

Inclusive Education in East Asia

Presentation 1

Prospects for Building an East Asian Model of Inclusive Education and Its Significance: Re-Examining the Essence of the Western Model and Relations Between the Community and People with Disabilities in Japan

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Although it is generally considered that inclusive education, which originated in Western society, is an ideal basis for educational reform, problems of the Western model of inclusive education and inconsistencies in that model have been recognized in recent years. The present paper examines the possibility and meaning within the Japanese cultural, social, and educational background of realizing a different inclusion model from the Western one. Some important points pertinent to inclusive education in Japan include the traditional sympathetic relation between special educators and children with disabilities and their families, the excellent quality of the specialty in special education, and the status of regular public school classes as an affiliative community. Furthermore, Japanese society was relatively kind to people with disabilities before World War II. In order to realize a Japanese model of inclusive education, Japan should not to fall into a dichotomy as to whether programs are inclusive or separate education, users' or special educators' initiative, and centralized or decentralized power. Rather, the possibility that a moderate Japanese model of inclusive education could be achieved is high.

Key Words: inclusive education, essence of the Western model, moderate Japanese model

Introduction

Fifteen years have passed since the declaration of the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education. That Statement called for inclusive education under the Education for All initiative. Inclusive education has begun to establish itself firmly as the global standard for school education for children with disabilities in the 21st century.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has been ratified by 63 nations including European countries such as the U.K., Germany, Italy and Sweden, and signed by 142 countries including Japan, South

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Korea, and the U.S.¹⁾ as of August 2009, stipulates in Article 24 that signatory countries shall ensure people with disabilities an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning (United Nations, 2010).

In Japan, a special support education system for children with disabilities went into effect in April 2007. This new educational system had some factors in common with inclusive education. The following May, South Korea also enacted the Special Education Law for the Disabled and Those with Special Needs, in order to promote inclusive education. These moves point to the promotion of inclusive education by international society, including East Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea. It appears that we have moved past the stage of discussing the merits and demerits of inclusion.

The questions now are how Japan and other East Asian countries should promote inclusive education, what should its philosophy and objectives be, and what would the ideal system and contents for its implementation be.

Regarding the philosophy and system of inclusive education, it has been more or less the norm to consider the Western style of inclusive education, that is, the Western model, as the standard, ideal form. At the same time, inclusive education in East Asia has been seen as second-rate and lagging behind the West (Mazurek & Winzer, 1994). However, the present author believes that East Asia slavishly following the Western model raises two issues.

The first one is that the Western model has essential Western features. The essence of the Western model, which is considered to be the standard for inclusive education in international society today, is closely related to the social background of the Western countries advocating this model. That is, those countries are societies with deep-rooted histories of exclusion and discrimination arising from extremely complex and diverse differences attributable to immigration, ethnicity, culture, poverty, and religion. Because of this, the Western model is one of many measures aimed at achieving social inclusion. Even the term “social inclusion” was originally used to address prejudices and discrimination against the underclass in France in the 1980s (Percy-Smith, 2000).

Western countries, indeed, were the first to call for the need for inclusive education and have been presenting the principles of inclusive education and its significance to the rest of the world by highlighting accomplishments in their own countries. The Western model is a social democratic movement aimed at a self-sustaining revival of schools and communities by eliminating various discriminations and exclusions that exist in Western society through reform and decentralization of education.

There is no denying the innovative spirit behind the model represented by the revolutionary idea of achieving a democratic society through education reform and by the concrete program based on this idea. There is much to learn from that model. However, the cultural and social backgrounds of East Asian countries differ from that of the countries in the West. Therefore, for them to uniformly adopt inclusive education, which may be incompatible with the true nature of the culture in their

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country, is in itself contradictory to the philosophy of inclusive education which welcomes differences and diversity of people. There is also a concern that the expansion of the Western model of inclusion might damage the cultural and social characteristics that East Asian countries have nurtured over many years.

More importantly, despite the revolutionary philosophy of inclusive education, its implementation in Western countries has not necessarily led to the achievement of the original objective of eliminating discrimination against and the exclusion of social minorities. Furthermore, there is also the paradox that people with visual impairments and with other disabilities have leveled severe criticisms against full inclusion, which is the ultimate form of inclusive education, because they believe that inclusion cannot meet educational needs that are unique to the various disabilities and that it might damage their own cultural base and identity (Oka & Nakamura, 2005).

