7. Development, Present Situation and Future Perspective of Education for International Understanding in Japan

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Foreword

I am honored to be given the opportunity to speak on education for international understanding in Japan before such a distinguished audience of Korean educators and I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Samuel Lee, Director of APCEIU for his kind consideration in making this event possible.

As I worked at UNESCO for 31 years, from 1961 to 1991, I admit that in many respects, I am different from the average Japanese. Therefore, my understanding of Japanese education may not conform to the standard views of Japanese scholars. With this note of caution, I ask for your kind patience in listening to my speech. My remarks will not be limited to education for international understanding in the strict sense of the term but will more broadly attempt to address educational issues in Japan.

Despite many attempts to define "education" in the past, it remains quite an amorphous term meaning many different things to many people. Today, education means school education for the majority of people, but schools as educational institutions came into existence quite late in our history. We tend to forget that our society and civilization emerged, survived and developed through education for many centuries before schools emerged. In this respect, both our countries (Korea and Japan) have good records of such education, and we regard education and learning with high esteem.

Japan, however, experienced another kind of education, namely, mass indoctrination in the name of patriotic or moral education in the course of her militarization. Therefore, when we hear the term "patriotic education", many of us start to express concern as to what this means.
When it comes to the more recent term "international education", there also exists total confusion. Some people refer to international exchanges of students or study in foreign universities as international education. It often means inter-cultural understanding, but in many multi-ethnic countries, inter-cultural understanding must start in their own countries first before attempting international understanding.

**Education as a double-edged sword and confrontation between nationalism and internationalism in education**

As mentioned earlier, we tend to think of education as something desirable without question and we advocate that it should be developed. But, looking back on our history, education has not necessarily been good.

Japan's earlier development was facilitated through the learning and assimilation of advanced knowledge, cultures, technologies and above all religion and philosophes from China and Korea. While this may not properly be called education for international understanding, since the term "international" was not applicable in those days, Japan definitely experienced nationwide learning and assimilation of other civilizations. She then closed the country from foreign contacts for many centuries and learning from other civilizations was forbidden. During this period, there was no national system of education. The central authorities advocated the policy of "not letting them (people) know but letting them follow" and consequently education of the people was totally ignored. Education was organized by each feudal clan for the male siblings of its ruling class as a means to strengthen and enrich it, and the Chinese philosophies of Confucianism and Taoism fitted well with their needs to maintain the feudal order and hierarchy. Studies of other foreign subjects were forbidden. Three decades of national isolation resulted in elaborating a tightly knit national culture and value system of homogeneous nature.

Toward the end of the Tokugawa Period around the late 18th and early 19th centuries, many clandestine private academies (shijuku) emerged against the risk of suppression by the Tokugawa regime, to study western sciences, laws, political theories and foreign languages. There is no doubt that this clandestine international learning inspired Japan for its modernization.

The new Meiji government initiated and pursued the policy of modernization, which in those days meant westernization. In the first declaration of the new educational policy in 1872, literacy and basic learning for
all people were given the highest priority. Many European and American systems were introduced and implemented. The contents of education in major part were adapted from European texts.

A national system of education and teacher training schemes were rapidly developed and primary school enrollment became nearly universal in only 30 years. Some quarters of government, concerned about the excessively western trend, proceeded to re-establish more national values content in education. This move culminated in 1890 with the proclamation of the Imperial Rescript on Education, which marked the beginning of the national totalitarian trend. A well developed education system served as a most effective means to implement this new policy. Such terms as "national spirit and western technology" were coined during these days to justify the superiority of the nationalistic identity over western civilization. The education system underwent a radical right turn towards ultra-nationalism. Since then, there have existed in the education system the two currents of nationalism and internationalism, each succeeding the other.

The nationalistic trend was ended with the defeat of Japan in World War II in 1945, and the proclamation of the new policy of democratization, which meant more or less Americanization. This was the revival of internationalism. The new Constitution was drafted under the supervision of the Allied Occupation Forces but provided valuable provisions for peace, human rights, democracy, renunciation of war and the restriction on armed forces, etc. Many American value concepts were introduced through education. The Fundamental Law of Education, legislated at that time, is still considered one of the exemplary peace-oriented education laws in the world, highlighting as it does many basic universal values.

