

A Study on a Significance of Interreligious Competency in Japanese School Education

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<Abstract>

In Japanese public education, there are no opportunities to learn religious education. Because we deeply regret the national Shintoism which led us into World War II. Moral education becomes strong nowadays, because of raising some problems of bullying in schools. The lack of religious knowledge gives us no ability to criticize a religion in general. Therefore, I think that religious knowledge should be set up as an element of culture in schools. Basically, religious education has contained faith and culture for a long time. However, it is necessary for Japanese to distinguish between growing faith and teaching knowledge of religions in public schools, because the former is prohibited in public school, but the latter is possible.

In order to assert of achievement of so-called “religious knowledge education” in public school, it should be explained several topics such as, situation of Japanese religious consciousness or attitude (chapter 1), discussions of significance of religious education in public schools after World War II (chapter 2), and relationship religious education and moral education in today’s public schools (chapter 3). After the explanation, I would like to consider of a significance of interreligious competency in public school in the future.

Introduction

Before World War II, Japanese educational foundation was imperial re-scription which was based on national Shintohism, one of the new religions in Japan, whose feature is the belief: Tennoh, the Kaiser, is God.

After World War II, the Japanese educational system was changed by General Headquarters into a democratic one. The result of this, any religious education in public school should be prohibited. Instead, moral education has been introduced since 1958. Therefore, there are no opportunities to learn religious knowledge in public schools. (it is surely possible to learn religious education in other private religious schools.) Normally, most people are accustomed to traditional religions (Buddhism or Shintohism) through some local festivals or family customs. But it is rarely to learn its discipline or history in a formal way, like Sunday School in Christianity.

Modern Japanese public education has emphasized on moral education since 1950s. At that time, Japan was recovered in the international society, because of participation as a member of the United Nations. This made Japan's appeal for the necessity to ask ourselves, what we ought to be as Japanese in this world. It could be also said that it would be an aspect of revival of Japanese Nationalism.

In 1999, the Law of the National Flag and Hymns was approved. At an official ceremony among every public school, the national flag (Hinomaru) should be raised and the national hymn (Kimigayo) should be sung. In Tokyo, many teachers protested against this law, because they were afraid that such performance could stimulate nationalism, which led Japanese to commit World War II. In short, they got punished by the committee of education in Tokyo.

In 2002, a new material, "Kokoro no noto" (workbook of morality) was introduced in our public education at the primary and secondary schools. One of the assumptions of this material, the Ministry of Education Culture, Sports, Sci-

ence and Technology, tries to reduce serious problems of bullying (Ijime) in schools.

Japanese moral education has been totally separated from religious education, after World War II. But one of the main contents of the education is the relationship between noble or spiritual being, nature and I. The basic structure of moral education was formed in 1958. In this year, a policy of Japanese standard curriculum was first constructed. It was concerned with the issue of “noble or spiritual being”, the concept of this could come from a feeling of awe (“Numinose” by Rudolf Otto). Although if the officers and researcher would mind such a philosophical or religious background, this sentence does not have any connection with religious meaning.

Such circumstances of Japanese education, even social elite or highly educated people have poor knowledge of religion. In 1995 Tokyo, a religious sect, Ohmu-Shinrikyo, scattered chemical poison gas, “Sarin” in the subway and many people were hurt and died. That was terrorism that we have never experienced in a big city. Some of the members of this sect graduated from a very famous university. And some studied chemistry in graduate school. As for them, knowledge of science has no connection with their ethics and sense of religion.

1. Japanese non-religious attitude

In general, most Japanese has neither religious faith nor belonging to any religious institution, such as churches or temples. They call themselves as Non-religious people. However, it doesn't mean the same as “atheist” in western culture. They don't believe God, but not deny the existence of God. Their consciousness of God is different from western way of thinking. It could be said that Japan is a polytheistic country. People accept many Gods in daily life, but

they don't decide one religion and also they don't take responsibility for their behavior. They just give offering and pray. That's all! They don't feel any kind of guilty, even though their wedding and funeral ceremony were by different religious way held.