Discussions of inclusive education in East Asia have so far been entirely focused on importing the Western model uniformly. In recent years, however, issues and contradictions associated with the Western model, and the significance of developing philosophies and methods reflecting the special character of East Asia in the field of education and welfare of people with disabilities have started to be recognized (Wu, Ashman, & Kim, 2008; Xiao, 2008).

The present report aims to discuss from a Japanese perspective issues associated with the Western model, the special character of inclusive education in East Asia in comparison with the Western model, and the significance of a new inclusive education model based on East Asia's cultural, social, and educational characteristics.

Japan is one of the countries in East Asia that has abundant resources related to education of children with disabilities. It also has a historical context different from that of the Western countries with respect to the relation between society and people with disabilities. Therefore, it can be said that Japan is one of the most ideal cases when considering an East Asian model that is different from the Western model.

Inclusive education, for that matter, is based on widely varying philosophies and systems even among Western countries. It is, therefore, difficult to discuss inclusive education in Western countries from a common perspective. In the present report, inclusive education in the U.S. and the U.K. are used as the main examples that reflect a typical Western model, including both the innovativeness and the conflicts in philosophy and practice²⁾.

Limitations of the Western Model

What are characteristics of the Western model and what are its limitations? One characteristic is its unambiguous denial of the accomplishments of special education and the offering of a simplified choice of either special education or inclusive education. The Western model, which takes criticism of special education for granted, positions special education as the exact opposite of inclusive education. It therefore denies any continuity in the philosophy and methodology between special education and inclusive education. It aims to eliminate the elements that make up special education, such as the two-tier system of ordinary education and special education,

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the system in which assignment to specialist schools is based on each child's type of disability, and the preeminence of specialists in their relationship with people with disabilities (Nakamura, 2009), by considering these elements without exception to be the root causes of the discrimination against and segregation of people with disabilities.

Warnock (2005), who chaired the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People in the early 1970s in the U.K., said that the concept of inclusion was unclear and could sometimes be harmful. She pointed out that the system of mainstreaming versus special (or specialist) schooling reflected many problems in thinking in the U.K. about special education.

From a historical standpoint, the education of children with disabilities was not originally started with the purpose of segregating or discriminating against people with disabilities by excluding them from the mainstream of society. The special education system too was not developed with such intentions. However, it cannot be denied that the special education system has, at times during the course of its development or as its outcome, led to the stigmatization of schools and classes for children with disabilities and other involved parties, as well as to the exclusion of children with disabilities from regular education.

In spite of these restrictions and limitations, special education, which has been teaching children with disabilities for over a hundred years since its establishment at the turn of the 20th century, must have quite a few accomplishments that could be carried over into the new model. Different from the claims of those who favor inclusive education, special education did not begin and end with a simple one-sided feature that had the purpose of neglecting and/or excluding children with disabilities, nor did it aim to keep those children away from regular education. For example, special classes at public schools at the end of the 19th century through the early 20th century, which was the starting point of education at public schools, and which the majority of children with disabilities in Europe and the U.S. attended, pursued integration of classes for children with disabilities with classes for children without disabilities. At the same time, the special classes themselves had exclusive factors inherent in them, or paradoxically resulted in the exclusion of children with disabilities from regular education in an attempt to respond to their individual needs.

Despite the existence of such contradictions, the fundamental concepts of inclusive education were evident in the special education system even at that time, such as a focus on individual needs and integration with regular education (Oka, Sasaki, Kimura, Cho, Yoneda, & Nakamura, 2006). Fintz, who was Director of Special Schools, Special Classes, and Vocational Education in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1940, pointed out that special schools and special classes were not aimed at segregation of children with disabilities, but rather their aim was to provide education and training to children with disabilities to the maximum possible extent physically and intellectually, under the category of special education (Fintz, 1940). In other words, the objective of special education was not segregation or exclusion but rather provision of appropriate education to children with disabilities. If this is true, it is important to

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clarify the achievements of special education or at least what it aimed to achieve, and the factors that might have prevented those objectives from being realized. If this is not done, inclusive education may also fall victim to problems similar to that of special education.

A second issue regarding the Western model, one that is related to the first issue, is its disdain of focusing programs on the educational needs unique to disability categories that was a factor in special education, and its all-out rejection of such a devolved educational form.

