion of Japanese Cultural Values and Democracy

However, in order to empower children, direct moral and social experience and caring and responsibility within collectivism is not enough. Morals should be taught along with democracy. Today's social defects such as materialism cause a loss of the self. Although "*Kokoro No Nōto*" was distributed to children to restore true self, a counseling packet for "*kokoro*" at school is being sold as commodity. This means that children's mind are still trapped and closed due to materialism.

Thus, morals should be taught to make children more open-minded, creative, and critical of the current situation. This approach would shift an "education of darkness" to an "education of enlightenment" (*Hikari No Kyōiku*)³¹⁾ as Miller described.

Kerr³²⁾ defines "the democratic psyche, formed in human relationships, as both receptive of the other and self-expressive." W. Parker sees the importance of moral education in educating democratic citizens. He further states that "Toward the goal of cultivating democratic citizens, egalitarian and caring relations are prescribed over authoritarian and formalistic relations; classroom and school climates that are open to the free expression of opinions and controversy are prescribed over climates that encourage conformity and agreement, and student engagement in school and classroom governance is advocated."³³⁾ This implies a direction for Japanese moral education. Japanese youth need to learn more political socialization emphasized with care and justice, as Kohlberg calls it "just community."³⁴⁾

Furthermore, H. A. Giroux states that "The growing alienation and breakdown of public life, reinforced by the dominant ideologies of individualism, consumerism, and scientific rationality, has profoundly exacerbated a qualitative decline in the language and social practices of schooling, community, and family life."³⁵⁾ His point of view is found from Western or American individualism, which is different from Japanese traditional collectivism. However, he implies that revitalizing the moral discourse in schools would educate students to be critical and active democratic citizens. This approach may enhance students to be well-balanced whole persons.

5. Summary

Japanese education has a duality, that is, authoritarian and supportive, cognitive and affective. These two components have been well-harmonized in Japanese schools, at least, up to the 1990s. The disequilibrium since 1990s can be caused by highly cognitive learning, lack of social inclusiveness, and lack of moral construct and support. Japan needs both integrity and intimacy in Japanese education; both Western individualism and Japanese collectivism.

Moral education should not be based on merely the maintenance of social order. It should include both caring and justice based on collectivism and democracy. There is a need for empowering students and teachers and their relationships, not by using

authority, but by developing a just community in school through moral discourse. This inclusiveness of self and others with positive moral discourse will help develop mutual respect and care for one another and it will result in taking responsibility for one's thoughts and actions. This will result in honoring human dignity and rights. Finally, this humanistic approach to moral education may be geared towards "virtue," that is, a pursuit to guarantee the self-existence of an individual or group, as stated by Aristotle.