In other words, most Japanese as "Non-religious" people are not committed in any established religion such as Christianity, or Buddhism, but they have religious feeling, or sentiment for nature or something of spirituality, which is not able to be organized in any rigid form or discipline. According to Aman, professor of religion in Meijigakuin University, such a feeling or sentiment is defined in "Shizen-Shuhkyoh" (Natural Religion). He says that many Japanese have a religion as Shizen-Shuhkyoh, although they do not believe Shohsoh-Shuhkyoh" (established Religion).

He also explains some features of "non-religion" as shizen-shuhkyoh.

Firstly, shizen-shuhkyo has a tendency of "Heibon (平凡)". It is said by "Heibon-shikoh": It means seeking for Normality. Aman quotes words by a famous anthropologist, Kunio Yanagida,

Ancient Japanese wanted normal Happiness in four seasons and every morning and every night¹

This normality always gets along with nature on earth. One of uniqueness of Japanese climate is diversity of four seasons. At making poem, such as Haiku, there are many special expression in connected with seasons: "Kigo (季語)". For example, Uguisu (spring), Kingyo (summer), and so on. A Japanese tradition of way of mind is deeply related with feeling beauty and fragileness, even short-lived. Our happiness comes from such a feeling. A typical example is "Hanami" (enjoying party with cherryblossom in spring). In general, a period that cherry trees blooms very short, a week or so. During blooming people get together and have a party. A couple of years ago, broadcast announced when

local cherry trees would bloom.

Secondly, some believer of shizen-shuhkyo admit that Gods are very near us and familiar with our normal life. They easily call some “God” and even make a shrine for him, when a person has a superior power. Such a “God” is extremely different from a transcendent being, such as Christ.

Thirdly, not only in “Shizen-Shuhkyoh”, but also Japanese way of mind has no consciousness of “existence of the other person”. In other words, Japanese has no “I” identity as a meaning of western culture. Therefore, there are no identity for “You”. It means that Japanese has no ontology as I and You relationship. I as a being that is not standing against You. A typical Japanese community consists of such a collective I get together. It calls “Mura-shakai” (Village society). It is “normal” for most Japanese to belong to such a village.

In short, the Japanese non-religious attitude is based on a consciousness of relationship which has a feature of Normality and seeking for non-transcendent God in village society.

2. Discussion of religious sentiment after World War II

Japanese religious attitude tends to be widely acceptable for every religion, excepting for breaking “Mura-relationship”. Therefore, the word “sentiment” or “feeling” is important to keep such a relationship. In this chapter, I would introduce three topics in concerned with religious sentiment after World War II.

Firstly, Akio Saki, a scholar of religion and Marxism, described religious sentiment in a column, “Feeling Drink-Sake Education (酒の気分教育)” in 1948.

In the past, a country emphasized the importance of “Sake (Alcoholic)” education. Sake has an enormous influence in life so it should therefore be

respected in education. But there are many different kinds of Sake. When Sake is chosen and another is not, it becomes difficult to keep fairness. One wise governor designed “a feeling of Sake education”. The purpose of the education was to give the feeling of Sake without actually drinking it”²

From the above Akio’s ironic comments about religious education we can find that religious sentiment is in itself a sign of ambiguity with the Japanese consideration of religion. He shows us its problem using Sake as a metaphor. Religious sentiment has no essence of religion. It is a feeling, or surface of each religion. If man would teach religious sentiment getting rid of its original essence such as written in doctrine, he would get a crooked image of religion.

