

Periodical Articles on Education

An Overview

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JAPANESE SOCIETY is known for its enthusiastic embrace of the value of education, particularly for its children and youth. It is a well-known fact that one of the contributions Christianity has made to Japanese society in the past 120 years lies precisely in this area. Emphases on international mindedness, individual creativity, the sacred worth of the individual, and the importance of a critical spirit, to cite only a few, were introduced to the Japanese people for the first time by enthusiastic and dedicated missionaries in the latter part of the nineteenth century. One hastens to add that the scope of Christian influence on education has not been confined to the so-called "Christian" schools. It has spread to secular institutions of learning, both government-sponsored and private. Consequently, some of the visions upheld by Christian schools are now being shared by other Japanese educators as the basic aims of education. However, those visions have yet to be realized fully. Schools in general, whether government-sponsored or private, secular or Christian, are facing major problems, such as regimentation, conformity, and ethnocentrism. These issues are addressed in several recent magazine articles, all of which were written by professional educators who are struggling to improve the quality of education in the daily classroom situation.

NEED FOR A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The first seven articles mentioned here appeared in *Kyōiku* (Education), a liberal

monthly magazine published for secular teachers at all levels. Horio Teruhisa, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, maintains that today's education must be firmly rooted in a global spirit. According to his article, "Issues of education in the age of globalization" (January 1994), Japanese educators must grapple with globalization with utmost seriousness. Take ecology, for example. Such ecological problems as earth warming, pollution, and contamination of drinking water know no national, cultural, or ethnic boundaries. Ultimately, all the peoples of the world depend on nature for their physical existence. In this period of history, a nuclear war not only would destroy the warring nations themselves but also could wipe the entire human race off the face of the earth. We ignore at our own peril the plain fact that "the world is one." To nurture and develop a global spirit in the mind of students, then, is an awesome responsibility to be borne by all educators, says Horio. Put concretely, education based upon competition must be supplanted with a spirit of solidarity. The ethnocentrism that has hampered Japanese education for so many generations must be replaced by a universal spirit. Horio asserts that this Japanese propensity for exclusivism and provinciality must be overcome, first of all, in the area of education.

Sanuki Hiroshi of Hōsei University concurs with Horio's assessment, particularly on the need for global education in Japan. He develops this thesis in his "Japan's Consti-

tution and education" (September 1992). Sanuki finds the most striking feature of Japan's Constitution to be its clear affirmation of and reverence for fundamental human rights. He specifically has in mind the following sections of the Constitution: "These fundamental human rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution shall be conferred upon the people of this and future generations as eternal and inviolate rights" (Article 11). "All the people shall be respected as individuals. Their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness shall... be the supreme consideration in legislation and in other governmental affairs" (Article 13). The Constitution also guarantees freedom from involuntary servitude (Article 18), freedom of religion (Article 20), academic freedom (Article 23), freedom from unlawful arrest (Article 34), suffrage (Article 15), freedom of assembly and association (Article 21), and "the right of workers to organize and to bargain and act collectively" (Article 28). Sanuki declares that such an affirmation of fundamental human rights by the Constitution has important implications for the education of children in today's Japan. Children are infinitely precious and unique individuals. Education, therefore, must help them affirm their unique individuality so that they may become mature persons for whom respect for human rights is of primal importance. With this basic assumption, says Sanuki, the educator must endeavor to instill in children an intellectual curiosity and to deepen their global worldview. Giving them knowledge is an essential part of education, but it becomes productive only when those conditions are met.

Nishikawa Jun of Waseda University seeks to relate this kind of global education to present-day Japan in its relationship with other Asian nations. This is the basic theme of his "Japan's modern history and an age of cooperation" (August, 1993). In the latter part of the nineteenth century, according to

the author, Japan was the only Asian nation that escaped colonization by Western powers. Instead of becoming a nation that pursues peace, however, Japan too sought to become a world power. For that purpose, it had to put its own people under the absolute control of radical nationalism. Consequently, Japanese education until 1945 was characterized by uniformity, not diversity. As a result, in prewar Japan, human rights were completely suppressed, and emphasis on individuality was strictly anathema. After World War II, under the new Constitution, human rights were restored in theory, but the sacred worth of the individual has not been affirmed in reality. In fact, it is often blatantly disregarded even today. One area in which this is especially conspicuous is education. Japan's educational system does very little to encourage students to be independent or to develop their own unique potential. Its emphasis on rote memorization at the expense of individual initiative must be surmounted.

CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF GLOBAL EDUCATION

The tasks clarified by academics in somewhat abstract terms are dealt with concretely by capable and conscientious educators throughout Japan. "Nourishing individuality at a night school" (March 1994) is a case in point. The author, Matsuzaki Unnosuke, is a teacher at a junior high school conducted at night in an industrial section of Tokyo. The students he teaches all suffer from severe poverty and from covert and overt social discrimination. Some are troubled teenagers. Others were unable to adjust to a regular public school. A few are grandmothers who, until now, have never learned to read. The educational level of these students is incredibly low. But Matsuzaki insists that authentic learning is taking place at his night school. Although none has attained the educational level set

by the Ministry of Education, the social consciousness of these students is often more profound than that of their teachers. For example, Matsuzaki was challenged in a social studies class about his assumption that Japan is an open, democratic country. For students suffering poverty and social discrimination, Japan is neither open nor democratic. Their analyses are based on everyday life experiences, not on abstract knowledge. According to Matsuzaki, the students are not satisfied with pat answers. They speak their own minds and are not afraid of questioning their teachers or, for that matter, contradicting the textbook. Matsuzaki concludes that true education involves an exchange of worldviews between teacher and student. In that sense, his night school class symbolizes, in a very profound way, what true education really is.

GENDER EQUALITY AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Another educator reports on the dynamics of her students' discussion of the status of women in Japanese society. In "Gender and education on equality" (July 1993), Kishizawa Hatsumi reports how students became interested in this issue. They discovered that their textbooks tend to stereotype both men and women. Their textbook on Japanese literature, for example, deals with few women writers. The main characters in most of the novels cited are men, and the occupations of female characters are either farming or elementary school teaching. Housework is done strictly by women. Boys are described as active and always talking in a loud voice, whereas girls are depicted as bashful and quiet. In their social studies textbook, the students observed that the division of labor between male and female was accepted without criticism. In the area of politics and history, no woman was mentioned as a genuine contributor to Japanese society. It is taken for granted that mothers

have no outside work. With the help of her students, Kishizawa concludes: "In order to respect and nourish individuality in each and every student, we must, first of all, overcome the gender stereotypes."

Another public high school teacher in Tokyo courageously faces one of the most difficult issues facing every democratic society: what is it that distinguishes democracy from the principle of majority rule? In her article "What is democracy?" (September 1993), Yoshida Kazuko reports that her struggle with this question began when student leaders' met to make a schedule for their year-end school trip. Their discussion was directly focused on a student with autism. Since it was obvious that the girl would find it difficult to work in groups while on the trip, the students concluded that it would be best for her to tag a long with her teacher most of the time. Yoshida pointed out that they had arrived at their conclusion without even talking to the autistic student. Although they had not bothered to find out what she herself wanted to do, the leaders were convinced that they were right because they had gone through a proper process of discussion and deliberation. In their minds, the conclusion was justified because they had reached it unanimously. What alarmed Yoshida in this situation was the leaders' callous assumption that the majority opinion is right. Would it be possible for democracy to be oppressive and to deny the fundamental human rights of a few in the name of the principle of the majority?

In Yoshida's opinion, the above case study pinpoints most succinctly the shortcoming of the Japanese understanding of democracy popularized since the end of World War II. The assumption that the majority is always right must be challenged. If democracy is the best way to nourish and protect fundamental human rights, the democratic society must fulfill certain preconditions in order to be democratic. For

Yoshida, an essential precondition is the ability of the majority to look at important issues from the perspective of the minority. Respect for diversity, not forced uniformity, must be the primary characteristic of any democratic society, concludes Yoshida.

