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ABSTRACT

Paradoxically, Japan presents both a difficult and promising setting for the advancement of critical thinking skills. One deep-rooted obstacle stems from anti-rational ideological traditions and prejudices. Another comes from the rigidly hierarchical, conformist nature of Japanese society, which does not encourage divergent opinions or their expression. Probably most significant are the impediments created by the educational system, based as it is on rote-memorization entrance examinations and controlled in many respects by the recalcitrant Education Ministry. On the other hand, reasons for optimism can be seen in the basic rationality of the Japanese people, recent moves to reform the education system and promote reasoning, and the responsiveness of students to a critical thinking approach. Conclusions based on personal experience and research to assess the prospects for critical thinking in Japan are presented. (Contains 21 references.) (Author)

Obstacles and Opportunities for Critical Thinking in Japan

Paper Presented at The 14th International Conference on
Critical Thinking and Educational Reform

Sonoma State University
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Paradoxically, Japan presents both a difficult and a promising setting for the advancement of critical thinking skills. One deep-rooted obstacle stems from anti-rational ideological traditions and prejudices. Another comes from the rigidly hierarchical, conformist nature of Japanese society, which does not encourage divergent opinions or their expression. Probably most significant are the impediments created by the educational system, based as it is on rote-memorization entrance examinations and controlled in many respects by the recalcitrant Education Ministry. On the other hand, reasons for optimism can be seen in the basic rationality of the Japanese people, recent moves to reform the education system and promote reasoning, and the responsiveness of students to a critical thinking approach. The author presents conclusions based on personal experience and research to assess the prospects for critical thinking in Japan.

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Theoretical Underpinnings

This paper is based on the belief that human reason has the ability to arrive at true knowledge of the objective world, or at least to come nearer to that reality, if the thinking is sound and the information reliable. Furthermore, the effective operation of human reason does not differ significantly from culture to culture. Rationality is the universal property of humanity, not just an ideological construct of some particular cultural world view. Therefore, the same basic criteria for determining what is good and bad thinking apply to all men. All people occupy a common universe, a shared reality, so they can have meaningful intellectual exchange. This is in contradistinction to relativistic views of human knowledge and communication. The whole notion of communication is predicated on the existence of an objective reality shared by the communicators about which they can have meaningful and rational interaction. A relativistic conception that posits a defining cultural/linguistic framework for all knowledge undermines the whole enterprise of communication and renders it impotent, since exchange of ideas requires the existence of a common ground of knowledge between speakers that is not confined to the perceptual worlds of either. There is no denying that individual mindsets and cultural backgrounds color and shape perceptions to a great degree, but that fact does not imply that such variations seal people into completely separate perceptual and mental worlds. The writer is in agreement with all the principles set down by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking.

Obstacles and Opportunities for Critical Thinking in Japan

by Bruce W. Davidson

The critical thinking movement began and flourished on the American education scene, but ESL/EFL instructors have noticed that this training may be even more necessary for many of our students (Pavlis, 1993). Our students often come from authoritarian, hierarchical societies in which the unthinking acceptance of the ideas of one's teachers and elders is considered a virtue. That mentality often results in plagiarism and a lack of analytical skills when such students enter universities in English-speaking countries. Even if their English is adequate for university-level work, their thinking skills often are not. Japanese students are a case in point.

Addressing myself to a conference on critical thinking, I feel some sense of fear and trembling, since what I will do in many respects goes against the grain of critical thinking. Many of the statements I intend to make are of the nature of broad generalizations about Japanese people. As a critical thinker, I feel uncomfortable stereotyping any people, since generalizations will not be true of many individuals. So let me lodge this disclaimer: there will certainly be many exceptions to my characterizations. However, Japanese society does indeed have a lot of homogeneous features, unlike some other societies. It is much less risky to generalize there. Furthermore, most of these generalizations are ones Japanese make about themselves, so they are not just foreign prejudices. Japanese can be extraordinarily critical and objective evaluators of themselves at times, as we shall see. At the same time, many Japanese also have erroneous notions about themselves, another fact worth bearing in mind. Personally, my own view of peoples and nations is basically the same as that of Dave Barry. He wrote "despite the gulf, physical and cultural, between the United States and Japan, both societies are, in the end, made up of people, and people

everywhere-- when you strip away their superficial differences-- are crazy" (Barry, 1992, p. 19). They can also be very rational.