Endnotes

- 1) See Shibata Yoshimatsu, *Dōtoku No Shidō* (Tokyo: Gakubunsha, 2002), and Tokunaga Masanao, Tsutsumi Masahumi, Miyajima Hidemitsu, Hayashi Yasunari, and Sakakibara Shiho, *Dōtoku Kyōiku Ron* (Kyoto: Nakanishi Shuppan, 2003).
- 2) Nathan, J., *Japan Unbound: A Volatile Nation's Quest for Pride and Purpose* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 28.
- 3) *Ibid.*, 29.
- 4) Inamura Hiroshi, *Shishunki Zassetsu Shōkōgun (Depressed Symptom in Adolescence)* (Tokyo: Shinyōsha, 1983).
- 5) Traiger, J., "Lessons from the Japanese: Adapt Don't Adopt," *Education* 116 (Spring, 1996), 442.
- 6) The Kobe serial killing and wounding of children incident in 1997 was announced by the press in Japan. A 14-year-old boy committed a series of violent acts against several elementary school children.
- 7) Arai, G. A., "The 'Wild Child' of 1990s Japan," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99.4 (Fall, 2000), 841.
- 8) White, M., *Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 26.
- 9) Doi Takeo, *The Anatomy of Dependence* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1973).
- 10) Okano, T. & Tsuchiya, M., *Education in Contemporary Japan: Inequality and Diversity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 11) Kasulis, T., *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* (HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2002). He identifies two kinds of orientation—intimacy and integrity—that determine how we think about relations among people and things.
- 12) Integrity model was introduced, as opposite to Intimacy Model by Kasulis, T., *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* (HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2002). This model emphasizes knowledge based on empirical observation and logical reasoning, both of which can be verified by anyone else, at least, theoretically.
- 13) Intimacy model, as opposite to integrity model, was also introduced by Kasulis, T., *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* (HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2002). Intimacy is objective, but personal rather than public. Intimacy model emphasizes intimate knowledge which has an affective dimension.
- 14) Fukuzawa, E., "The Path to Adulthood According to Japanese Middle Schools," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 20.1 (1994), 61–86.
- 15) Buckley, S., *A Study of Field-Independent/Field-Dependent Cognitive Styles of Japanese Students and Correlations with Their Academic Achievement in Two American High School* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 402 749, 1992).
- 16) Traiger, J., "Lessons from the Japanese: Adapt Don't Adopt," *Education* 116 (Spring, 1996), 442.
- 17) Berman, D. M., "A Case Study of the High School Entrance Examination in Chiba Prefecture, Japan," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 18.4 (Fall, 1990), 387–404.
- 18) Lee, W. O., *Social Change and Educational Problems in Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong* (Hampshire, England.: Macmillan Academic & Professional Ltd., 1991).
- 19) Asano Makoto, "School Reform, Human Rights, and Global Education," *Theory Into Practice* 39.2, (2000).
- 20) Lee W. O., *Social Change and Educational Problems in Japan, Singapore And Hong Kong* (Hampshire, England: Macmillan Academic & Professional Ltd., 1991).
- 21) *Ibid.*

- 22) Miller, A., *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence: The Liberating Experiences of Facing Painful Truth*, Translation by S. Worrall; with a new afterword by the author: Abbruch der Schweigemauer, (1998).
- 23) Tokunaga Masanao, Tsutsumi Masahumi, Miyajima Hidemitsu, Hayashi Yasunari, and Sakakibara Shiho, *Dōtoku Kyōiku Ron* (Kyoto: Nakanish Shuppan, 2003).
- 24) Ozawa Makiko & Hasegawa Takashi, *Kokoro No Nōto o Yomitoku (Decoding Notebook of Heart)* (Tokyo: Kamogawa Shuppan, 2003).
- 25) Education of the Darkness was introduced, as opposite to Education of Enlightenment, by Miller, A., *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence: The Liberating Experiences of Facing Painful Truth*, Translation by S. Worrall; with a new afterword by the author: Abbruch der Schweigemauer, (1998).
- 26) Vigotsky, L. S., *Thought and Language* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962), 51.
- 27) White, M., *Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children* (New York: Free Press, 1987).
- 28) Ibid.
- 29) Kerr, D., "Toward a Democratic Rhetoric of Schooling," in J. I. Goodlad & T. J. McMannon edits., *The Public Purpose of Education and Schooling* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 73–83.
- 30) Kohlberg, L. "Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive Developmental Approach to Socialization," in D. A. Gosling, edit., *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969).
- 31) Education of Enlightenment, as opposite to Education of the Darkness, by Miller, A., *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence: The Liberating Experiences of Facing Painful Truth*, Translation by S. Worrall; with a new afterword by the author: Abbruch der Schweigemauer, (1998).
- 32) Kerr, D., "Toward a Democratic Rhetoric of Schooling," in J. I. Goodlad & T. J. McMannon edits., *The Public Purpose of Education and Schooling* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 81.
- 33) Parker, W., "Educating Democratic Citizens: A Broad View," *Theory Into Practice* 40.1 (Winter, 2001), 10.
- 34) Power, F. C., Higgins, A., & Kohlberg, L., *Lawrence Kohlberg's Approach to Moral Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
- 35) Giroux, H. A., "Schooling and the Politics of Ethics: Beyond Liberal and Conservative Discourses," *Journal of Education* 169.2 (1987), 12.