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Dong Kwang KIM

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The State and Future Prospects of Global Education in Japan: A Perspective from the Special Course for Global Human Resource Development at Okayama University

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Abstract

In this paper, I aim to portray the state and future prospects of global education in Japan from the perspective I have gained from my engagement in the operation of the Special Program for Global Human Resource Development at Okayama University. While doing so, I hope I can bring some clarity to such hot but ambiguous concepts or activities as globalization, global education, global human resources development, etc. Also, I will offer some suggestions thoughtful considerations of which I believe will lead to richer rewards from the joint endeavors of hardworking people at Okayama University.

Keywords: globalization, global education, global human resources development, Special Program for Global Human Resource Development at Okayama University

I. Introduction

Since coming to Okayama University a few years ago, I have worked in two different units: The Center for Global Partnerships and Education and the Institute for Global Human Resource Development. For the first few months, I was engaged in the CAMPUS Asia project while serving at the same time as the head of the Study Abroad Section of the above Center. Then, I obtained a full professorial position which became newly available at the university's fledgling Institute of Global Human Resource Development. Even after I was fully engaged with the work at the Institute, I continued to serve as the head of the Study Abroad Section for some time.

I organized two English summer schools at Okayama University—the first as part of the Okayama University CAMPUS Asia project and the second in an attempt to incorporate the summer school topics into the Special Program's curriculum in cooperation with other universities in Northeast Asia and the United States—which were titled respectively *The Common Good: East Asian Regional Integration* and *Seeking the Common Good and Securing the Future of East Asia*. These engagements with the CAMPUS Asia project and the Special Program for Global Human Resource Development at

Okayama University, as we shall see, may be subsumed under “global education.”

In this paper, I aim to portray the state and future prospects of global education in Japan from the perspective I have gained from my engagement in the operation of the Special Program for Global Human Resource Development at Okayama University. Also, I will offer some suggestions thoughtful considerations of which I believe will bear richer fruits from our hardwork together. In this process, I hope to bring some clarity to such hot but amibiguous concepts or activities as globalization, global education, global human resources development, etc., for I have often seen people—teachers, administrative staff, and students alike—using the terms without clear understanding. But, first, let’s look at the increasing importance of education in the age of globalization.

II. Education in the Age of Globalization

“On one occasion Aristotle was asked,” reports Diogenes Laërtius, “how much educated men were superior to those uneducated.” He answered: “As much as the living are to the dead.”¹ I have yet to see utterances that express the power of education more emphatically than this. The remark Diogenes Laërtius attributes to Aristotle stands at the very beginning of the essay by David E. Bloom, an economist at Harvard, titled “Globalization and Education.”² Standing alone apart from the main body of the essay, the quote may be Bloom’s decorative motto reflecting his sense of aesthetics; but it speaks volumes for his profound conviction that in the age of globalization education is a decisive factor that divides the haves from the have-nots, the powerful from the weak, and the successful from the failed.

Bloom’s is one of the ten essays that form the book titled *Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium*.³ The book, the first of its kind, grew out of a seminar at Harvard in which anthropologists, brain scientists, economists, educators, and political scientists examined, comprehensively and thoroughly, the impact of globalization on the world’s nations and their societies and citizens alike in culture, economy, environment, laws, and politics. In the views of all the participants of the seminar (hence authors of the book), globalization defines our era. Globalization is deeply implicated in nearly all of the major issues of the new millennium: terrorism to the environment, HIV-AIDS to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), free trade to protectionism, population growth to poverty and social justice, etc. Globalization is “what happens when the movement of people, goods, or ideas among countries and regions accelerates” (Coatsworth 2004).

Throughout history, human beings drew the meaning of their lives from their immediate surroundings—places where they were born and raised, families and kinfolks, clubs they belong to, and companies where they work. They even drew the meaning from local worldviews and religions.

Today, the world is another place. While human lives continue to be lived in local realities, these realities are increasingly being challenged and integrated into larger global networks of relationships (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hillard 2004).