My thesis will be that Japan paradoxically offers both an encouraging and an inhibiting environment for the development of critical thinking skills. Even stranger, many of the aspects of Japan that result in resistance to well-reasoned thinking may also, in other respects, actually further well-rounded, thorough analysis. I have been led to these conclusions through observations of the daily behavior of Japanese people, my reading, and my teaching experiences. Our college includes an intensive, two-year topic-based English component. During the first year, students study English through topics such as Prejudice and Advertising, and in the second year they take writing, listening, and discussion courses focusing on topics such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, in my case. This year I also introduced a Critical Thinking elective course. In these and other classes I have been trying to implement critical thinking approaches, mostly with success but not without difficulties.

Obstacles To Critical Thinking in Japan

One considerable barrier consists of some precepts of conventional wisdom in Japan. These hold that (1) Japanese people are not logical, that (2) the highest truths go against logic, and that (3) explicit words and clear ideas should not be trusted. Rather than a rational philosophical tradition derived from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, Japan has an anti-rational ideological tradition, stemming in part from Zen Buddhism.

> The well-known popularizer of Zen in the West, Suzuki Daisetz --who made a fortune with some forty books in English explaining truths 'that cannot be captured in writing'-- never tired of pointing out the shortcomings of Western 'dualistic logic.' Actually, the historical function of Japanese Zen, which thrived among the warrior class, was to lower resistance of the individual

> against the blind obedience expected of him, as can be gathered from the common Zen imagery of 'destroying' or 'extinguishing' the mind (van Wolferen, 1993, p. 316).

From those feudal days until today, in a truer sense than Marx ever intended, this anti-rational preconception appears in many ways to function as an "opium of the people," anesthetizing their critical intellectual faculties. Consequently, many Japanese assume that words can not communicate our deepest or most profound thoughts and feelings. Proverbs extolling the virtues of silence abound in Japan, and the most famous Japanese poetic form, the *haiku*, is famous for its economy of language. Unfortunately, in everyday life, this distrust of words leads to extremes of behavior at times and many instances of miscommunication, since people often overestimate their ability to read the thoughts and feelings of others. Adding to the confusion, real convictions and outward behavior often do not match. The words *tatemae* and *honne* refer to the distinction between one's outward public face and one's true intentions or hidden thoughts. It is often considered more tactful or practical to conceal more than one reveals in words.

As a result, ideas and language are not given very close attention; communication is often vague. Many Japanese themselves are dissatisfied with this state of things. In reports about a humorous American essay about male communicative reticence, several of my young women students wrote that "words are necessary" and "if men don't communicate in words, they can't be true friends." Many people in Japan seem to have some difficulty discussing ideas or even in explaining them. Few students unexposed to foreign education can express opinions on serious subjects. After they come to our junior college, students often confess that they have a lot of trouble expressing their ideas in English in class first of all because they do not have any opinions. And if they have opinions, they often can not explain or justify them. Our teachers once distributed a questionnaire asking students what they thought

was the most important human right. Most wrote vague things such as "world peace," "the right to be respected," or just "freedom" (to do what?,. Only a minority seemed to have a clear idea of what a human right is or how it might be different from an future ideal or a dream, and those answered specifically "freedom of speech" or another right. The most common Japanese rhetorical composition mode compounds the problem of vagueness by leaving the statement of the main idea of an essay to the very end, often undeveloped and undefined as well. Sometimes the main point is not explicitly stated at all.