EDUCATION IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

If public school teachers are trying to make education more meaningful and relevant, Christian schools cannot afford to do less. The May 1994 issue of *Fukuin to Sekai* (The Gospel and the World) features articles that deal with the contributions that Christian schools, both Protestant and Catholic, can make to Japanese society. Yuki Hideo, a former professor at Dōshisha University, one of the oldest Christian institutions of higher learning in Japan, addresses himself to this issue in his article, "The future of Christian schools." At the outset, the author makes it clear that Christian schools are the primary medium by which Christianity has been disseminated throughout Japan. Church-sponsored kindergartens as well as Christian elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, colleges, and universities have had a great impact upon Japanese people. The number of those who have come in contact with Christianity through Christian schools far exceeds the number of people the church has ever reached. For Yuki, the importance of this fact needs to be appreciated and underscored.

The question that needs to be raised is: what makes Christian schools "Christian"? According to Yuki, Christian schools, particularly colleges and universities, have succumbed to the temptation of compartmentalizing courses in Christian studies into an area of intellectual discipline and separating them from the faith commitment of the church. Another pitfall is the equation of a school's Christian character with its emphasis on English education, its connections with American colleges, and the num-

ber of foreign teachers on its faculty. There is nothing wrong with capitalizing on these features; in fact, they are elements that Japanese schools in general sorely lack. But Christian schools are bound to lose their *raison d'être*, if that is all they can claim. Yuki's point is clear. Christian schools are "Christian" if they relate education to the faith commitment of the church in some meaningful way.

To do this, Christian schools must increase the number of Christian teachers. In some schools, the sole Christian members of the administration and faculty are presidents and chaplains. Yuki thinks it is difficult for Christian schools to preserve their Christian identity if Christians are in such a minority. In this context, the author believes that church-school relationships need to be developed and strengthened. Japanese churches have been too provincial, concentrating on their own survival in a non-Christian environment. Today, churches must feel responsible for general Christian education, encouraging their members to go into Christian education either as interested supporters or, even better, as well-qualified teachers who can be role models for their students. At the same time, Yuki believes that schools should encourage their students to participate in the ongoing life of the church. Mutual cooperation between churches and Christian schools must be implemented further for the indigenization of Christianity in Japan.

One concrete example of Yuki's thought is presented by Koseki Tadashi, who writes in the same magazine about his alma mater, Kirk Doits Gakuin (Christian Independent School). KDG is quite unique. For one thing, it is located in a small isolated farming community 300 miles from Tokyo. In winter, the snow almost buries the school buildings. The nearest train station is twelve miles away, and buses run only twice a day. Consequently, the teachers and seventy-five students live on the campus in

a very close-knit community. Since its inception in 1948, KDG has persisted in keeping its Christian character intact. It has purposely not prepared students for college entrance examinations, holding that the practice of evaluating a school according to the number of its students accepted by prestigious colleges is a major obstacle to the pursuit of truth. Each student in the entire community is assigned certain chores every day. Perhaps the most unique feature of KDG is its attempt to combine education with genuine Christian piety. Worship services are conducted in the morning and at night. The Bible is taught to all students. Sunday is literally the Sabbath—a day set aside for worship and personal meditation.

What Koseki remembers most vividly fifteen years after graduation is the commitment of his teachers. They dedicated every waking hour to their students. Some stand out particularly in the author's memory. One is a ninety-year-old calligraphy teacher whose life has been an epitome of authentic piety. Another, the founder of KDG, lectured on the Bible, Plato, and Socrates. Still another was a teacher who always helped students do their chores and encouraged them to live and work for others. Koseki is

now a teaching assistant at the University of Tokyo's department of physical science. In retrospect, he believes that KDG taught him what it means to incorporate an intellectual pursuit of science with a deep faith in God.

Having reviewed all these articles focusing on education in Japan, one can readily pinpoint certain areas of common concern among the authors. One is their love of students. Another is their commitment to develop students' potential to the fullest. At the same time, one can also discern that non-Christian authors, despite their passionate concern for the nurture of individuality, show little interest in the ultimate source from which the sacred worth of the individual originates. For the two Christian authors of reviewed articles, on the other hand, fundamental human rights and the worth of the individual are clearly believed to be theonomously derived. Without a loving God, those concepts simply do not make sense. These differences between Christians and secular humanists are thought-provoking. It may be fair to say that they inadvertently reveal one specific area in which Christian schools in Japan can make lasting and important contributions.