The Western model is premised on a respect for differences in order to achieve a fair society. When this is applied to education, however, it results in the adoption of a uniform education form, which is especially detrimental to the uniqueness of the various types of disability.

Moreover, although emphasis is placed on social significance, such as equal peer relations with children without disabilities, the learning potential of children with disabilities has not yet been fully realized. While the philosophy of eliminating discrimination, exclusion, and segregation based on differences that is propounded by the Western model is surely innovative, specialists in the field of special education have often pointed out that a hasty generalization of such philosophy would naturally cause contradictions between that philosophy and reality. People with disabilities and special educators have been criticizing inclusive education because it isolates people with disabilities, contrary to its philosophy, and inhibits their independence and social participation. Also, although special educators believe that it is important for children with disabilities to have opportunities to interact with children with similar disabilities in order to have a positive perspective about themselves, the Western model downplays this factor.

Furthermore, the Western model considers the devolved educational form of special education as a major factor behind the stigma associated with children with disabilities, and points out that separation of children with disabilities in special educational facilities is a form of segregation and discrimination. These claims are understandable given the fact that implementation of mainstreaming in the 1970s, the actual starting point of inclusive education in the U.S., was related to the civil rights movement of the time and landmark court cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* case that overturned racial segregation in education. However, a view that all types of separation are segregation is shortsighted and will deny the separation that children with disabilities need. This would lead to the contradiction described earlier of inhibiting these children's independence and social participation. What is even more serious is that despite an emphasis often placed on social significance as a major accomplishment of inclusive education, it has been pointed out that children with disabilities are in reality not necessarily accepted as peers in regular classes, and their status remains low (Wu et al., 2008).

A third issue is that the Western model positions the people involved, including people with disabilities and their families, in a strained, confrontational relationship with specialists in the education of children with disabilities. In special education,

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trained specialists characteristically take a leadership role, whereas in the Western inclusive education model, the leading role is played by people with disabilities and their families. This consumer-centered focus is typical of Western values. For example, it is also embodied in the Independent Living (IL) movement, that was born in the U.S. and which expanded in the 1980s and afterwards, and also in the Western model's emphasis on individual rights. The rights of children with disabilities and their families have consistently expanded with respect to the decisions that are made for those children's educational opportunities, including the contents and methods used in their education, ever since the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 in the U.S. and the 1981 Education Act in the U.K. Although it is certainly reasonable to respect the opinions of children with disabilities and their families, it is a fact that in both countries, serious confrontations often occur between the children with disabilities and their families and education specialists regarding the education of those children.

Even when confrontations do not occur, an important issue is how and to what degree specialists' judgments regarding the education of children with disabilities should be given priority over the judgment of the children with disabilities and their families. After the identification of a child's disability, the ideal decision-making process should be based on a long-term cooperative relationship between all parties, without confrontation and without forced imposition of the specialists' ideas.

Inconsistency between the philosophy and the reality is also another issue relating to the Western model. For example, although the U.S. and U.K. aim to create an inclusive educational environment that welcomes all sorts of differences, they have introduced "martinetism," that is, an emphasis on scrupulous attention to the details of methods and procedures, led by zero-tolerance policing. This has resulted in the exclusion of children with behavioral problems from regular education. Table 1 shows that for all reasons combined, approximately 0.3% of U.K. children dropped out of special schools in that year, a percentage that was more than twice the overall percentage of dropouts. Behavioral problems in a broad sense, including commission of crimes and delinquency, have been serious issues since the end of 19th century when special education was established under the public school system. The existence of martinetism in the U.S. and U.K., as represented by zero-tolerance policing, suggests that the promotion of inclusive education has not led to the resolution of the long-standing problems of commission of crimes by children and other forms of delinquency.

In addition, accountability in education, strongly sought today in the U.S. and U.K., raises the risk of pushing children with special educational needs, including children with disabilities, who are in regular classes, into a disadvantaged position as a result of the promotion of inclusive education. The U.S. No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110) that aims to eliminate gaps in learning achievement³⁾, and the market competition-based policies symbolized by school selection systems in both the U.S. and U.K., are typical examples.