The sociological scene creates still more problems. Hierarchical and rigidly ranked, Japanese society rewards the submissive and makes the dissident uncomfortable (Nakane, 1970). Authorities include writers, journalists, teachers, and intellectuals, whose pronouncements often go unquestioned, even when offered in ignorance or outside an authority figure's area of expertise (Taylor, 1983). Even more daunting for the potential Japanese critical thinker are group dynamics in Japan. Outward social peace and uniformity are often so valued that a person can be punished for standing out, even for being too conspicuously intelligent or opinionated. Thus a well-known proverb warns that "the nail that protrudes will be hammered down." One American student admitted to Tokyo University, the nation's highest ranked university, was shocked to make the discovery that "there was no such thing as the free exchange of ideas you expect at an American university. Students were afraid to ask questions. They were afraid someone might ridicule them for not knowing the answer" (Taylor, 1983, p. 98). Everywhere in Japan one encounters striking examples of the power of conformity. As Dave Barry puts it, "it would be easier to get the entire population of Tokyo to wear matching outfits than to get any two randomly selected Americans to agree on pizza toppings" (Barry, 1992, p. 63). That is an exaggeration, of course, but it contains an accurate observation. Within the Japanese Diet, little rational debate of policy issues takes place, a reality often bemoaned even by Diet members themselves. Most Diet activity concerns coalition

and faction-building, jockeying for positions of power relative to other political elements, not discussion of the substance of ideas under dispute (Oikawa, 1994 May).

For the reasons above, real intellectual courage and a critical, inquiring spirit are rare. In discussion, my students are often quick to drop a point they make in the face of any disagreement. They will often immediately grant the validity of the opinion of other party without challenging her reasoning. I once observed two students taking opposite positions in my class on a human rights issue during a small group activity. Later I asked one of the two what she thought about the issue under discussion, knowing it to be untypical of many in the class. She immediately turned to her previous opponent and asked "What opinion did our group decide on?" I stopped her in mid-course and asked, "No, I'm asking your personal, individual opinion, not your group's." In their oral class journals, many students wrote that our class debates were their first experience of opposing the argument of another person in their whole lives, so it was very difficult for them. They added, however, that it was rewarding. In my composition class last year, one student argued in her essay that smoking should be forbidden in public places in Japan. In one paragraph she dealt with the opposing position that people have a right to smoke wherever they like by responding, "Of course, people have a right to smoke anywhere they want to, but they should consider about the health of others." I wrote on her paper: "'Of course?' Not in my house!" The student was eager to express agreement and refused to engage the opposition argument. Many others wrote in a similar manner, sidestepping issues and avoiding real confrontation. My students sometimes remind me of some American politicians trying hard not to offend anybody and to agree with everything. One of our graduates studying in Great Britain wrote me recently:

> I do understand your enthusiasm in teaching so-called "Critical thinking." That is one of our problems that most Japanese students abroad first have to face up to. I know a lot of Japanese students saying, "It's so difficult for me to

> discuss it because I haven't ever thought of this kind of things" . . . Also, what is worse, our ability of analysis or thinking deeply is totally paralyzed because of Japanese social condition which is regarded as "peaceful society" by many people. . . even Japanese educational system doesn't encourage us to have our own ideas.

This brings us to the final and perhaps most daunting barrier to critical thinking in Japan, the Japanese educational system. In many respects, the whole system seems designed to make thinking as difficult as possible. The force that drives the system is preparation for the entrance examinations students must pass to advance to the next stage. These are multiple choice tests of memorized information. Everyone knows that the only important thing for advancement in society is to pass those tests, so time spent on other things is basically time wasted. If in France "to the deepest circle of educational hell belongs the 'multiple choice' exam," in Japan the multiple choice exam occupies the highest circle of heaven (Marcus, 1994, p. 18). As a result, teachers can not afford to spend too much class time on thought-provoking activities such as writing essays, group discussion, or questioning and probing ideas. Instead, "since college entrance exams demand a knowledge of facts rather than the ability to think, high school is one long cram session" (Taylor, 1983, p. 97).

