

DISCUSSION PAPER

by

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on

William Cumming's
THE JAPANESE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE?

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COMMENTS ON:

PROF. CUMMING'S PAPER ENTITLED:

THE JAPANESE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE?

by Arifin BEY

F o r e w o r d

I feel greatly honored to be given the opportunity to attend the Thirteenth ICUS and to comment on the paper of Prof. Cummings. I must admit, however, that I feel far from qualified to do the job. I am a newcomer in the field of education after having served in the Indonesian diplomatic service for 28 years. But, having been given the challenge to do the job, I hereby, in all humility, submit my observations.

THE PAPER

Under the title: "The Japanese Educational Challenge", Prof. Cummings submits the following thesis. The Japanese educational system is now faced with a crisis because it has institutionalized an inner contradiction. It is fulfilling victim to its success. "Over the post-war period it has steadily improved in "warming up" youth for advanced education by virtue of cumulative egalitarian shifts in the process and performance of primary education. But the Japanese system has failed to develop corresponding "cooling down" mechanisms at the upper levels. As a result, increasing numbers of youth have developed high expectations for success at the upper levels. But in the striving to realize these expectations, those from more affluent homes have been progressively more successful." The Japanese educational system, the Professor continues is now facing a "crisis of legitimacy."

In substantiating his thesis, Prof. Cummings reviews the educational system of pre-war and post-war Japan. He then takes up the larger system which had developed out of the educational reforms of post-war years, such as the Employment System, the role of the Parents and J u k u, Mediating Institutions and the Mass Media. Further, he discusses Japanese education as Equilizing Forces in which he praises the high dedication shown by teachers in carrying out "whole person education", in giving equal

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attention to all students and in striving to improve the quality of the school rather than the individual as the basic educational unit.

Further, speaking about Stratifying Forces, he discusses the high percentage of admission to highschool and universities, a number of which is nearly equal to that of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Competition for entrance into "the right schools", however, has become more and more severe, giving impetus to the establishment of private universities, not without its attending abuses. These realities have caused many to question whether higher education is worth the effort. (There are even cries calling for the abolition of the university system itself.)

In the midst of all these, a new counter culture is emerging. Young persons are more willing to settle for second and third choices in universities There are signs of hedonistic and hooliganism among the young. All these, according to Prof. Cummings, bring about The Crisis of Legitimacy of the Japanese educational system.

In discussing the Paper, I propose to proceed as follows.

I will begin by examining the key theme, namely the nature of crisis befalling the Japanese educational system as analyzed by Prof. Cummings. I am going to argue that the essence of the crisis is not educational but rather cultural in nature.

Further, I will proceed to examine the facts used to illustrate the thesis. I will compare them with my own notes. Some of them may underline the facts in the Paper. Others may present quite a different picture. I will try to amplify the facts which agree with my notes and present the alternative facts where needed. I will then end my comments by presenting a Conclusion which includes a suggestion to overcome the "crisis".

NATURE OF CRISIS: CULTURAL RATHER THAN OF SYSTEM

Prof. Cummings uses the term 'education' and 'educational system' interchangeably. On page 1, including the title, the word 'education' is used ten times, but on page 2, the word 'educational system' is used. A closer look at the Paper, it is clear that it deals only with the system and avoids discussing its underlying philosophy.

In reading what Prof. Cummings calls educational crisis, to my understanding constitutes an acute problem which arises from a prolonged economic malaise linked with the 'burdens' of an ageing society. If the meaning of education is limited to what Prof. Cummings describes in his Paper, then the so-called crisis will automatically solve itself, if and when the world economy and that of Japan resumes their vital growth.¹⁾

Personally ...

Personally, I choose to define education in a much wider sense. Its system is only part of an integrated philosophical outlook on life and society. On the other hand, I do agree that there exists a crisis, but of a deeper nature. One aspect of this crisis lies in the tardiness of the system in grasping the speed and dimensity of social change.

It happens that this issue is taken up by Prof. Schleicher in his Paper presented to this Committee entitled: "Ecological vs. Purely Functional Concepts in Education and Educational Policy." I hope it is not unethical to quote from a paper which is yet to be presented. With the permission of the author, I would like to quote part of the Paper which conveys my opinion in far better words.