The lives and experiences of youth growing up today will be linked to economic realities, social processes, technological and media innovations, and cultural flows that traverse national boundaries with ever greater momentum (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hillard 2004). Of late, the world has witnessed two unusual events—the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and Brexit. These events are quite symbolic of the fact that living in a global network of relationships is not necessarily easy. In fact, Coatsworth (2004) has shown the cost of globalization when different countries, cultures and peoples came in close contact on the Latin American continent. These include a long list of human and environmental problems, ranging from the massive, unplanned, and unhealthy proliferation of urban settlements to massive air and water pollution, extensive deforestation, and the unregulated depletion of nonrenewable natural resources, inequality shock such as coercive systems of labor and the growth of the unconscionable wage gap between unskilled and skilled workers (Coatsworth 2004).

The profoundly contradictory history of past globalizations, as in the case of Latin America, makes it crucial that policy makers, producers, citizens, and especially educators undertake conscious efforts to better understand and manage the forces of globalization (Coatsworth 2004). Not all effects of globalization are negative, however. Coatsworth also has shown that those who have successfully ridden the billows of globalization have proved much better off than before. Globalization has an even greater potential to improve our lives, and education is at the center of this. The important tasks education is entrusted with in the age of globalization are: to shape cognitive skills, interpersonal sensibilities, and cultural sophistication of children and youth whose lives will be both engaged in local contexts and responsive to larger transnational processes (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hillard 2004).

III. Global Education

We are now living in a globally linked world—events and decisions made far away impact us in our neighborhood and nation. The forces of globalization are changing the way we live. On one hand, there is greater integration, (e.g. the European Union, transnational corporations, pop music and fashion), but also greater fragmentation, (e.g. resurgence of nationalism, ethnic and religious conflicts, critical social movements) (Hicks 2003).⁴ In recent years, notes Jenkins, a cultural critic who also contributed an essay to the book *Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium*, it has become increasingly difficult to study what's happening to a nation's—say America's—culture

without understanding its global context (Jenkins 2004). One can no longer make sense of everyday life unless this is set in the context of living in a global society (Hicks 2003).

In a situation like this,

Teachers often talk about the need for a global dimension in the curriculum and the ability, therefore, of students to take a global perspective on contemporary events and issues. This is different from the term ‘international’ which refers to connections between countries, as in ‘international relationships’. The key organising concept is interdependence, which highlights the complex web of interrelationships existing between people, places, issues and events in the world today. Exploration of local-global connections is at the heart of global education, since these dimensions are inextricably related and relevant to all subject areas (Hicks 2009).

Thus, Hicks (2009), a leading British expert on global education, defines it as the kind of education which:

- enables people to understand the links between their own lives and those of people throughout the world
- increasing the understanding of the economic, cultural, political and environmental influences which shape our lives
- develops the skills, attitudes and values which enable people to work together to bring about change and take control of their own lives
- works towards achieving a more just and sustainable world in which power and resources are more equitably shared.

Echoing many experts’ views of the new educational agendas in the changed world of interconnection and interdependence, Hicks (2003) identifies the four core elements of global education. Global education has:

1. Issues dimension—This embraces five major problem areas (and solutions to them): inequality/equality; injustice/justice; conflict/peace; environmental damage/care; alienation/participation
2. Spatial dimension—This emphasises the exploration of the local–global connections that exist in relation to these issues, including the nature of both interdependency and dependency
3. Temporal dimension—This emphasises exploration of the interconnections that exist between past, present and future in relation to such issues and in particular scenarios of preferred futures
4. Process dimension—This emphasises a participatory and experiential pedagogy which explores differing value perspectives and leads to politically aware local–global citizenship

The progression of education from emphasizing the contents-based teaching to the highlighting of interdependence is quite relevant and only fitting in our world of multiple and global linkages. In this vein, the two English summer schools I organized at Okayama University in connection to the university's CAMPUS Asia project and the Special Program for Global Human Resource Development can be subsumed under the category of global education. Two teams of academics including myself—first from China, Japan, and Korea, and second from Australia, Japan, Korea, and the United Kingdom—taught such diverse topics as the concern of global migration, legal systems of East Asian countries, transnational women's movements, higher education in the age of globalization, and the ways for peaceful co-existence, particularly in the Asia and the Pacific Regions.