Some American educators have dismissed such a picture of Japanese education as an inaccurate stereotype. In their study, Stigler and Stevenson made a number of claims about educational practices in Japan that bear some close examination. A principle weakness of their study is that they overgeneralize from insufficient information, again and again. Their article abounds in statements such as "Asian teachers almost always begin with a practical problem" (Stigler and Stevenson, 1991, p. 15), but by "Asian teachers" they only mean "Chinese and Japanese teachers," not Koreans or any other groups which inhabit Asia. By "Japanese teachers," they mean only elementary school math teachers. By "elementary school math teachers," they

mean only twenty first and fifth-grade teachers in the Sendai metropolitan area. One wonders how they can draw such sweeping conclusions from observations of only twenty teachers in one city. Even if one grants some validity to the study in regard to mathematics instruction at the elementary level in Japan, a lot of Japanese education remains unexplored by it. A value-neutral and non-controversial subject, mathematics easily lends itself to a thoughtful approach in whatever society it might be taught. Also, compared with the more regimented, exam-oriented junior high schools and high schools, elementary school education in Japan is more mercifully free and egalitarian. It may be that elementary school mathematics instruction here generally is more thought-provoking than mathematics instruction in America. Nevertheless, that would not by any means prove that Japanese education is "thinking education" across the board. Nothing could be further from the truth, as many who teach and work in Japan can testify from personal experience and common knowledge.

A number of these problems can probably be laid at the door of the powerful bureaucracy that oversees the system. Like many other aspects of Japanese society, the educational system forms a hierarchy, with the Education Ministry bureaucracy at the top trying to manage all aspects of education in Japan, public and private. I teach at a small private college, and much of our faculty meeting time is spent discussing how to respond to the peculiar guidelines and directives constantly issuing from the Education Ministry, which every school is expected to follow. They tell us how many students we can have, when our entrance exams must be held, and what admissions policies we must follow, among other things. Especially disturbing is the fact that lately there have been some signs that the Education Ministry wants to reinstitute the kind of "moral education" practiced in Japan before and during World War II. The singing of the national anthem and the flying of the rising sun flag have recently become required at all public schools. The Ministry approves all school textbooks and has regularly censored passages in history texts which criticize Japanese behavior during the war, prompting lawsuits by some textbook writers against the ministry and

outcries from neighboring countries such as Korea and China, which suffered from wartime aggression. Such opposition is well-founded, since the pre-war educational monolith represented the complete antithesis of critical thinking education, as Japanese psychiatrist Keiji Kurosawa insightfully observes:

> [It was] an education which despised the intellect and its critical ability. During the war, the nation and the people were educated by propaganda. To criticize was to be an enemy. Action decided everything. The whole nation was in one mind. Therefore they could not do anything without orders from the authority. After the war they lost their self-respect, and all laws lost their authority. Morals based on the ability of self-control cannot be directed by others. To control and direct oneself is the highest intellectual activity. As a result of denying criticism, the Japanese people lost their intellectual ability and could not understand other people's standard of behavior. Therefore when restrictions were removed, the Japanese behaved like animals (Moloney, 1952, pp. 193-194).

Fortunately, resistance to reactionary moves from the Education Ministry has come from the left-leaning Japanese teacher's union, which still feels morally responsible for the wartime brainwashing. Though the Ministry has made many attempts to suppress this union, it continues to carry on some effective resistance to the Ministry's policies (van Wolferen, 1993).

Such a hierarchically-controlled, factual exam-oriented education system naturally produces uninquisitive, uncritical, and unreflective students. The Ministry is perhaps now reaping the harvest of its own policies in a generation of high school students who refuse to read anything but comic books. In a 1993 survey, 60% of senior high school students admitted they did not read even one book a month, other than comics (Nishizawa, 1994). Such students infrequently visit libraries, so the

Ministry has recently proposed to add comic books to all public libraries to attract more young people. As another example, one of my younger Japanese colleagues told me not long ago that while she was a graduate student at an American university, she was asked to write a critique of an article in an academic quarterly. Another student had to explain to her what was required: that she summarize and evaluate the main ideas of the article. She had had no previous school experience of reflecting on the ideas of something read in class and then writing about it. Often students have trouble just identifying the main ideas and paraphrasing the wording they encounter, much less evaluating written material critically. Most disturbing to me, though, is the fact that many students seem to be easily persuaded to believe anything they see on T.V., hear from friends or teachers, or read in print. In my Arab-Israeli Conflict class, I had occasion to witness many students who allowed one slanted, radical author to form their entire view of the topic. This brainwashing was reflected in their term papers and final exams, which often only parroted the views of this author (Davidson, 1994a). Such problems are not confined to students. After observing the poor performances of Japanese scientists and scholars at international conferences, physicist Koreo Kinoshita concluded that the real cause was not a lack of English proficiency but rather imprecision in expression and weak logic. This discovery has led him to author a line of Japanese texts specifically to address these deficiencies (Kobayashi, 1994).