"In the face of such quick changing and contradictory goals (of today's society), the educational 'output' never corresponded with the changed social expectations but produced tremendous conflicts (e.g. between equality and quality of education, between comprehensive and competitive education, and between universal expansion and the university drop-out rate or academic unemployment. If teachers, parents and students are never able to meet public expectations, then considerable distrust emerges from the public towards educational planning, and respectively from educational policy towards the educational system. And even worse, the quick changing social demands limit educational reforms to what can quickly be put into practice and tend to turn education into a 'function' of short-lived impulses of the day." 2)

Prof. Schleicher also points out to the time-lag in education, because the curriculum hangs-on to out-dated paradigms. 3)

I mentioned that the Japanese education is facing a crisis of deeper nature. It can be attributed to what is called modernism which has brought about "cultural contradictions" - to use the term coined by Daniel Bell, not only in the economic realm, in this case capitalism, but also in the educational system. Under modernism, the whole man no longer exists. He has become a being fragmented. The cause lies in the fact that the educational system has been separated from man's cul-tural heritage. Hence, we can speak of a crisis of culture.

Somewhere else, I have analyzed this problem, explaining the crisis of education within the cultural and civilizational context of man. I argued that education was not to instill know-how alone, but it must be placed within the framework of value judgment. It must not be limited to teaching the arts of how live today for the individual, but also the wisdom to contribute to the civilization of tomorrow. It is not to transfer the ability to produce the means of life only, but also to seek understanding about the meaning of life.

I have ...

I have argued that while the Japanese educational system is effective and efficient as far as producing the means of life is concerned, it has yet to come with an immanent concept of the "whole man".⁴⁾ It is interesting to note that Prof. Schleicher also argues in favor of a "value oriented education." He points out that in present day system "fundamental insights which guide an adequate use of educational strategies are to a large extent missing at the macro or ecological level. It is this missing macro-frame of reference, however, which is really at the heart of today's educational crisis." (p. 20)

The seriousness of the crisis is all the more pressing, because there is very little awareness about the nature of the crisis. I would even add that even when the Japanese educational system succeeds in providing "cooling down mechanisms" at the upper level, the "cultural void" which is the Japanese education today would still suffer from yet another crisis the roots of which lie deep.

Prof. Cummings asserts that the Japanese education system seeks to develop well-rounded "whole people" not just intellects. In concrete, this means (1) to develop children with pure and rich hearts; (2) to build up strong and healthy bodies; (3) to promote the spirit of curiosity and intellectual achievement; (4) to encourage the will to endure in whatever is attempted; and (5) to help each child to understand how his strength complements those of his classmates. (pp. 13 - 14)

I would willingly agree with Prof. Cummings about this "whole person" approach which is 'especially evident in the early years of primary schools' Not a few Japanese educators, however, have referred to the prevalence of "hōnin shugi" or nihilism, even at the primary level, let alone at higher schools. ⁵⁾

"Unity" Approach Needed

We are attending the Thirteenth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences. To my mind, we are still rather far from applying an unity approach to the themes at hand. Discussing education by only taking up its system and overlooking its underlying concept or philosophy, in my judgment, is not conducive to the making of "the whole man." If this observation is correct, then the root of the crisis of Japanese education, as it is also the case with most of the industrialized nations, lies in the disjunction between concept and function.

Speaking about this disjunction, NAGAI Michio points out that the Japanese education is wanting on at least two points.

"The first concerns the relationship between technological progress on one hand and man and his society on the other. Out of the inner search within ourselves for what is true, and good and beautiful, we must tackle the challenge of creating a culture whose values are more human . . .

human and more lasting. Education in Japan must grapple with this problem, through the home, the schools and society itself.

Second, is the issue of international reconciliation. For one hundred years ... the Japanese have been motivated chiefly by concern for its own gains. Today the world is too small to allow any country to abide or even survive by exclusive self-concern. 6)

My own observation on education, of which the system is but its outward manifestation, must take into consideration man as the product and conveyor of his or her culture as well as participant in the making of a constantly renewing civilization. In education one finds the u n i t y of the past, the present and the future. Permit me to repeat my own words published elsewhere.

"Individual man (in the generic sense) is the product of the civilization to which he belongs. At the same time, individual human beings, consciously or uncounsciously, contribute to the molding of that civilization. Thinkers contribute deliberately and self-consciously; a common man contributes to the process of change without self-reflection.

No prevailing civilization stands isolated. Each is the product of a series of encounters between previous civilizations.

A single civilization, therefore, can be called a 'wave' in the sea of history of man. In other words, it is the macrocosmic expression of the choices that human beings made under their prevailing conditions. But modern democratic civilizations have expanded the area of choice.

Choice implies selection, differentiation of the 'good' from the 'bad'. This is value judgment. Value judgment is based on culture. As such, culture serves as the determinant for which type of civilization man-in-history selects. In short, 'culture' is the very 'heart' of civilization.