Introduction of an adequate level of competition works effectively in some cases

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TABLE 1 Number of Students Dropping Out of School in the U.K. (2004 to 2005)

	Number of dropouts	Percentage of total number of students who dropped out
Primary schools	1,090	0.03%
Secondary schools	8,070	0.24%
Special schools	280	0.31%
Total	9,400	0.12%

Source: Department for Children, Schools and Families, U.K. (2006)

to improve the quality of education. However, in the case of children with disabilities, unlike other children, it is only after they become adults, achieve independence, and participate in society that the impact of their education can truly be evaluated. A hasty adoption, therefore, of performance-oriented or market principles must lead to the trivialization of the educational needs of children with disabilities. It also raises concerns that their medium- to long-term development might be overlooked.

Significance of Developing an East Asian Model and the Prospects of That Model: From a Japanese Perspective

Features and limitations of special needs education as an education system for children with disabilities. What are the features and possibilities of education for children with disabilities in East Asia, including Japan, in comparison with the Western model?

Japan's "special needs education", while incorporating some of the elements of inclusive education, is essentially a version of segregated special education. Thus, it is distinct in its nature from inclusive education. The most significant difference between special needs education and inclusive education is that, as mentioned above, the ultimate objective of inclusive education is to realize a democratic society through educational reforms, while the objective of special needs education is to reform the education system for children with disabilities.

Unlike inclusive education, therefore, special needs education, which touches on the realization of a convivial society and the regeneration of local communities, often remains only as words. The linkage between special needs education and actual educational systems and programs can be weak (Nakamura & Oka, 2007). Moreover, as the Central Council for Education report in 2005 pointed out, special needs education is not based on criticism of special education, as is the case of the Western model of inclusion, but rather special needs education aims to develop special education further. Therefore, special needs education is essentially different from the Western model that it bases itself on a devolved educational form in which education is differentiated according to the type and degree of each child's disability (Central Council for Education, 2005).

In the future, however, Japan is likely to steer toward an inclusive education model. Pre-election pledges made by the Democratic Party of Japan and the Japanese

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Communist Party in August 2009 (Democratic Party of Japan, 2009; Japanese Communist Party, 2009), as well as judicial precedents in court cases regarding the school options for children with disabilities, the revision of Article 22-3 of the Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act, and comments by cabinet ministers, have all referred to introducing more flexibility into the approval system for entering schools (Japanese Diet, Lower House, 2010).

Japan faces various other problems in addition to issues in education for children with disabilities. Serious and urgent issues faced by the country include the linkage between educational disparities and the widening economic disparities resulting from the prolonged economic recession, and fundamental problems with the social structure, bullying and truancy, a breakdown in classroom discipline, increasingly brutal juvenile crimes, domestic abuse, non-attendance, and insufficient educational support for children of foreigners who settled in Japan in the 1980s and later.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has expressed the hope that the promotion of special needs education would lead to solving and rectifying the problems of bullying and truancy, thus contributing to the revitalization of schools. Unfortunately, such expectations are not based on concrete programs for tackling those problems, and it is unlikely that special needs education alone could provide essential solutions.

It will, therefore, be imperative for Japan to utilize inclusive education in order to revitalize its school system, while at the same time retaining the essence of education for children with disabilities through implementation of special education and special needs education.

Considerations for unique educational programs that are based on disability type characteristics and channeling expertise. If Japan is to introduce inclusive education in the future, what can it offer that is significantly different from the Western model?

The first point is appropriate channeling and development of the educational expertise based on the type and severity of children's disabilities that has been cultivated in the Japanese special education system. Unlike Western countries where special education-related issues have been linked with a wide range of civil rights and social minority-related problems including race, immigration, poverty, and religion, the evaluation of special education in Japan has been, so to speak, an internal issue relating only to the education of children with disabilities. The issues of integration and segregation of children with disabilities have been discussed in Japan from the viewpoint not only of the rights of children with disabilities but also of the effectiveness of education: whether to give priority to integrated education or to educational content and methods that are designed for each type of disability.

For example, in the 1970s, Western countries began shifting their policies to integrated education and away from segregated education, with the primary objective of guaranteeing the right to education of children with disabilities. At that time, Japan introduced "exchange education", which is the Japanese version of integrated education (Oka, 2009) "as an interface between ordinary education and special education that enables a qualitative transformation" (Kawai, 1976), while firmly

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maintaining a policy of segregated education.

Tsujimura (1913–1979), then president of the Japanese Association of Special Education, expressed strong concerns regarding the then radical view that segregating children with disabilities in special education schools and classes was discrimination, and that special schools and classes for children with disabilities were unconstitutional. Tsujimura argued that such views belonged to “ideologues who do not understand the reality of issues surrounding children with disabilities” (Tsujimura, 1972).