IV. Global Human Resources Development as a Form of Global Education

In recent years, the term “global human resources” has become a buzzword.⁵ Education for global human resources development seems to pass as a dominant form of global education now. How global human resources development came to dominate as a policy initiative or an educational practice in Japan can be explained through the conceptual tool of “assemblage.”⁶ Borrowing from the modernist aesthetics of artists, such as Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp, Gilles Deleuze applied the concept of assemblage to building what may be described as a theory of process ontology. It is through Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari's appropriation (2008) for their ontological theory that assemblage came to be embraced by virtually all substantive middle-range theories that employ the concept for their recent research projects (Rizvi & Lingard 2011). These theories view assemblage as the source of emergent properties of productive processes. Assemblages are the causally productive result of an intersection of multiple open systems, and their properties are emergent in the sense that the concept is deployed in a logic that is not part of—and whose results are hence not foreseeable—in the light of either one or the other system considered in isolation.

Japan's economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s had encouraged a gradual increase of international students at Japanese universities: 3,003 in 1964, 4,444 in 1970, and 5,671 in 1976 (MEXT, 2001). In 1971, the OECD report entitled “Reviews of National Policies for Education: Japan” suggested that, with Japan as a developed country, the Japanese government and universities should take greater responsibility for international contributions in education. With this report as a turning point, the then Prime Minister, Nakasone, formulated a strategy (the Provisional Council on Educational Reform) for accepting more overseas students, which developed in time as Plan 100,000 which targeted 100,000 foreign students by 2000.

Even around 1980, Japan started a full-scale discussion of the internationalization of education in

face of the rapid expansion of exportation of Japanese high-technology products. Then the prosperity that Japan enjoyed during the period of the “bubble economy” (roughly 1980s) came to an end in the beginning of the 1990s, adding more reasons to Japan’s struggle to develop human resources suited to the globalized economy and labor market. Thereafter, when the IDP Education (International Development Program), an Australian agency for supporting international students, published a report forecasting the number of international students in the world in 2025 as 7.2 million, Japan tried to follow this global game of acquiring more international students, and set a new plan in 2008 to accept 300,000 international students by 2020 (Yonezawa 2014). Whereas the 100,000 Plan was understood as Japan’s overseas assistance to developing countries particularly in East Asia, they felt need to develop global human resources and the 300,000 Plan is an initiative meant to make a more commercial use of higher education in Japan.

Even before all these, Japan seems to have used higher education mainly as a tool to achieve economic development. Green (2016) notes that the primary goal of Japan’s policy toward all levels of education has always been the development of “human resources (*jinzai*),” ready to be trained and adjusted quickly to the demands of Japanese industry. His observation follows the footsteps of McVeigh who, acknowledging that “education is tied to economic development everywhere,” argued that Tokyo’s education policy, in particular, is deeply interwoven with the interests of Japanese business (to the point of being determined by them) in its demands for universities to prepare *jinzai*. In the early part of this century, to follow the arguments of McVeigh and Green, the concept *jinzai* has been simply modified into “global human resources” (*Global jinzai*). Now the final bit of assemblage that establishes global human resources development as the dominant form of global education in Japan comes from the Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development set up in 2012.

The official use of the term “global human resources” traces back to a report by the Global Human Resource Development Committee of the Industry-Academia Partnership for Human Resource Development (2010), jointly released by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The definition provided by the report was long and cumbersome; it was more an illustration of abilities required for global human resources than a definition.⁷ A year later, in 2011, the Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development (hereafter the Council), an advisory council directly under the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, was established⁸ and gave a more streamlined definition of global human resources (Yonezawa 2014).