I would like to report that the foreign teaching community is providing a counterbalance to this system, but unfortunately many signs there are also not encouraging. As an active member of the Japan Association of Language Teachers, I have been able to observe trends in that organization over the last seven years. The brightest sign may be that a "global issues" movement exists among language teachers; however, most of those teachers who wish to bring serious moral or political discussion into the language classroom have no acquaintance with critical thinking approaches (Cates, 1990). Some of them agonize about how to teach about global

issues without indoctrinating students, a legitimate worry. Another promising innovation has been to base language teaching on content, i.e., significant subject matter for learning, as opposed to drills or practice in decontexturalized language forms and activities (Snow, 1991). The problem, though, is that no one has clearly explained how to approach the content of instruction in any cognitive depth. Other teachers have focused on how to encourage better language learning by using quasi-hypnotic teaching methods such as Suggestopedia and "neuro-linguistic programming," methods which seem to me to be the reverse of a critical thinking approach (Davidson, 1994a). For instance, "neuro-linguistic programming" is a technique which consists in guiding students by subliminal commands offered under the guise of suggestions by an authority figure-teacher ("Atsuko" 1993). However, the most pernicious influences have probably come from elements in the intercultural communication movement (Bennett, 1993). In articles and addresses, cross-cultural communication specialists often base their guidance on cultural/linguistic relativism and help perpetuate misleading stereotypes such as the idea that Japanese people are not logical (Davidson, 1994b). At the most recent JALT national convention, the theme was "Language and Culture," and one plenary speaker informed us that because Japanese sentences have subjective-object-verb word order, Japanese speakers employ a different kind of logic. He maintained this despite the fact that he confessed himself unable to speak Japanese. (It was an absurd contention anyway, since those classical masters of logic and philosophy, the ancient Greeks, employed an inflected language with no fixed word order). One intercultural communication Ph.D. candidate once informed me that teaching reasoning to Japanese students is a kind of "cultural colonialism." I have heard similar superficial ideas repeated at many presentations at the convention and elsewhere. In short, critical thinking concepts have not yet made much headway among language teachers in Japan. Without a critical thinking approach, "global issues" teaching seems destined to be indoctrination, "content-based" instruction to be substantially contentless, while other approaches militate against rationality altogether.

Opportunities for Critical Thinking

Up to this point the reader may be justified in thinking that promoting critical thinking in Japan has very little chance of success. But this is not a tale of woe and hardship; the prospects are in many respects positive and hopeful. These positive indications include the basic rationality of the Japanese people, the present recognition by many that logical thinking must be encouraged in Japan, and the amenability of Japanese students to critical thinking education.

To begin with, it is simply untrue that the concept of logic is alien to Japan. The Japanese language contains much of the same informal logic vocabulary as English, and these words are commonly used in much the same way. Some of these terms are *zentei* ("assumption" or "premise"), *mujun* ("contradiction"), *suji ga totte inai* ("no logical thread"), and *goriteki/ronriteki* ("reasonable" or "rational"). On a daily basis I hear these supposedly irrational people making logical truth-claims and pointing out logical inconsistencies. For example, in one T.V. show I viewed recently, one of the heroes of the program criticized another character because his actions were completely "self-contradictory" and "illogical." Another time my Japanese tutor and I were examining a paragraph that concluded with a thought which contradicted its beginning. My teacher commented "*suji ga totte inai*," meaning "there is no logical thread holding this passage together." When during recent trade negotiations the U.S. negotiators demanded that Japan set numerical targets for imports from the U.S., one newspaper columnist commented that the "the request is unreasonable" because "it would be impossible, under the free economic system, for the Japanese government to force private corporations to attain numerical targets" (Oikawa 1994 February). The point is not whether one agrees with this reasoning or not; the point is that this is clearly an example of refutation by reasoning. As a classroom teacher, I have often observed my untrained students making logical inferences and uncovering apparent contradictions, without any direction from me. One student in my Arab-Israeli