As opposed to the Western model which is based on the choice between inclusive education and special education, and between integration and segregation, Japan should be able to develop a more flexible version of inclusive education by integrating the advantages of special education into an inclusive program. This should be possible, because Japan has been adopting elements of inclusive education while continuing to rely on segregated special education, and has been making efforts to introduce its own form of integrated education while maintaining segregated education. Japan can avoid being trapped by the duality choice concept of Western countries.

At the same time, however, we should not forget that when Western countries switched to integrated education, people with disabilities in Japan carried out a campaign criticizing segregated education and seeking integrated education.

In short, Japan, compared with Western countries, has been giving a higher priority to the role of specialists in education for children with disabilities than to the opinions of people with disabilities. How to respect the opinions and positions of people with disabilities while also maintaining and channeling the educators’ expertise based on distinct disability types is an important issue that Japan needs to resolve in the future.

Building rapport between specialists in education for children with disabilities and the children themselves. Unlike the tense, confrontational relationship often seen between education specialists and children with disabilities and their families in Western countries, Japan has, so far, been able to maintain a more peaceful relationship between them. This could be attributed to the cultural custom, common in East Asia, of placing value on social harmony in the community, human relations, and the common good, while maintaining respect for individual rights. This contrasts with the Western concept of the school as a place that is obligated to respect the right of individuals to receive a suitable education (Bell, 2000; Kwon, 1998; Wu et al., 2008).

In other words, as opposed to the Western model in which the relations between students and teachers is one of rights and duties, in Japan, both the teachers and the students are expected to respect their roles as part of the collective that is the school or the class. This has, in all likelihood, led to a latent motive to achieve collaboration and cooperation, rather than confrontation and strife. Furthermore, though modern Japan has lost much of the traditional East Asian value of showing deference to elders, this element also may have had some impact on the relations between children and their teachers, who are older than they are. At the same time, however, it has to

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be acknowledged that the relations between specialists and children in conventional special education were often based on a rigid hierarchy that placed the specialists in an absolutely advantageous position, not allowing any disagreement by the children with disabilities and their families. Also, the intense expectations in Japan for collaboration and harmonization and the existence of a cultural foundation that forced compromise and silence on both the teachers and the students have led to the stifling of even necessary confrontations. For that reason, an intense, trusting relationship needs to be built into inclusive education, while maintaining the harmony that East Asian countries, including Japan, have stressed over the years.

Incidentally, differences similar to those of the relations between specialists and interested parties in Japan and in the West have been pointed out in areas other than education for children with disabilities. In research on informed consent in the medical field, Ono and others (Ono, Yamaguchi, & Saito, 1995) have pointed out differences in the concept of informed consent between Western countries and Japan. In their opinion, in the West, where most people are highly aware of their rights and self-assertiveness is considered to be important, informed consent was developed as a legal concept based on a confrontational relationship of rights and duties. The concept was transformed from the paternalism epitomized in the Hippocratic Oath to a stance that placed primacy on patients' rights. In contrast, in Japan, where harmony is considered to be important, in addition to the assertion of rights as in the West, it is thought necessary to have informed consent based on the trust that comes from building a relationship between the doctor and the patient (Ono et al., 1995).

Furthermore, as pointed out by Nagaoka (1998), self-determination, which is at the core of informed consent, is not necessarily accepted unconditionally even in the U.S. where it originated. Nagaoka emphasizes the importance of support and guidance by specialists, because, in his opinion, genuine self-determination is not possible simply from the assertion and advocacy of self-determination rights (Nagaoka, 1998).

These observations hold pointers for the relation between education specialists and students in inclusive education, notably the role played by specialists. Although of course the opinions of the children have to be respected, determining comprehensively what is best for them is very difficult, and it is not necessarily an easy task for the children themselves to reach those decisions based only on their own knowledge and experience. In that sense, specialists play the important role of assisting children to make more appropriate decisions.

Relation to regular education: function of the class as a collective, and related factors. In Japan, classes are not just units for learning but, more broadly, the permanent address of the children's school life. They have functioned as a community with their own culture. Kariya (2009) observed that unlike schools in Western countries where children regularly move to different classrooms, children in Japan spend the major part of their school life in the same room. That room becomes the permanent place for various activities, including learning, eating, entertainment, playing, autonomy, and work. The Japanese classroom functions as a collective, possessing various roles

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(Kariya, 2009). In other words, in Japan, more than in the West, a classroom is a place for forming children's identities, as well as a place where they have a sense of belonging.