If culture is the heart of civilization, and if this heart is embodied in 'man-the-thinker', then the type of civilization we select to live in, is pre-determined by the type of 'thinkers' the society produces. The mission and meaning of education lies here." 7)

The crisis of education in many parts of the world today lies in the fact that it selects to train "do-ers" rather than "thinkers". The 'revolt' of Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago stands as testimony to this fact. As I understand it, President Hutchings has been all along advocating the u n i t y approach.

OLD CONCEPT AND NEW

Congruent with my thinking that there is need to understand the concept of education before discussing its system, I take the liberty here to add my findings to that what Prof. Cummings refers to as "Background to the Old System." The objectives of the Japanese educational system under

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the old system may be summed up in the slogan "Fukoku Kyōhei" or "Prosperous country, strong military." In order to attain that objective the policy pursued was "Wa-kon Yoosai" or "Japanese ideology, Western know-how." Equipped as such, Japan embarked on "Seiyō o oitsuku, oikosu" or "Catching up with and overtaking the West."

At the beginning, the objectives of building a modern nation were rather broad. But because Japan was rather in a hurry, the techno-economic objectives were given top priority.

Post-war Japan has changed its slogan, which I can sum up in the following words: "Fukoku Kyohei" or "Prosperous country, rejection of military." Some would even argue that the average Japanese do not even think in terms of 'nation' anymore. The object of loyalty has been directed to the "Kaisha" or company in which one works. Those of you who had visited Japan may have frowned at automobile stickers advising people "to love your Company and your Family", in that order. An American student of mine some years ago presented me with a cartoon clipping from, I suppose, The New Yorker, which depicted two Japanese lovers enjoying life at a lonely beach. The boy did his best to capture the heart of the girl and assured her: "Of course I love you most of all, next to the Maru-Maru Company for which I work!"

Such a loyal attitude on the part of the Japanese worker assures him (not her) a life-long employment as mentioned in the Paper on page 7. Aware of this life long loyalty, the Company willingly provides him with continuous training and retraining. This training goes on well into middle career. The much greater mobility in the United States discourages such extensive investment for training employees. 8)

Given the objectives of post-war education as expressed in "Fukoku Kyohei", I am of the view that as a system, its education works rather well, that is as long as "the country is prosperous". and very little investment is reserved for the military.

Because of space limitation, I conclude the part on general observations and proceed to examining the facts introduced in the Paper.

COMPARING NOTES

1. Reform Under American Occupation

On page 5, it is pointed out that "after Japan was defeated in World War II, both the American Occupation authorities and a select group of liberal Japanese leaders who were asked to help in reforming the nation agreed that the educational system required fundamental change."

I would ...

I would submit that the situation was rather quite different, at least on the following two points.

(1) The Potsdam Declaration did not call for a fundamental change in the Japanese social and educational system, because it recognized the fact that Japan at one time -- prior to the rise of militarism -- already enjoyed a democratic system. Hence, the Potsdam Declaration called for the restoration of democracy and its attending social and educational policies.

(2) During the early days of the Occupation, the Japanese authorities-- liberal or otherwise - immediately went to work to do just that at their own initiative. They issued directives which preserved the Japanese education as it existed prior to the birth of militarism and direct intervention of the military into the educational policies. The directives called for the re-installation of "Japanese type democracy."

The most important directive was "Shin Nippon Kensetsu no Kyōiku Hōshin" (Educational Policy for the Construction of New Japan). The then Minister of Education, MAEDA Tamon pointed out that the enactment was carried out without any consultation with the Occupation authorities and the directive was entirely the product of autonomous Japanese initiative.

A strong negative reaction came from the Occupation authorities, causing it to be withdrawn. The Kyōiku Hōshin was found faulty on two counts. (1) It included the continuation of the so-called Kokutai Shugi (State Ideology) which stressed the interweaving relationship between the Emperor system and educational policy. (2) It failed to stress the need for separation of state and religion, which was one of the fundamental objectives of the Occupation.

Far from achieving an agreement, there was clearly a tug-of-war going on between the Occupation authorities and the Japanese government. The former called for the "construction of a democratic country", while the Japanese government stressed the need for the "re-construction of our democratic country." In the place of Kyōiku Hōshin, the Occupation authorities issued their own directives. 9)

2. The Mass Media

On page 9, Prof. Cummings observes in a positive tone about the heavy consumption of newspapers and increasingly widening audience of TV programs, etcetera. Here, I must submit, quantity does not mean quality. Most of the Japanese newspapers, for instance, are colorless. You read the editorial of one of them and you can be sure you read the views of the majority of the newspapers. Newspapers in Japan, with few exceptions, do not take a stand.