The definition of global human resources that the Council (2012) gave includes:

Factor I: Linguistic and communication skills

Factor II: Self-direction and positiveness, a spirit for challenge, cooperativeness and flexibility, a sense of responsibility and mission

Factor III: Understanding of other cultures and a sense of identity as a Japanese national

To sustain a well-advanced economy, Japanese enterprises felt the need to expand their businesses further into the global market. As critics note, the concept of “global human resources” used in the government documents is directly related to the national, economic, and social development of Japan. The “bubble economy” burst in the beginning of the 1990s, which increased the need for human resources who can speak English and work globally, coupled with the dwindling workforce due to the low birth rate, and the prospect of selling higher education as value-added products to increasing number of outbound students from all over the world particularly from East Asia—all these factors played a significant role in the assemblage of global human resources development as the dominant form of global education in Japan.

METI and industries started to require universities and institutions of higher education to make efforts in improving the basic generic skills for business workers. MEXT also stressed the importance of education reforms for assuring learning outcomes suitable for university graduates. In response to the leaders of universities and industries who also supported the idea of fostering Japanese youth to be more internationally competitive human resources, MEXT provided the Project for Promoting Global Human Resources Development in 2012 to support leading practices among universities and selected 11 university-wide programs and 31 faculty/school-based programs. The project was awarded to universities that proposed to make strong efforts for introducing international programs that include many courses and/or subjects to be taught in English. Most of the programs were meant to focus on giving students incentives and support to study abroad through educational programs and academic and career support (Yonezawa 2014).

At any rate, the above definition is the most authoritative one that the majority of Japanese institutions of higher education, including Okayama University, are following. Although Okayama University was not selected for the Project for Promoting Global Human Resources Development, its leaders took the initiative to create an educational program along the line of the above definition of “global human resources.” Thus was born in 2014 the Institute of Global Human Resource Development at Okayama University, which now offers the Special Program for Global Human Resource Development.

V. Critique of Education for Global Human Resources Development

In his highly influential paper, “On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge,” Basil Bernstein (1971) referred to curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation as the three message systems of schooling. He used the notion of “message system” to name those aspects of schooling which have the greatest socialization impact, which links schools and their message systems to the broader culture and the reproduction of that culture and associated social system. He observed that “How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and principles of social control” (ibid.: 47). At this juncture, it may be meaningful to review the Bernsteinian three message system in the Special Course for Global Human Resource Development at Okayama University.

The human resources that the Institute of Global Human Resource Development at Okayama University wishes to produce are those who possess the five cardinal values: rigorous spirit, general education, communicative ability, insights, and professional knowledge. Courses have been designed to cultivate students’ ability to think logically and critically, engage in problem-solving, foster creativity and originality, exercise prudence, develop artistic talents, be able to plan and work in teams, acquire an analytic mind, and obtain professional knowledge backed up by the ability to communicate it in English. The curriculum consists of several English subjects (called SPAcE the Special Program for Academic English), Global Core 1 Subjects, Global Core 2 Subjects, a Short-Term Summer/Spring Study Abroad, and a Long-Term Study Abroad or an Overseas Internship. The Global Core 1 Subjects include Intercultural Communication, Communication Development, Understanding of Japanese Culture, etc. The Global Core 2 Subjects include so-called Global Studies 1 and 2, which are mainly the subjects designated by the faculties of the Special Course’s students belonging to their major fields of study.⁹ Of late, Global Studies 3 was added to the repertoire of the Global Core 2 Subjects.

The Special Program at Okayama University shares a great affinity in curriculum and value orientations with those programs at other national universities in Japan with similar global human resources development programs.¹⁰ But, in terms of curriculum development, the Special Program seems to lead the pack because, to begin with, the curriculum was designed by the visionary leaders who saw the great applicability of the liberal arts or humanities for global education. And the curriculum is constantly being adjusted and evolving with development of courses such as “Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Innovation” and “Global Studies 3,” which features a series of lectures by scholars, diplomats, business people, and experts in international cooperation at NGO’s under the framework of what constitutes global leadership.