Janson (2007) contends that the formation of a peer culture is of great significance in inclusive education. In Japan, where a major part of children's school life is spent in the one classroom that is allotted to their class, it is easier to form a peer culture based on the class.

Moreover, this strong sense of belonging and attachment to the class is also quite often seen in segregated classes for children with disabilities. LeTendre and Shimizu (2006) have pointed out differing impressions left on Japanese and U.S. researchers who were investigating special education in Japan. They noted that although the American scholars concentrated solely on segregation and exclusion from regular education, Japanese researchers focused on emotional links between the children in special education classes and on their affection for their class (LeTendre & Shimizu, 2006). This difference in the perspectives held by the Japanese and American researchers suggests that classes in Japan possess a special function that is different from those in Western countries.

One of the important factors that has helped Japanese classrooms function as an attractive community has been the East Asian cultural trait of valuing collective harmony. Another factor, the present author believes, is that Japanese classes, at least until now, and unlike those in Western countries, were made up of children with few differences in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and cultural background, and few disparities in social background.

On the other hand, the homogeneous nature of the Japanese classes has led to problems such as bullying and the exclusion of children who have different traits and attributes. The exclusivist and closed nature of the classes, as typified in such terms as "class kingdom", has been recognized as a significant issue. All these problems are in direct conflict with the principles of inclusive education, which welcomes all kinds of differences, so they need to be resolved soon. At any rate, the community function inherent in Japanese classes would, in all likelihood, make regular classes a base that offers a sense of belonging and identity to children with disabilities.

Reexamining the history of the relations between Japanese society and people with disabilities. Another reason for presenting the prospect of an East Asian model for inclusive education is the relation between society and people with disabilities in Japan, seen from a historical perspective. Though this is still a hypothesis at this point, it appears that Japan in the past might have been less exclusionist than the West with respect to people with disabilities. Many relevant historical facts have been revealed over the years. For example, a re-examination of the framework employed in past studies is in progress in the field of psychiatric medical history. Such a re-examination is necessary prior to the introduction of inclusive education and in the context of special needs education reforms.

A tendency in the Japanese academic world to import topics for study is probably one of the reasons for making inclusive education, as practiced in Western

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countries, the standard. Moreover, this tendency could be traced to the belief that Japanese society has been rather backward in its attitude toward people with disabilities. Under the Education Act enacted after World War II, the codification of special education was based on the special education system in the U.S., without much consideration of the Japanese cultural context or its composition from a Japanese perspective. This, in turn, created a stereotype of Japan as a backward nation in the field of education for children with disabilities.

The basis for the theory that Japan is backward was the fact that, although modern Western society already had separate hospitals and institutions for people who were deaf, blind, or intellectually disabled, or had other types of disabilities, Japan had been markedly late in opening such facilities. Especially in the case of children with intellectual disabilities, Japan was not only late in opening such facilities, but they were few and largely limited to privately managed institutions. Special classes, like those set up in public schools in Western cities, were, in Japan, limited to a few schools in few big cities such as Tokyo and Osaka. As far as mental illnesses were concerned, Western countries had both public and privately run hospitals and care facilities, whereas Japan had only a very small number of mental hospitals. Many patients were, instead, permanently confined to their homes.

These factors combined to reinforce the notion of Japan being a backward nation with respect to education, welfare, and health care issues relating to people with disabilities.

Now, what about the relationship between this “backward nation theory” and the East Asia model in inclusive education? The common thread in both is that they were evaluated based only on the Western model, and people with disabilities, as well as institutions for those people, were understood only from a Western perspective.

A detailed look follows.

(1) An image that comes to mind when thinking of schools for children with disabilities is the Western model of institutions for children who are deaf or blind. However, much more advanced models already existed in other regions, to the extent that the objective of this education was to give those children skills so that they would be able to find work. This was exactly what the *Todoza*, a guild for people with visual impairments, was doing by providing vocational training in music and acupuncture during the mid-Edo period (Edo period: 1603–1868) in Japan. Particularly, Sugiyama’s Institution of Acupuncture Therapies that was established around the 1680’s was the world’s first school for people who were visually impaired. *Todoza* was established in the Muromachi period (1336–1573), which means that Japan pioneered education for people who were visually impaired at a very early date, one without parallel elsewhere in the world.