Secondly, in 1966, “IMAGE OF EXPECTABLE PERSON (期待される人間像)” by the Central educational Committee says an assertion of feeling awe (or reverence) toward an origin of life. It says,

Every religious sentiment comes from a feeling of reverence about the origin of life. We did not make our life by ourselves. The origin of our life was dependent on our parent’s lives, other people’s lives, other human’s lives. Essentially, life is not only physical, but also spiritual. Therefore, real religious sentimental understanding is the feeling of reverence for such an origin of life, and it is something holy. Human dignity and love are based on this understanding and real gratitude and true happiness comes from it.³

In 1986 Murata says such concept of “*Ikei no nen* (畏敬の念, reverence)” is a foundation of moral education for Japanese.⁴ Its original consciousness came from Japanese feeling of Gods in all nature, such as mountains, rivers, plants and trees. After the transmission of Buddhism to Japan, we also felt the

existence of Buddhist characteristics amongst nature. This sensibility is the foundation of moral education as the reverence for all life.⁵

Thirdly, in 2002, the Japanese government starts a new moral education as educational policy “*Kokoro no kyohiku* (心の教育, education of mind)”⁶, based on the reverence of life. This moral education is not apparently connected with a religious education, but its method seems to have “religious sentiment” elements. For example, its material is called “Kokoro-no-nohto”, whose appearance is beautifully coloured and there are many attractive pictures and photographs in the notebook. Such a visual effect is very efficient for human unconsciousness. One of the representative directors is Hayao Kawai who was the most famous scholar of the unconsciousness psychology of Jung.

It seems to be crucial that the moral education in modern Japan uses such a “sentimental” method in public school.

3. Critique against the policy “*Kokoro no Kyohiku*” and suggestions of interreligious education

As the above mentioned, “*Kokoro no Kyohiku*” is especially embodied in a moral education by a “*kokoro no nohto*”. Some scholars criticize against such a moral education that is in danger to limit internal freedom of the human mind. For example, Shimamura, a Japanese psychologist, says “The government makes Japanese people stop thinking”.⁷ Its purpose is to educate people who could accept easily what good is, which is authorized as “good” by the government. A *Kokoro no nohto* is a helpful material in order to achieve this aim. He also criticizes, such an education encourages “rubbing the way of non-thinking into our mind unconsciously”⁸, and the action “rubbing” should repeat again like the learning process of foreign languages. In his opinion, this policy comes from a kind of “new liberalism” in the U.S., whose aim is to realize a structure in a society, such as obedient robots as most people and a small number of

“elite” who leads “robots”.

In addition, if a moral education would be replaced as a required subject like other subjects, it could be possible like during World War II that the Japanese government urge students to put on some particular values, like a “nationalism” in the moral education, getting along with government’s policy. This is a main issue of today’s moral education in Japan.

I assume that it should be considered to avoid developing this moral education which is deeply based on religious sentiment or a feeling of reverence, because the moral education has a problematic element of violation of the fundamental right of faith and mind as a human being. Instead of this education, I suggest introducing interreligious education into public schools in Japan. An “interreligious education”⁹ has a several kinds of features which are not clearly distinguished with each other. However, it is possible to make the following three types. The type 1 is “neutral”: between religion A and religion B. In this type, man does neither belong to A nor B. He does not take any standpoint. The type 2 is “particular”: Man belongs to religion A and he tries to understand B. The type 3 is “particular non-religious”: Man does not believe in religions, but his standpoint in particular is “non-religious”.

The difference between Type1 (neutral) and Type3 (particular non-religious) is, whether one chooses a particular standpoint or not. There are some conditions to realize and succeed in interreligious education. For example, in all standpoints, man should respect others, religious or non-religious. We can find other rules in principles of intercultural philosophy by Mall¹⁰ and Wimmer¹¹, or “a Global ethic” by Hans Küng.¹²

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it seems to me that Japanese school education needs to have an opportunity to teach not only moral, but also religious values. In our modern life traditional religious values, such as Buddhism or Shintoism, are outworn. On the contrary, capitalism is worldwide growing. It is important to analyze and consider the interreligious education in order to grow a competency to criticize oppressive government leading the *Kokoro no kyohiku* as a reverence based on moral education. Then students should keep their internal freedom, which they can choose their own spiritual standpoints in their life.