This is clearly a reflection of the educational process which discourages original thinking. On the other hand, special mention must be made of NHK and its Educational Channel which contribute significantly to the widening of knowledge among their audience.

3. Private Schools

On page 29, Prof. Cummings writes as follows.

"Most of the earliest private schools were established to realize a special educational goal cherished by their founders. The majority were founded by foreign missionary groups and benefited from the input of foreign funds and teachers. A few were established by local figures who wished to create independent men (Waseda) or women (Tsuda), or individuals with a creative and free spirit (Tamagawa Gakuin)."

I submit that the examples selected are facts. However, the three schools do not wholly reflect the real situation surrounding the establishment of these schools. Reading Kindaika to Kyōiku by Nagai Michio, it is made clear that the establishment of private schools was part of "civilizational choice" debated during the early years of Meiji Reformation. When one looks at the whole spectrum of intellectual confrontations of those years, I would select Waseda, Keiō, Dōshisha and Tokyo Shōgyō Gakkō (predecessor of Hitotsubashi Daigaku), and then mention Tsuda and Tamagawa Gakuin.

Nagai picked Ōkuma Shigenobu, the founder of Waseda as the pioneer of educating anti-establishment political thinkers, Fukuzawa Yukichi, the founder of Keiō as the pioneer of educating anti-feudal and democratic individuals, while Shibusawa Ei-ichi, the founder of the Tokyo Shōgyō Gakkō as the champion of education for entrepreneurs. While Niiijima, the founder of Dōshisha, was convinced that Japanese modernization was possible only through wide dissemination of Christianity. 10)

4. Rōnin phenomenon

The Ronin issue is brought up on page 31. Rōnin, of course, is practiced not only by highschool pupils, but also by college students as well. Not all college students graduate after four years of school attendance, although with very little effort, graduation is assured. According to Woronoff, quoting statistics of the Ministry of Education, among all the students who were admitted to four years colleges in April, 1969, those who graduated in March 1973 were 79.1%. If you add to that the ones who managed to graduate a year later, the figure rises to 87.9%.

While ...

While it is not known precisely, the graduation rate is estimated at something like 95%, all repeititors included. The rate for the United States is 70%, 88% in the United Kingdom, 44% in France and 52% in Germany.¹¹⁾

5. Is Higher Education Worth It?

On page 33 it is pointed out that many low to modest income families forego investment in higher education while the more affluent income families prepare to invest heavily to pay for higher education. It is interesting to note that the average Japanese does not see the problem in the same vein. They often point their finger to the British stating that contrary to the situation in Japan, chances for the common man is very limited.

Hugh Cortazzi, an outstanding Japanologist and a former British Ambassador to Japan reminded Japan that "the right background" and "financial ability" are the necessary pre-conditions for promotion to university education. In this respect Cortazzi underlines the findings of Prof. Cummings. The former British Ambassador further pointed out:

"It has been said that the most important thing for any Japanese child is to get on the right educational escalator at kindergarten level. If class is not a factor, money and education are, and in Britain we would think that in so far as class exists, it is increasingly being viewed as a question of money and education."¹²⁾

The high cost of higher education and the poor output it produces have given rise to great dissatisfaction among scholars as well as businessmen as well as industrialists. So much so that some have called for the abolition of universities, including the Tokyo University.¹³⁾

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The key message of Prof. Cumming's paper lies in the assertion that "the educational system is facing loss of legitimacy." This means, the widening disparity between the system's effectiveness in warming up youth with the required cognitive skills and motivation and its inability to provide equitable opportunities at the advanced levels (p. 37)

I would not describe this as an educational crisis. In a declining economy, as compared to the years of high economic growth, the competition for university education has become stiffer. Enterprises, burdened by surplus staff, no longer dole out scholarships as they used to. In fact, during the period of high economic growth, the term "ao-gari" was commonly used. This meant that enterprises entered into employment agreement with students years before graduation. They were also given financial support to complete their education.

One other factor which has made higher education less attractive is the ageing society. The average life expectancy of the Japanese woman as recorded in 1982 was 79,1 year as against 73,8 for man. In the year 1935, the figure for woman stood at 49. In fact, "jinsei go jū nen" (man's life span is but fifty years), as the Japanese saying goes, is no longer applicable today. According to government statistics, by the year 2000, one out of five Japanese will be over 60 years, healthy and still willing to face hard work! This situation makes demand on younger people smaller.