With the emergence of the cold war came the ideological conflict between the communist and socialist bloc on one hand and the free democratic western bloc including Japan and Korea on the other. Thus internationalism in Japan was split into two factions: one siding with the communist-socialist bloc and the other with America. U.S. policy shifted radically from the genuine democratization of Japan to the possible reinforcement of Japan to serve as the dyke against communist aggression. The honeymoon of internationalism in education thus did not last long.

The U.S. sided with the conservative nationalistic group that constituted the government, and the opposition including the teachers' union represented the other side of internationalism, i.e. the USSR and East European bloc. Since then,
Japanese education has been torn by the conflict between these two political international forces. While the international community was rejoicing over the World Declaration of Universal Human Rights in 1948, Japan was struggling to stop the infiltration of communism into education and was engaged in a purge of "red" teachers. The Teachers' Union reacted with successive strikes and brought the matter to court, insisting on the illegality of the government's disciplinary actions. The history of Japanese education in this period is dotted with lawsuits in the courts. Both sides stressed the importance of neutrality in education, but in reality there were two entirely opposite concepts.

Many political parties have raised educational issues in election campaigns; and national associations of enterprises and industries have demanded the introduction of more science and technology in the school curriculum while voicing concern over the leftist trend in education.

The Ministry of Education has tightened its control, not just over teachers' performance and teacher evaluation but also by introducing more strict guidelines and syllabuses, which have maintained high standards in teaching.

This section has been the background from which to understand educational development in Japan, marked by the confrontation between nationalism and internationalism. The analysis of education for international understanding requires the full understanding of this larger context.

**UNESCO's education for international understanding and Japan's active participation in the UNESCO ASP Program in the 50s and 60s**

Japan was condemned as a war-criminal nation at the end of WWII and totally isolated from the international community. The country lost confidence in itself, and the abolition of the Imperial Rescript on Education meant for many Japanese the loss of the basic framework of value systems in education. Many considered the lofty goal of the UNESCO Constitution as the ideal value objective replacing the Imperial Rescript, and active campaigns were launched from the grassroots level to urge Japan's admission to UNESCO. This was the first non-governmental initiative that moved the government.

Japan was admitted to UNESCO in 1951. As UNESCO was the first UN organization to admit Japan, it has a special place in the hearts of many Japanese people.

Japan followed UNESCO's guidelines and advice most faithfully in order to
show its genuine aspiration for peace and recovery as a democratic nation. UNESCO's education for international understanding was very attractive to Japan, so it joined the ASP program upon its start in 1953 and was exemplary in fulfilling the goals of the ASP program.

The Japanese National Commission for UNESCO issued many publications and took a very active role. Six secondary schools (4 junior secondary and 2 senior secondary) were designated as associated schools in 1953. The Japanese National Commission decided to take up the following themes for their experimental activities:

- Respect for fundamental human rights
- Mutual understanding of and cooperation with foreign countries
- Understanding of and cooperation with UN organizations
- Realization of world peace

The associated schools in Japan increased to 19 in 1956 and to 25 in 1960 and two teacher training universities joined the program in 1957. A total of 55 schools participated in the program between 1953 and 1980. The major activities took place in the 1950s and 1960s, and Japan's participation has become inactive since the 70s.

**Changing role of Japan in international cooperation: Shift of priority from understanding to development cooperation and assistance**

The 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games was said to mark the end of the post-war period and the beginning of a new era of Japan as a world economic power. While Japan achieved spectacular economic and social development, it was still suffering from the ideological and political confrontation in the field of education. Prof. Ienaga's lawsuit against the government over the legality of the approval procedures for school textbooks by the Ministry of Education deserves special mention. Furthermore, universities were racked by radical students riots. Under such fierce East-West controversies, education for international understanding faced tremendous difficulties in its implementation and many schools started to withdraw from the ASP Program toward the end of the 1960s. The government now has become less enthusiastic over education for international understanding, which inevitably causes many political repercussions in education.
The 1960s corresponded to the period of massive independence of developing countries, especially in Africa, and UNESCO's program priorities began to shift from international understanding to educational development. Japan's new interest in supporting educational development started with the hosting of the first Conference of Asian Ministers of Education in Tokyo in 1962, and since then the country has closely associated herself with the implementation of the Karachi Plan to achieve universal compulsory primary education in Asia by 1980. Japan's cooperation with UNESCO took the form of Fund-in-Trust contributions to support UNESCO’s action. Japan also designated the National Institute of Educational Research (NIER) to offer regional services in education. Later, in the early 1970s, ACCU was established to provide regional cooperation in education as well.

