

John Dewey in Japanese Educational Thought by Victor Nobuo Kobayashi, Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan, School of Education, 1964, v + 198 pp. \$2.50.

It is most appropriate that Professor Kobayashi's *John Dewey in Japanese Educational Thought* is being introduced in the issue of *Educational Perspectives* devoted to a discussion of East-West relations in education, for there is widespread agreement in the claim that Dewey's philosophy, whether we agree with it or not, rightly or wrongly, has exerted a profound influence on not only the West, but also the East; not only American education, but also foreign education. To support this claim, quotation after quotation could be cited, of which the following is a representative example:

The impact of Dewey's philosophy, both in America and throughout the world, has already been noted. His books on education have been widely read and have been translated into a dozen or more foreign languages—even into such tongues as Turkish, Arabic, Japanese, Polish, and Bohemian. School systems in all of these areas have at one time or another undergone to some extent a reform of traditional practices in line with Dewey's suggestions, and in America the progressive-education movement has become one of the most powerful forces in secondary education. Rarely, if ever, has one man during his own lifetime seen his efforts crowned with such success. (Robert F. Davidson, *Philosophies Men Live by*, New York: The Dial Press, 1952, p. 292.)

While generalized statements of this nature which give testimony to the widespread influence of Dewey can be multiplied manifold, unfortunately the same cannot be said for studies which delve into the validity of the claim. "Dewey is frequently said sig-

nificantly to have influenced education in different parts of the world, but only a few students have investigated intensively into this matter." (p. 13) Professor Kobayashi's book makes a significant contribution in filling this void.

The problem which confronts an investigator attempting to assess the possible influence of the ideas of a given person on society is whether the ideas give rise to changes in society, or changes in society give rise to new ideas. This problem in the educational context—namely, whether the schools lead society in bringing about social change or follow society and incorporate the societal demands brought about by social change—is well-known to educators. Professor Kobayashi begins his study by clearly stating his position on this issue by quoting favorably Dewey's statement that, although philosophy is an outgrowth and expression of the times and sustains the closest connections with the history of culture and in this sense reflects culture, philosophy is not merely a reflection of culture but also affects the future development of culture. This basic assumption is extended to include philosophy of education and the process of education itself.

Philosophic Evaluation

Having clarified the role that philosophy plays, we are confronted with another problem in the conduct of a study on the influence of a philosophy on education. Namely, how is "influence" to be assessed? If we were to follow Dewey's position consistently, the answer would be the extent to which actual day-to-day classroom practice is affected. While the investigation into what changes were brought about in classroom practice as a result of a given philos-

ophy may be highly important in determining the effect of a given philosophic position and would be highly desirable, this inquiry would be most difficult and would require very extended investigations. Classroom practices differ from school to school and from teacher to teacher even in the most regimented schools and similar classroom practices may stem from differing philosophic roots—these factors, among others, suggest the difficulty involved in appraising a philosophic position in terms of its effects on classroom practices of an educational system.

In view of this fact, it is quite understandable that Professor Kobayashi's "study is limited to the impact of Dewey in educational thought; it is not primarily concerned with the role of Dewey's theories in actual school practices in present-day Japan." (p. 8). By the use of extensive primary and secondary sources in both Japanese and English (which are listed in excellent bibliographies in the appendices), individual and group interviews of American and Japanese educators familiar with Dewey's thought in the Japanese educational context, and numerous school visits, Professor Kobayashi has collected data to trace the development of interest in Dewey by the Japanese from the early period of the Meiji Restoration, which ushered in an era when Western ideas, institutions, and technology were imported on a large scale by Japan, to the present day.