But as I mentioned above, a revitalization of the Japanese economy would solve the problem, at least in part. Another way-out would be to make use of these "gray manpower", rich in experience and expertise, in the service of developing countries within the context of economic and technological cooperation. Such a project has been started by Mr Takeshi WATANABE, former President of the Asian Development Bank, although the number of volunteers is still infinitesimal.

Further, it must be born in mind, as the Dutch proverb goes: "De boog kan niet altijd gespannen zijn!" The Japanese have been over-working in the past 40 years. There are signs of fatigue as illustrated by the increasing number of suicides, among school children and - interesting enough - business managers in the early forties! Some prefer to become 'drop-outs' of the race and choose to enjoy life in simplicity and quietness.

But when the world economy picks up again and Japan is surely to ride the waves, universities will again boom, irrespective the cost. Because under such conditions, higher education will pay. We will again observe the Japanese running faster than their counterparts in other industrialized countries, not to catch up with the West, but to become "Number One!" Provided, of course, Japan institutes a fundamental change in its educational philosophy. -

1. I was working at the Indonesian Embassy in Tokyo in the late sixties when Japan enjoyed a very high economic growth. I remember how difficult it was to recruit a Japanese employee. In those years, the system of "aogari" which provided scholarship to college students was widespread. The condition was that recipients must work for the enterprise extending the scholarship. Employment agreement was reached at a very early state of college years, hence "ao-gari".

2. Klaus Schleicher in Ecological vs. Purely Functional Concepts in Education and Educational Policy. Paper presented to Committee IV, 13th ICUS, Washington, D.C. 1984.

3. As an example, mention can be made about the lack of recognition that although techno-tronically speaking the world is moving fast towards globalism, culturally speaking it is moving towards regionalism. University curriculum has not yet paid sufficient attention to this new trend.

4. Morton Kaplan, Editor. Japan at the Turning Point - Prospects for the Coming Decade. Riverfield, Inc. Tokyo, 1981. Especially Chapter V which deals with Education and Culture in the Age of Internationalization.

5. See, for instance, Kobayashi Michinori on Kyoiku no Mitsu no Yakuwari - Senjo Kyoiku no Hansei in AKADEMI, Vol. 10, 1979, pp. 54 - 62. On page 59, he describes the education of post-war years as based on 'jiyu honin shugi' or nihilism. (Akademi was published by the Professors World Peace Academy of Japan, Tokyo)

See also Bunka Kaigi, No. 180, 1984 on "Kyōiku Kaikaku o Dō Kangaeru Ka". Prof. Shimizu Sokuo also uses the term nihilism in describing Japanese post-war education.

For reference in English, a British view may be of interest. See J. Woronoff, JAPAN: The Coming Social Crisis, Lotus Press, Tokyo, 1981. Of special interest is the Chapter on The World's Best - and Worst - Educational System. pp. 109 - 154.

6) NAGAI Michio, Some Thoughts on Modernization -- With a Special Emphasis on Education, (International (H)ouse of (J)apan of Japan Bulletin, Vol. 2, No: 1, Winter, 1982, pp. 1-4.

7. Morton Kaplan, Editor. Op.cit., pp. 69-70.

8. David MacEachron in What can America Learn from Japan, I H J Bulletin, Tokyo, Vol. 3, No: 3, Summer 1983, pp. 1 - 7, on p. 3.

9. For detailed description of this tug-of-war, see Takahashi Shiro, Senryoka no Kyoiku Kaikaku to Ken-etsu: Kyokasho, Kyoiku Zasshi ni Miru Ken-etsu no Jittai, in Bunka Kaigi (Tokyo), No: 182, 1984, pp.2-15.

10) Nagai Michio, Kindaika to Kvōiku, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 1974, 3rd Edition. See especially Chapter 3, Chishikijin no Seisan Ruuto, pp. 102 - 151.

11) J. Woronoff, op. cit., p. 123

12) Hugh Cortazzi, Class or Hierarchy - Britain and Japan, I H J Bulletin, Tokyo, Vol. 4, No. 2, Spring 1984, pp. 8-10.

13. See Matsushita Kohnosuke in Kuzureyuku Nippon o Dō Sokuu Ka, PHP Publications, Tokyo, 1974. Strong dissatisfaction was expressed about Tokyo University and its huge budget. Mr H. Ibuka, former President of SONY spoke in the same veins at a Seminar held to commemorate the Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of the University of Tsukuba, 1 November 1983.

Dissolution of universities, especially those specializing in the social sciences, was seriously discussed at a Roundtable discussion held by Bunka Kaigi, Tokyo. See Vol. 180, 1984. -