**Education for international understanding vs. education for internationalization of Japan**

The year 1974 was the decisive point at which Japan’s education for international understanding departed from UNESCO’s education for international understanding. There is no single cause for this and a number of factors and events contributed to it.

UNESCO successfully mobilized its Member States to support the first normative document in this field, adopting in 1974 the Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (the so-called the 1974 Recommendation). This recommendation was intended to provide a common, systematic basis for the concept, modalities and expected results of education for international understanding in the world and it was widely appreciated by the Member States. While Japan participated in the adoption of the 1974 Recommendation, it never took any action to disseminate the document nor to implement it.

With economic growth, Japan’s pace of internationalization was progressing rapidly and the country faced the need to internationalize the entire system of education and its management.

Firstly, many Education Ministry officials were faced with the need to develop a system-wide policy approach to education for international understanding, not limited to the experimental schools under the UNESCO ASP program. By the end of the 1960s, most of the ASP schools had completed
their research projects and their final reports were compiled. They faced difficulties in identifying the new topics in which to undertake further research and experimentation. Furthermore, many schools did not want to be involved in the political and ideological conflicts that were likely to occur under education for international understanding.

While education for international understanding remained as a priority of the education policy, it was not the ASP style of experimentation but a more system-wide program of the pan-Ministry of Education. Although the Ministry issued some guidelines, it did not emerge as a consistent, nationwide program but ended in a hotchpotch of spasmodic activities. This resulted in the further isolation of Japan's education for international understanding from international moves under UNESCO, especially in Asian countries. Neither was Japan aware of the shift of UNESCO's education for international understanding from an experimental nature to experiential learning.

The Ministry of Education was undertaking structural reform and the Secretariat of the Japanese National Commission was integrated into the inner structure of the Ministry in 1974. The personnel of the National Commission became responsible for all international affairs and activities of the Ministry, which made it impossible to concentrate on UNESCO affairs. This caused the natural death of ASP in Japan.

The Central Council of Education, which is the policy advisory organ of the Minister of Education, made a recommendation on international exchanges in education, science and culture in 1974, defining education for international understanding in the context of the internationalization of Japan. Education for international understanding was considered as part of the dimension of helping Japanese to live in the international community. One may cynically point out that this could have been part of a national strategy to create future generation of aggressive Japanese businessmen and women. The recommendation covered, inter alia, improvement of foreign language teaching, internationalization of universities and the increase of foreign students, study abroad of Japanese students, cooperation with and assistance to developing countries, enhancement of Japanese language teaching to foreign students and development of the infrastructure for administering international cooperation. The most urgent issue, however, was how to cope with the education of overseas Japanese students and returnee students, as many Japanese children faced critical problems of adaptation to the Japanese education system and culture after returning from
abroad. As a result of the rapid expansion of Japan’s trade and business overseas, many Japanese families migrated abroad accompanying their businessmen cum husbands. Their children’s success in the entrance exams for higher education was the most important issue not only for the children themselves but also for their families. The Ministry of Education was forced to respond to the demands of parents.

It is clear from the above that Japan’s involvement in education for international understanding was integrated into education for the internationalization of Japan. Therefore, all the overtones of education for international understanding reflected the national culture and values, and such universal values as human rights, peace, freedom, global ethics, etc. were less visible.

**Over-manipulation of education and resultant deterioration, and children outcry and revolt**

Education is a double-edged sword as I mentioned in the beginning. It serves as a means to achieve certain objectives but at the same time it can serve equally effectively in the opposite direction. From the time of establishment of the education sub-sector in society, it tended to retain its conservative nature and to remain isolated from the outer world, by developing its own rules of conduct and value systems. For many centuries, it enjoyed quiet autonomy from outside interventions.

However, it has become clear in recent history that the solution of the most difficult issues in society depends on preventive or remedial action through education rather than direct intervention or rehabilitation, such as in the case of drug abuse, HIV/AIDS or materialism. Many count on education to facilitate social and economic development, to develop conscience-based societies, or to develop creativity.