(2) Although the Western model is primarily focused on the period of establishment of schools for children with disabilities and the start of education, it does not take into account the social status of people with disabilities. For example, before World War II, there were only few small private facilities and one public school in Japan for children with mental disabilities. This dearth of educational and welfare

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facilities has been considered to be indicative of the social exclusion of people with mental disabilities in Japan.

On the other hand, no concrete evidence has been found that Japan considered people with mental disabilities to be a threat, as was the norm in Western countries (although such theories have been touted). Evidence of acceptance of people with mental disabilities, such as a letter from a parent whose child was admitted to a facility, although sketchy, cannot be ruled out as merely an exception. Parents who could not institutionalize their children with disabilities in such facilities were most likely able to provide training and attention for them so that their children could later be accepted as employees in industry wherever possible.

(3) The Western fear of the menace of people with mental disabilities was based on the success of emerging sciences such as social science, psychology, and psychiatry. It was based on a dichotomy.

On top of that, there was also the tendency to generalize from a few sample cases, based on preconceived notions. However, in Japan, which did not adopt such a dichotomy, people with mental disabilities might have had a social status different from what similar people had in the West. Even when the concept of people with mental disabilities as a threat came to Japan from the West as academic theory, there were few or no resources available to popularize that theory in Japan. The dichotomy that they were a threat, or in other words evil, and hence should be eliminated from society, was probably not something familiar to the Japanese of that era.

(4) The case of people with visual impairments described in (1) is relevant when examining the social status of people with disabilities in Japan. The nurturing of people with visual impairments by providing standard vocations such as music and acupuncture actually ensured a place for those people in society and in their daily lives under the Edo Shogunate. The Western idea and system of rights assumed that a certain set of people had rights, whereas others did not (although later, the number gaining rights expanded).

(5) The acceptance of social participation of people with visual impairments in Japan was not limited simply to reverence for academics with visual impairments such as Hokiichi Hanawa. Rather, the acceptance of people with visual impairments can be considered to be a Japanese trait exemplified by *The Tale of the Heike* (*Heike Monogatari*) and carried on to this day.

(6) There were great individuals, such as Akashi, whose imaginative writing, performance with the biwa (a Japanese musical instrument similar to the lute), and storytelling were highly appreciated by people in the Muromachi era. Not only these illustrious people with visual impairments, but also the *go'ze* (traveling female musicians who had visual impairments) in the pre-war period who visited remote villages, were bearers of culture in an era when there were not many avenues available for entertainment. They also brought information about other lands (Saito, 1972). The fact that Japanese society offered a social role even to women with visual impairments has not been reflected in the value standards of Western countries.

(7) A re-evaluation of Japan's medical and aftercare for psychiatric patients has

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been carried out by various writers, including Yagi (2005). For example, the message of Kure's "double calamity" (*Niju no Fuko*) theory is that it was the West that treated people who were mentally ill especially cruelly. Kure contended that better mental hospitals could be established in Japan after a review of those mistakes. Also, judging from published observations by the German psychiatrist Weygandt (1870-1939), who visited Japan in 1930, the treatment in Japan of patients who were mentally ill was not in any way markedly poorer than that in Western countries at that time. On the contrary, Weygandt went on to champion the treatment of patients who were mentally ill within the confines of their own home as a positive aspect of the Japanese family (Hashimoto, 2007).

(8) Standards and evaluations based on Western concepts mistakenly assume that economic deprivation would lead to poor assessment and treatment of people with disabilities. Perhaps such a preconceived notion was applied to Japan as well, which was a developing nation at that time. Recent anthropological studies have, however, shown that although poverty is an important factor in attitudes toward people with disabilities, it is not a necessary factor (Sasaki & Oka, 2006). There are regions in developing countries where people with severe mental disabilities and patients with mental illness live in regular society, and are not expelled from their communities. Even now, it is difficult to assess accurately the perspectives on the social status of people with disabilities based on Western standards alone, such as a visible system or the existence of schools.

On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that people with disabilities have been treated more generously in Japan than in the West, at least prior to World War II.