Conflict class once wrote "I often hear about Jewish power in financial world. In fact, I had a confusion that the Jews who are discriminated against and who has power to control the economic in the world (*sic*)." She noticed the obvious contradiction between the claim of anti-Semites that Jews control the world economy and the fact that they also receive the worst persecution and suffering. If they are supposedly so powerful, why are they so powerless to resist? Examples like this could be multiplied endlessly.

On the other hand, the term *rikutsupoi* ("excessively logical," hence with the connotation "inflexible") is pejorative in meaning, especially when applied to young women. Japanese at times appear to want to put severe restraints on the applications of logic, with the result that a person can both be criticized for being too logical and for not being logical enough. Aside from that qualification, though, the plain fact is that Japanese commonly employ logical concepts in everyday discourse, just like everyone else. They find contradictions, reason to conclusions, and gather evidence to confirm hypotheses. Foreign observers have noted that many Japanese are fond of detailed statistics, and pie charts and graphs are constantly produced at meetings (Taylor, 1983). In fact, there seems at times to be an exaggerated, naive faith in statistics, but this faith nevertheless belies the fact that Japanese respect objective truth and fact-based reasoning in many spheres of life, especially business and finance.

Perhaps even the oft-touted importance attached in Japan to social harmony only reflects the fact that they understand the logic of human relationships. They have accepted the common sense fact, which often eludes other peoples, that those who get along badly can not get much done and that making an enemy involves great risks and future trouble. This is not mere emotionalism or groupism. It is common sense rationality, taken to an extreme. Also, the Japanese penchant for leaving things implied and unsaid in conversation or writing reveals a hidden faith --misplaced in

many cases-- in the ability of others to infer what the communicator is trying to express through a minimum of language. Japanese are not ignoring the inferential powers of the listener or reader; they are trusting them perhaps too much. The Japanese mode of leaving things unsaid requires the exercise of a lot of thinking on the receiving end.

Though the educational system generally remains unsupportive of reasoning, elements of the Japanese government have recently admitted that Japanese students need to receive more training in rational thinking and communicating. A research institute associated with the Ministry of Trade and Industry not long ago made these proposals for educational reform:

> In the global arena, candid and decisive speech is in order. It is therefore necessary for the nation to promote the teaching of dialectical skills in an effort to enable Japanese to speak more clearly and logically in international settings. This proposal has been presented by the Global Industrial and Social Progress Research Institute, an academic center affiliated with the International Trade and Industry Ministry. . . Koreo Kinoshita, a professor emeritus at Gakushin University and chairman of the research committee at the institute, presents the following example in his books. Which statement is intended as a fact? "George Washington was the greatest president of the United States," or "George Washington was the first president of the United States." In his writing, Kinoshita says primary school students in the United States are taught to distinguish facts from opinions (3 March *The Daily Yomiuri*).

Responding to such suggestions and to criticisms of the defects in English education in Japan, the Ministry of Education has also formulated new guidelines for English courses in Japanese high schools. For example, the "Oral English C" course is to be a

course in English debating. However, critics have remarked that these vague new guidelines are not likely to provide more than cosmetic changes in many cases, since high school students typically "are given few opportunities to formulate and express their thoughts in the classroom, let alone arrange them," even in Japanese (Carter et. al., 1993, p. 5). Furthermore, without changing the multiple-choice entrance examination system for school advancement and the grammar-translation teaching methods aimed at passing such tests, few students will probably choose this elective course in debate. Finally, the motive for these changes seems not to be any acknowledgment of the inherent defects in the educational system but a desire to help Japanese business or government leaders present their predetermined positions to the outside world. Arriving at truth or deeper understanding is not the goal. In other words, the government really appears to be encouraging what Paul has called "critical thinking in the weak sense" (Paul, 1992). Nevertheless, these developments must be regarded as positive steps, since they represent a significant departure from the past. Someday they may lead to good thinking being valued in itself.

