JAPANESE EDUCATION IN TRANSITION 2001
Radical Perspectives on Cultural and Political Transformation

INTRODUCTION

Japan has recently experienced important shifts in what was once seen as a stable, homogeneous, and orderly social environment. Foremost among the challenges facing Japanese society are those involving the educational system, educational concepts, and educational philosophy.

At all levels, from pre-school to elementary, from secondary to university, from lifelong to other learning contexts, Japan faces challenges that would have been inconceivable even ten years ago. The papers which we present here were originally planned for a session in Commission 6 of the Eleventh World Congress of Comparative Education Societies held in the Republic of Korea in July 2001. We were interested in getting together a group of scholars concerned with radical change and transformation in the Japanese educational context, particularly in terms of what it means to be a citizen, and to be educated as a citizen, in Japanese society.

The papers that follow here were thus begun as a series of discussions among ourselves, as researchers working and living in the Japanese educational context, and then planned as a series of presentations from a wide range of perspectives for the Congress in Korea. Our intention was, and is, to inform, provoke, and stimulate fellow scholars of comparative education and comparative cultures.

We especially take up those issues on the sharp edges of change in Japan, issues for all 21st century multicultural societies: citizenship, nationalism, gender, curriculum, literacy, immigrants, transnational exchange, and identity. Japanese education in the 21st century is clearly in transition, and these papers present radical perspectives on Japan’s educational, cultural and political transformation.

The first paper, National education policy and the masses in modern Japan: the origins of a state-oriented mentality and the long detour to a new form of citizenship education by Satoshi Yamamura, begins our collection of papers by laying out the historical foundations for radical change in Japan. By noting that the enlightened segment of the Meiji State leaders perceived the essential connection between modern education for the masses and modern methods of warfare, he shows us how the nation and the education system were inextricably linked from the very beginning. Untoward consequences were, and continue to be, the result.

In 1872 and 1873 the Meiji Government introduced two new systems, the modern school system and conscription to win their domestic political struggle against other sectors as well as competing with overwhelming western powers. This initial intention of the enlightened bureaucrats who
eventually survived political struggles inside the central government met with a strong resistance from peasants who composed the largest portion of the population of the time.

The government managed to force the masses into the centralised system of education and politics by around the time of the Russo-Japan War. These views and perceptions, ostensibly based on modern western science and carried by enlightened bureaucrats, urban intellectuals and college students, and others, saw their unbreakable victory over the masses by around the early 1930s. This was a sign of the end of the plurality-oriented values of pre-modern Japan in education and politics. The concept of citizenship has had a difficult communication with the bolstered value of subject-conscious ideology ever since. This paper concludes with an exploration of the problematic idea of citizenship in today’s Japanese education.

The second paper, Multicultural or “pure” Japan? Citizenship challenges for Japanese education for the 21st century by David Blake Willis, continues this theme by examining Japanese education for citizenship at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries.

With the so-called Third Opening (or internationalisation) of Japan, the rush of globalisation, and a concern for the direction of national cultural identity in the Japanese nation, courses for citizenship have recently been promoted in schools with titles such as ‘Education for International Understanding’ and ‘Global Education,’ among others.

Twin surges, one of an awareness of a diverse, multicultural Japanese society, and the other of an apparent neo-nationalism, have been noted in the mass media. The first speaks for a compelling drive for more openness in Japan and is outward looking, democratic, and inclusive in its conceptualisation of citizenship. The second is exclusive, inward looking, and based on images of a homogeneous canon for Japanese culture. Both have been introduced into school contexts, resulting in considerable tension and dissonance.

Concern has been raised about the dilution of Japanese identity, manifesting itself in enforced singing in schools of the national anthem and required national flag-raising at ceremonies, not to mention on-going controversies about the contents of school textbooks. This paper explores dilemmas and directions for citizenship education in Japan, indicating possible future directions for the roles of educational institutions in this key component in the transmission of values for the Japanese cultural identity.

Key questions for the enactment of democratic education for citizenship are raised. It seems, from what he tells us, that the lessons of the hidden curriculum are, if anything, far more powerful than those of the explicit curriculum. Class and difference are two themes which resonate again and again in surprising and disturbing ways. The dissonance and contrast with messages emanating from mainstream scholarly media on Japanese education are strong and troubling. Where the values and methods for teaching being enacted in classrooms around Kobe come from is the subject of the next paper.

Confucianism as cultural constraint: a comparison of Confucian values of Japanese and Korean university students, the third paper by Ken Tamai and Jonghwan Lee, attempts to analyze the roots of educational values for citizenship by examining students at the end of their educational careers. This paper is a strong, comparative study of beliefs and actions centered around Confucian values.