To summarize his excellent study of this development, after a brief period of experimentation with American educational ideas during the early years of the Meiji Period, Japan quickly turned to Europe, especially Germany, for its educational models. Although this interest in

Germany dominated much of the study of Western philosophy and education, the ideas of Dewey were studied continuously in Japan since 1888, when the first article dealing with Dewey's ideas on psychology appeared in Japanese. Not only were many books by Dewey translated and numerous articles on Dewey written by such Japanese scholars as Tanaka Odo, Hoashi Riichiro, Uyeda Seizi, Nagano Yoshio, etc., but Dewey himself was invited in 1919 to deliver a series of public lectures at the then Tokyo Imperial University in recognition of Dewey's world-wide reputation in philosophy and education. These lectures which were later published as *Reconstruction in Philosophy* probably had very little general influence, but they did have some impact in that they inspired a few young devotees who were to gain significance after World War II. For a decade after World War I, Japan had a progressive education movement, which was part of a world-wide reform movement in education. Although Japan's progressive movement in education was inspired not only by Dewey's ideas but also by other European and American educational theories, the Japanese tended to identify this movement as a Dewey movement. This movement helped to popularize the educational ideas of Dewey, but by the 1930's the progressive education movement was almost dead because the progressive schools, from the outset, had operated in a hostile and precarious environment. Professor Kobayashi observes that the progressives were primarily concerned with educational methods and were disinterested in the relationship of these methods to the promotion of a democratic society. After World War II, there was an outburst of interest in Dewey among the educationists because the Japanese considered the American occupation's education reform policy as based upon Dewey's philosophy. The introduction of the "experience" and

"problem" approaches in the new subject of social studies and the subsequent withdrawal of emphasis on the "experience" approach and a return to an "essentialistic" curriculum by the Ministry of Education further fostered the study of Dewey which has continued to the present day. Among the educationists of Japan today, there is more serious concern over the deeper meanings of Dewey's theories, rather than a superficial interest in novel pedagogical devices.

In looking at the development of Dewey's ideas in Japanese educational thought, there is an underlying question of the applicability of Dewey's philosophy, which evolved in an American environment with a great emphasis on democracy, to a society like Japan with a long history of non-Western traditions. This problem is brought out most forcefully in Professor Kobayashi's discussion of the demise of the progressive education movement. After pointing out that the progressive schools had operated in a hostile and precarious environment and had to adjust themselves to the school examination system (and anyone familiar with the "examination hell" of the Japanese school system will realize the serious effect of this adjustment) and to the government's strong and direct control over the curriculum of the schools, both public and private, he calls attention to the underlying difficulty in these words:

A fundamental difficulty of Deweyan progressivism was that public education in Japan had been conceived from an early period as being wholly and ultimately for the good of the state. The Meiji oligarchs had been united in their faith in the power of education to transform society; education as a means for creating a moral society had been a part of their Confucian tradition. With Japan threatened by foreign domination, they made education an integral element in their program of building a unified and strong nation. The na-

tionalistic motivation for establishing schools on an unprecedented mass scale had democratic implications in so far as schools enabled more individuals to realize their potentialities of growth in a wider area of choices, as well as to expand their familial and provincial concerns into a larger, national concern. *All these consequences were liberating, but the aims were basically undemocratic, since the growth of the individual was ultimately a means, rather than an end. Education was primarily to make him a loyal and useful subject . . .* (p. 100, italics not in original.)

Can this difficulty be overcome? Professor Kobayashi believes that it can be, as he indicates in his concluding chapter that the Japanese intellectuals now have a greater commitment to democracy which has been a positive factor in their finding meaning in Dewey. Although one cannot be too optimistic, the "prospects for the growth of a Japanese philosophy of democratic education seem bright today, since there have already been some efforts made in that direction." (p. 158) And, it might be added, to the extent that the Japanese educators critically examine Dewey's ideas to determine their suitability or unsuitability for Japan and develop a reconstructed philosophy of democratic education which will clarify and express the Japanese experience, to that degree will Dewey's ideas have been applied to Japanese educational thought.

In this book, Professor Kobayashi has given us not only an excellent discussion of the development of Dewey's thought in the Japanese educational context, but also a valuable overall description of the development of education in modern Japan, with useful discussions of figures who have played key roles in this development, such as Sawayanagi Masataro, Obara Kuniyoshi, Hani Motoko, and Noguchi Entaro.

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