Conclusions

Without falling into hasty dichotomies between inclusive education and segregation and exclusion, child-centered and specialist-centered, or centralized and decentralized, an East Asian model of inclusive education proposed by Japan should aim for a selective adoption of superior elements from models, in order to realize a smooth transition toward inclusive education. Since ancient times, Japan has possessed the ability to convert and adapt other countries' cultures and technologies into its own culture and technology by integrating them with existing Japanese practices. Such integration is a characteristic feature of the Japanese culture and religions, and it has been able to carve out its own developmental path by absorbing information from East Asia in ancient times and more recently from the West, without any conflicts with its own culture.

Mitsuhashi (2007) contends that the coexistence of syncretization and segregation of Shintoism and Buddhism in Japan is a syncretistic phenomenon occurring only in Japan. That is, even in the case of religion, which has been the source of the deepest and most devastating conflicts in other countries, Japan has been able to find such a solution. This nature of Japan suggests that it may be able to offer new inclusive education that avoids a conflict between inclusive education and special

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education and rather brings together the best in both.

The major objective of inclusive education in the Western model is social reform. In that sense, if Japan is to switch to inclusive education in the future, it cannot be handled within the field of education alone, but rather should be positioned as a policy issue that requires the attention of the entire Cabinet. The question is especially how to deal with inclusive education along with issues relating to the social structure, the prolonged recession leading to widening economic disparities between and within regions, as well as between schools and between individuals.

Another issue is how to shift from centralized control to decentralized. Watanabe (2006), while strongly calling for elimination of state control over education and leaving it to the autonomous assessment of regions, proposes ways to position and realize education as a joint operation of state and local communities citing, as an example, Tottori prefecture's initiative in pursuing the autonomy of the local community and its revival by bearing upon the state to carry out its role and responsibilities, based on a separation and balance between the two (Watanabe, 2006). At the same time, how to regulate the scope of the state's responsibilities while transferring rights to the local communities, and how to handle the relation between the state and the local communities are crucial issues.

Another important issue is how to guarantee the rights of children with disabilities to choose their educational environment. As can be seen from the experience of the West, it will be difficult to maintain, both in terms of quality and quantity, segregated schools and classes for children with disabilities once inclusive education takes off. Inclusive education, however, will require a long period of time before it bears results. During that transition period, haste will deprive children with disabilities of the opportunity to choose an appropriate educational environment. Even if children with disabilities can be enrolled in regular schools, if they cannot be offered the choice of a segregated education, should that be what they desire, the system could not be considered to be catering to the needs of the children with disabilities, and whatever they decide could not be regarded as a decision that respects their will.

For inclusive education to achieve real growth in the international community, a universal philosophy has to be shared by all. The key will be to respect the differences and special character of each country, and to achieve integration slowly. Yoshino (2007), quoting Inkeles, describes the coming together of people from different civilizations and cultures as follows:

There is a place where two big rivers come together in the upper reaches of the Amazon in Latin America. The water of one of the rivers is semi-transparent and brown in color, while the other is murky. Interestingly, the waters don't mix immediately after the confluence of these rivers.... They finally start mixing a few miles downstream to become a single river. The coming together of differing civilizations and cultures also is similar. Initially they don't mix well and may even face off, but eventually will come together naturally and would create a new era. (Yoshino, 2007)

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Unlike Western countries where social relations are based on rights and justice, factors such as tolerance, harmony, and communal unity play important roles in the establishment and maintenance of social relations in East Asia. Thus, East Asia is the very place where a more flexible inclusive education may be established. Once there is international recognition for an East Asian model as a new standard of inclusive education on a par with the Western model, that will lead to a restructuring of inclusive education as an educational and social innovation having an even wider and more flexible philosophy and methodology.

Notes

- 1) President George W. Bush refused to sign the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on the grounds that it would weaken related domestic U.S. laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). After Barack Obama became President, he signed the Convention on July 24, 2009.
- 2) Western countries other than the U.S. and U.K. are, however, also facing similar difficulties and contradictions. For example, Erikson, Nimonji, & Ishibashi (2007) have pointed out that the system of social inclusion that is the goal of inclusive education in the Nordic countries had been battered because of the severe economic conditions and the changes in the sovereignty of those countries resulting from close cooperation in the European Union. They note that “the Nordic model of social inclusion is stable, but its foundation is threatened.”
- 3) The Washington Post (Glod, 2009) reported that the Obama administration is considering a revision of the No Child Left Behind Act that would change its purpose from sanctioning schools that do not meet standards set by the states to assisting schools that need improvement.

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