Both Korea and Japan are countries in which Confucianism has been to seen to have penetrated deeply and widely. Although there is a tendency to regard Confucianism as something homologous everywhere, Tamai and Lee find by examining Confucianism’s impact on education and values in
Japan and Korea that this is not the case. Thus, it becomes important to examine and elaborate the differences of Confucian values, especially as they have played out in the education systems and the contemporary values which are held in these two important receiving countries of Confucian philosophy.

This study focuses on Korea and Japan and attempts to examine the differences between the two countries. The research results show that Confucian beliefs in these two countries are not the same. Two unique features of Koreans are “filial piety” and “altruism,” while Japan’s uniqueness has appeared in “conformity to the group and authority.” What accounts for the background of these differences? Through the analysis of present Confucianism we hope we will obtain better views on the social values of Japanese and Koreans and be able to clarify their distinctive features for comparative education from a cross-cultural viewpoint.

Shigehisa Komatsu helps us to understand change in the Japanese curriculum in the next and fourth paper, *Transition in the Japanese curriculum* - how is the curriculum of elementary and secondary schools in Japan determined?

Organising curriculum at the national level is a Japanese tradition and school administrators or teachers have less experience with it. Social, political, and economical trends in Japan have been recently characterised by a move toward diversity, flexibility, decentralisation and autonomy and away from uniformity, rigidity, and central control.

School administrators and teachers are now at a loss as to how they should constitute curriculum in their schools. The most important problem in Japan now may be how educators should cultivate a sense of identity about organising curriculum.

Taeyoung Kim introduces our fifth paper, *“Identity politics” and Korean youth in Japan: a case study of a junior high school student*, with a careful account of what it means to be ‘Other’ in the Japanese educational system.

The purpose of his study is to search for the breakthrough of "identity politics” around Koreans in Japan by shedding light on the ethnic identities of Korean youths. After World War II Koreans in Japan organised schools using their language and transmitting ethnic culture to children, but the SCAP GHQ and the Japanese Government regarded this movement as harmful and began to suppress it.

Koreans have since then been under the pressure of assimilation and their ethnic education has been marginalised in the Japanese educational system. "Identity politics,” which regards ethnic tradition as essential for identity, developed in opposition to assimilation, functioned as resistance and liberation in the first stage, but sooner or later became oppressive to the diversity of Korean society in Japan.

This case study is based on research in Takatsuki, Osaka, where a children’s group of Koreans was organised by the school board of the city to foster ethnic identity and transmit ethnic culture among Korean children and youths.

The sixth paper, by Koji Nakamura, discusses an educational program which aims to bridge some of the traditional gaps in the Japanese educational system. *Cultivating global literacy through ‘English as an International Language’ (EIL) education in Japan: a new paradigm for global education*, examines Japanese students’ global literacy as multicultural citizens of the world and their communicative competence in Japanese EFL classrooms.
Since these have been relatively impoverished by the Japanese educational system and its high context culture compared with their counterparts in the rest of the world, he discusses the significance of a four-year empirical study of integrating controversial global human rights issues into a university-level EFL speech communication class in Japan, highlighting the role of English as an International Language (EIL).

Global literacy in this context addresses two essential phases. One is an ability to access and converse with the rest of the world in English as an International Language with computer literacy for internet communication. Another is a literacy of reconceptualised citizenship, called multicultural citizenship, which will enable students to acquire a delicate balance of cultural, national and global identification.

The seventh and last paper, *Psychological struggles of Korean international students in Japan*, by Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, examines the experiences of international students from South Korea at Japanese universities. Koreans now comprise the second largest national group in Japan, numbering nearly 13,000.

Data were gathered from the responses of 96 students at the University of Tokyo to the request to write freely their opinions regarding foreign student life in Japan. Qualitative analysis of the data revealed a major theme centering on reactions to Japanese society and human relations. Four themes were identified: moral vs. prejudiced; diligent vs. inhuman; true feelings vs. facades; and resignation vs. perseverance.

Beginning with a look at the historical foundations of modern Japanese education and ending with a study of the identities of Koreans in Japanese universities is perhaps a fitting sequence, demonstrating the changing nature of education in Japan. Once seen as an instrument solely of national power and its projection, education is now crossing borders in ways unimaginable to the Meiji founding fathers of a hundred years ago.

What this indicates, of course, is the changing nature of values as well as a shifting socio-political-economic context. That Confucian values remain the base is undoubtedly important, yet new values are also being created, especially in classrooms such as those dealing with global issues and using other languages.

When looked at from the perspective of comparative education, the darker sides of the Japanese education system, especially as it reflects a damaged society and particularly damaged youth in their search for identity, are unfortunately also only too well-represented by the papers here. There are signs of hope in changes in the curriculum but even more so in the ways individuals are taking matters into their own hands, educating themselves for citizenship of an entirely different order than that envisioned by centralised ministries of education that are far away and often too slow to react to changing environments. These papers, we hope, will provide a substantive new look at issues of Japanese education from a comparative perspective.