Now more than three years in my current position, I can look back—and forward—to my work at

the Institute of Global Human Resource Development and suggest some ideas on how best to go about it. In my view, Global Core Subjects are really the mainstay of the Special Course that has the potential of delivering the kind of global education that Hicks and other educationists envisioned. Also, I think too much emphasis is placed on raising the students' scores in various types of English tests. Furthermore, too much energy of both academic and administrative staff is spent on helping students study abroad whether for a Short-Term Summer/Spring Study Abroad or a Long-Term Study Abroad or an Overseas Internship. While pursuing these immediate goals, I sometimes wonder if the Special Course is simply chasing after numbers.

Also, the Special Course is not faring as well as it should with regards to the other two Bernsteinian messages on the systems of schooling: pedagogy, and evaluation. Usually, teaching takes a back seat to the administrative duty in the operation of the Special Course. In a way, the operation of the Special Course requires too much bureaucratic effort to effect any meaningful results from the educational endeavors of its stakeholders—the university leaders, concerned academic and administrative staff, students and their parents. Of course, it is not the university's fault alone because it is following by and large the definition and goals of global education (aka global human resources development) set by the government (MEXT, METI, etc). When teaching or pedagogy suffers, evaluation suffers too. Students are not necessarily evaluated on the quality of learning, and experiences, while teachers are also not necessarily evaluated on the quality of teaching and their performances. The Special Program will do well to reorient itself to global education that cultivates a sense of global citizenship, which at the moment I feel is inadequate. Of course, this examination is more of a theoretical diagnosis, and any implications or suggestions arising therefrom may or may not be practicable in the current circumstances due to the restraints under which the university and its units must operate.

VI. Concluding Remark

The education for global human resources development is overly dependent on the human capital model of education, a model that trains and uses Japanese people as tools for the national, economic, and social development of Japan. This model misses out a lot on the potentials of global civic education. The education for global human resources development conspicuously lacks the grace to let the Japanese people to learn to live a good individual life. It is be high time to shift the gear into the capabilities approach, which is a better model of global education because it provides civic and personal education, as well as catering to the human capital model of education. In the final analysis, the education for global human resources development, at its best, is no more or no less than the liberal arts education with global awareness and perspective. Being faithful to the aim

of liberal arts education is the best way to insure the future success of global human resources development in Japan.

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¹ See Diogenes Laërtius, Aristotle, 9. - Book 5: The Peripatetics, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (c. 200 A.D.).

² Contained in Suarez-Orozco, M. & Qin-Hillard, D.B. (eds) (2004) *Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

³ Suarez-Orozco, M. & Qin-Hillard, D.B. (eds) (2004)

⁴ Even in East Asia where countries voice different—and often contentious—opinions on the issues of identity, colonial settlement, and contemporary politics involving nation states and territories, East Asian countries are cooperating—better in the economic than in the political areas, although cooperation in the latter is also taking place. Realizing the economic and political realities of the contemporary world, leaders of the region's countries have taken many initiatives to form a more systematic community in the region. See Kim (2016).

⁵ In 2016, a Google search of the Japanese-language version of the term (*Global jinzai*) yielded over 3 million references (Green 2016).

⁶ For illustrations of application of "assemblage" to explaining higher education policy shifts in Australia and Korea, see Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2011) and Kim (2016).

⁷ See the Figure 1. Abilities Commonly Required for Global Human Resources on p. 38 of Yonezawa (2014).

⁸ The Council was composed of a wide range of ministers, namely the Chief Cabinet Secretary; the Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare; the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry; and the Minister of State for National Policy, newly appointed under the Cabinet led by the Democratic Party of Japan (Yonezawa 2014).

⁹ The Special Course for Global Human Resource Development is a minor program that students participate in on top of their major studies. Established in 2014, as of this writing there are about 350 students from the 11 faculties of Okayama University matriculated to the program over the years.

¹⁰ Kyoto University and Tohoku University have their equivalents to Okayama University's Special

Course for Global Human Resource Development and their curriculum is fairly similar to the one at Okayama University (Personal chats with colleagues from the universities).