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Notes

¹ Yanagida (1968), p.171

² Saki (1948), p.91

³ Sugawara (1999), p.95

⁴ *ibid.*, p.100

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Kokoro no kyohiku (心の教育), according to 2002 White Paper on Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (文部科学省白書平成14年度), “Yutaka na Kokoro (Richness in Mind)” has following six elements.

- 1) The sensibility to be inspired by beauty and nature
- 2) A conscientious mind to value justice and fairness
- 3) A fundamental sense of ethics to cherish life and to respect human rights
- 4) Willingness to make a social contribution and consideration for others
- 5) Independence, self-restraint, and responsibility
- 6) Tolerance of living together with others and of the heterogeneity

(Chapter 3, Section 2. To Cultivate “Rich Humanity”)

From this point of view, “Kokoro no kyohiku” could be embodied as follows: improving moral education, enough activities through actual experiences, improving reading, encouraging the mind to respect human rights, encouraging the mind to love nature and culture, establishment of human relationships through activities

(cf. Kajita Eiichi: Kokoro no Kyohiku toha nanika? [what is education of mind?], in: Kokoro no kyohiku no kiso/kihon, Ningenkyohikukennkyuhkyohgikai, ed., Kyohiku forum No. 32, 2003)

⁷ Shimamura (2005), p.57

⁸ *ibid.*, pp.13 – 14

⁹ As Nipkow writes, interreligious education (inter-religious education) originally comes from the concept of “interreligiöse Erziehung” in German. (Nipkow (2005), S.367)

And he explains that at the beginning of 1990s, the concept of the “interreligious learning (das interreligiöse Lernen)” appeared. Its central meaning is, religions are in the deepest inside of traditions of each cultures. There are three goals as follows:

- 1) Understanding (Verstehen) : it ought to be learned on the process of systematic learning. It needs the combination between “self-understanding” and “others-understanding”.
- 2) Taking many-sided perspectives : it ought to be formed with the interreligious ability to make a decision on the other point of view.
- 3) Changing a behavior (Verhaltensänderungen) and minds to make a new way (Handlungsbereitschaften), when man faces conflicts and keeping his internal culture (innere Kulture).

(ibid., S.371 – 372)

Additionally, interreligious education is described as the following learning.

Interreligious learning (interreligiöse Lernen) is,

- Expanding knowledge on the face of changing the world and helpful wisdom of religions on earth.
- Forming of the identity as reflexions of subjective, worldly phenomena and introduced into balance of identity.
- Growing communicative competency toward the demands of the future.

(cf. Jamal (1996), S.107, Joachim (2011), S.114)

¹⁰ Mall (2000), p. 5

“We cannot fix the nature of intercultural philosophy just per definition. Likewise, as stated previously, it is also wrong to misread intercultural philosophy as simply a reaction or a shift made in the face of today’s de facto pluralistic philosophical tradition. (...) In its positive import, intercultural philosophy is the name of a philosophical conviction, attitude, and insight. No philosophy is *the* philosophy, and no culture is *the* culture.”

¹¹ Franz Martin Wimmer : *Interkulturelle Philosophie : Eine Einführung*, WUV, Facultas Verlags- und Buchhandels AG, Wien, 2004

¹² Hans Küng was a priest of diocese Basel, professor of fundamental theology in Tübingen University. He has begun the project of “a Global Ethic” since 1990. In 1993, the declaration of a Global Ethic was offered, which was based on three fundamental principles as follows :

No peace under the nations without peace under the religions.

No peace under the religions without dialogue between the religions.

No dialogue between the religions without fundamental research in the religions.

According to the introduction of the declaration, “a Global Ethic” was defined as “an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life”. A Global Ethic could be an absolute

minimum of ethics for mankind to live on earth. However, it doesn't mean that a Global Ethic is a new ethic in order to be forced on other existent religions. It should be applied not only for religious people, but also non-religious people. (cf. *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, Parliament of the World's Religions, 4 September 1993, Chicago, U.S.A., Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel (1993))

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