Review Article

Citizenship Education in Japan

Edited by IKENO, Norio
Auckland: Continuum Studies in Educational Research, 2011
194 pp.

LASSEGARD, James*

This volume attempts the somewhat unwieldy task of examining in detail the role that Japanese education has played in how Japanese youth become Japanese citizens. It is clarified early within the excellent introductions by the late Sir Bernard Crick, and by Dr. John J. Cogan that every nation's view of the shape that citizenship should take in society is closely related to national characteristics and aims of the respective country. This would offer a rationale for the very emic rather than comparative approach taken to this subject by the book's Japanese authors.

Perhaps more so than in other nations, citizenship education (CE), in its various forms permeates the curriculum in Japanese school education, spanning such subjects as moral education, civics, geography, etc. The Period of Integrated Study has also been used for the teaching of CE since 1998.

The book is divided into four parts comprised of eleven chapters, each written by Japanese scholars in the field. Part one deals with how historically CE has been administered in Japan. Kazuya Taniguchi, in chapter 1, outlines the origin and development of Japanese CE from 1872 to 1947, and definitions are problematized due to semantic differences between the Japanese words for citizen *shimin*, and *komin*. This chapter is of interest in that it discusses the extent of historical influence that westernization has had on Japanese CE. We learn that the conflicting dichotomy of an individualized globalization played against an emphasis on tradition and community has been an undercurrent of Japanese citizenship since the turn of the century. Taniguchi discusses the role that moral education has had in CE and notes that "civics" as a national subject was taught in Japan as early as 1896. The author also explains how the ideal of community citizenship became an integral part of regional studies. Although relying more on description rather than analysis, this is an important chapter as it represents a solid foundation for much of what follows in the book.

In Chapter 2, Norio Ikeno discusses how Japanese citizenship policy developed in the post-war era, and emphasizes a dual system responsible for educating students in citizenship ideology and values. What is of particular interest is how the subject of the new Social Studies in post-war

*Hosei University
e-mail: j.lassegard@hosei.ac.jp

Japan was used to both to “instill socio-cultural knowledge.... and to foster the principles of citizenship” (p. 16). To accomplish these aims, children were taught about real life issues in the classroom. It is also of interest that despite the many revisions of the Course of Study for Social Studies, the emphasis on cultivating citizenship has remained essentially the same. Once again the common theme of conflicting dichotomies is apparent, particularly after WWII with the Japanese authorities intent to preserve traditional educational policies in spite of the more democratic system demanded by the Americans during the Occupation.

In Chapter 3 by Masao Yoshida, the reader is able to gain a deeper understanding of the various conceptualizations of citizenship in Japan, and the qualities that were deemed essential to be instilled in Japanese youth. The 1977 Course of Study resulted in social studies lessons that were generally centered on goals of instilling children with “empathetic understanding”, and “character building”. The author extrapolates several paradigms using cases of primary school social studies education, which accordingly was meant to “make students understand the ideas, activities, feelings and outlook of people through empathy” (p. 33). One can certainly see many similarities between the ideals depicted here and those emphasized by Japanese schooling today. However, the author wisely points out the potential danger in CE that focuses entirely on instilling empathetic values, and the tendency to ignore or minimize negative aspects in history to accomplish this.

Part Two, by far the largest section of the book, consists of 4 chapters that examine the “what” and “how” in terms of the development of CE curricular content in postwar Japan. Hirokazu Kimura, in Chapter 4 examines how it was taught as a moral education subject with the overarching aim of “fostering citizenship”. In Chapter 5, Tomoyuki Kobara extensively details the content of broad Social Studies curricula in elementary and secondary education, the greatest change being in 1989, when it was replaced by the subjects of geography, history and civics. Although the author highlights important changes within the Social Studies objectives, particularly the shift from “problem solving” to “understanding”, the reader may not adequately grasp a deep sense of how this shift has impacted current generations of Japanese. Likewise, in Chapter 6, Kazuhiko Iwata provides literal English translations of Japanese textbooks used in the Course of Study for Social Studies, and includes as an example the concept of global citizenship. However, without more information and analysis regarding how such materials were actually utilized in teaching and learning in the classroom, the reader may find these descriptions somewhat wanting. Chapter 7 by Kotaro Yoshimura details how the topic of “garbage collection” has been used practically in teaching CE, and Chapter 8 is divided into four parts written by separate authors, who comprehensively examine how CE has been taught within lessons that have had as their focus global and multicultural, environmental, geographical, and historical issues.

The two chapters in Part 3 take a case study approach to looking at recent manifestations of CE in Tokyo schools. In Chapter 9, Soji Katakami writes a descriptive account of the curriculum at one elementary school, while providing a voice for actual teachers of CE and their own perspectives. Chapter 10 by Yoshiharu Toda strives to bring in more current issues in teaching and learning of CE by using data that details teaching hours and subjects within Tokyo schools. The author offers an engaging discussion of how CE is integrated into school subjects such as moral education and the Period of Integrated Study, rightly noting the problematic nature of using CE to instill a specific brand of “Japaneseness”, particularly in a society that is becoming increasingly multicultural and diverse.

Part 4 of the book consists of a single but essential chapter by Kenji Tanahashi, which delves into how Japanese students are being evaluated and assessed for achieving various attributes

of citizenship, while examining such aspects as attitudes, ideas, skills, and knowledge, all of which encompass a new emphasis on using criterion-referenced evaluation methods. While the reader gleans substantial information about the specific objectives and criteria of CE, one wishes that some findings could have been provided from research examining the supposed beneficiaries of CE—Japanese students themselves, whose voices are noticeably silent throughout the entire volume.

In many respects this volume succeeds in introducing the international reader to various aspects of Japanese CE that have not heretofore been published in English, and is therefore a welcome addition to the literature. Although the chapters seem to flow logically from one to the next, the volume seems to lack an “overview” chapter which comprehensively organizes and synthesizes some of the main issues pertaining to CE that Japan is presently dealing with, and which could have provided a stronger rationale and foundation for the book. Nevertheless, researchers of citizenship education would likely find this volume to be of great interest, as would those who are curious about how Japan has managed to instill the values of citizenship in its youth through the medium of school education.