The history of Japanese education is filled with many cases of external intervention. Political parties have used education as a campaign issue such as the preservation of neutrality in education or rather anti-communist measures; governments in power have imposed many measures of to augment national identity and prestige; and employer and enterprise associations have urged the implementation of anti-left measures and the increase of scientific and technological subjects.

These are just a few examples. Successive governments have tried to achieve national goals and objectives through education and to introduce certain
political orientations advocated by their ruling groups. Besides such demands and interventions, education has been subject to condemnation for its mal-functioning whenever students manifest misconduct. Universities have imposed many obstacles to educational reforms by retaining their traditional entrance examinations and ivory tower mentality. Excessive external manipulation has put so much pressure on education, the classroom and school children themselves, that they have started to manifest their incapacity to follow such education. Classroom collapse, school violence and bullying, absenteeism and dropping out are the consequences of over-manipulation of education from outside, forgetting the genuine nature of education and the main actor in education, i.e., the children themselves. Children are overly stressed under the weight of the standard curriculum tightly controlled by the Ministry of Education, under the overt expectations of parents for better scholastic performance, by attendance in a series of cram and preparatory schools after regular classrooms have finished for the day. The loss of free time and play, and a narrowing natural environment and space in urban areas add further stress.

Education for international understanding is not included in the subjects for entrance examinations and therefore it is often neglected not only by schools but also by parents.

**Belated re-discovery of genuine nature of education and a new educational reform and the role of education for international understanding**

Faced with this deterioration in education, the Ministry of Education has been taking several measures to relax its control and to ease academic standards. The measures are being taken to give more free time for children and revive the educational function of the home, community and school through their closer cooperation. The genuine goal is to recover the children's natural spontaneity, to nurture their hearts to be more humane, to regain their initiatives to identify problems and to find their own solutions.

The Ministry defines these changes as a means to enhancing the "force to live," and decided to introduce a new curriculum in 2002 in primary and junior secondary schools and in 2003 in high schools. One innovation is to set aside certain hours of "Sogo gakushu" or comprehensive learning for which no guideline nor syllabus is issued by the Ministry. Each school is expected to
develop its own program and the Ministry just expresses the hope that such
hours will be used for active and experiential learning in such multi-disciplinary
fields as international understanding, welfare, environment, information or
health. All schools in Japan are somewhat lost with this measure, as they have
been so used to following instructions from the Ministry. It is thought that
education for international understanding will most likely be a very popular
practice in the future. Many teachers are already engaged in positive
preparations and our Association for International Education has been
supporting their efforts. I have just returned from a study tour to the
Philippines and Thailand with 12 schoolteachers to observe their ASP programs
in action.

**Future Perspectives**

Education for international understanding has always been one of the
priorities of the government policy in education but it tended to be isolated
from other Asian experiences and concentrated on cooperation with developed
countries, such as the USA, Canada, Australia, etc. On the other hand, Japanese
society is increasingly internationalized and one finds many non-Japanese
residents today. To live together with them in good relations and respect is an
important aspect of education in Japan. Many activities are being carried out on
a trial and error basis but it is a fairly superficial and stereotyped practice
since many teachers lack international experience.

Japan advocates the philosophy of "kyousei" or to live together and to learn
from one another for mutual advance and well being. This concept is the key
to the future education for international understanding. It is our profound
pleasure to find the same consideration in the Delors Commission report on the
4 main pillars of education for the 21st century: education to know, education
to do, education to live together and education to be.

We have moved beyond theoretical education for international
understanding; from now it will have to be action oriented experiential learning
in cooperation with our friends in many countries. We are searching for ways
to revive ASP in Japan and we hope to learn from your experiences.

Likewise, specialists and scholars will have to share their research results in
a more systematic manner with colleagues in other countries. It is hoped that
APCEIU will play a major role in this field. Many teachers may be linked in
networks through E-mail and the Internet. It is necessary to move out of
routines and stereotypes to a more real and appreciative understanding with mutual respect, and in this connection, Korea-Japan cooperation and exchange will hopefully develop further. We are competing in many spheres but our cooperation will have to be as strong as our competition. Internalization of the many values underlining education for international understanding is essential to promote such cooperation and exchange.