The everyday behavior of ordinary Japanese people provides more grounds for hope. In addition to being basically reasonable people (that is, at least as reasonable as any other peoples in the world), they exhibit many qualities which can provide fertile soil for critical thinking training. Ironically, many of these characteristics are the attractive flip side of some of the worst features of Japanese psychology. The flip side of their submissiveness to authority is a basic teachability. Unless they happen to be in a position of power or prestige, people often show themselves willing to listen to honest criticism and new ideas. By temperament and cultural background many people seem well-suited to rational self-reflection and intellectual humility. The flip side of the insistence on harmony is a potential critical thinking strength of the Japanese: in many cases people are willing to hear various and differing opinions on a topic. Dissent must at times have its say, and many Japanese are good at entering into

the point of view of someone who disagrees with them. In that respect they may have a predilection for "dialogical" thinking (Paul, 1992).

Furthermore, recent classroom experiences have convinced me that many Japanese young people are eager to be challenged intellectually. In many cases, students have exceeded my expectations in their response to a critical approach. Now I am evaluating student progress in thinking by various many formal and informal means (Norris and Ennis, 1989). My oral students kept a thinking journal that I collected every month. During the course we studied prejudice, advertising, and rational persuasion, and student comments often showed insight and analytical thinking about these subjects. In particular, comments during our teaching units on Advertising and Prejudice revealed a good response to a critical thinking approach. Students seemed to find these units fascinating and eye-opening. Many quickly grasped the implications of their study. In one advertising activity, students brought magazine ads to class and had to identify one assumption and one implication in each ad. One student wrote afterwards "I watched commercials consciously recently" as a result of the unit. For example, about one vitamin drink ad showing a muscular young man, a student wrote "I think this ad implies if we drink Protina we will be a muscular man. And this ad assumes that a muscular man is popular, and man should have brawny arms and legs. . . I was very interested in today's class." Another student commented "the media have us many influence in politic, thinking, and so on. We must not be infatuated by the exaggerated media. We should see the truth of thing." "I think T.V. is wonderful but also fearful. Audience should understand truth." "I have ever thought that advertising does not have power to change people's thoughts and opinions. But I noticed that was mistake. Advertisings influence our life." Many wrote comments to that effect. During the unit on prejudice, students reacted even more strongly. "Unit 4 was very difficult and very interesting and very instructive and very meaningful for me. I have never thought serious about 'Human Rights and Prejudice' . . As we say 'never judge from appearances,' people should not be

possessed with a foolish preconception." When I asked students to bring in their own examples of prejudices arising from superficial thinking, they brought in a wide variety, not just the usual minority-group grievances. One complained about how her personality was once erroneously classified by her friends according to her blood-type (a current fad); another mentioned her mistaken idea about an author whose books she had not bothered to read; another mentioned how one bad experience at a Chinese restaurant had convinced her that "Chinese people are cold." Afterwards many expressed amazement to find how pervasive such thinking is in everyday life.

In both written and oral work, students frequently seem to grasp the importance of the logical and clear development of ideas. For example, after I had pointed out that her own classification essay conclusion was not logical since it made a persuasive statement not buttressed by any reasons, the same student, during the following teaching unit, found the same flaw in another student's work during peer essay evaluation and wrote "your conclusion is not logical." For two years I have also been teaching a course in debating. With practice, many students show obvious progress in their ability to express and defend ideas in debate. What is more, they often quickly recognize the flaws in each other's arguments, as I can see in their written comments on the performances of other debaters. Their criticisms of each other's reasoning are often the same as mine.

Finally, many students obviously appreciate a thinking approach to education and evaluate such instruction highly. On post-graduation surveys, a number of ours gave high marks to teachers who "made them think," even if the classwork was difficult. Our school draws unusually inquisitive and intellectually mature young women, so our school's experience may not be typical. However, it shows there is a definite "market" for critical thinking in Japan, a hunger for depth in learning over superficiality.

Conclusion

Within the context of many non-American societies, what critical thinkers advocate is nothing less than revolutionary. Independent, rational thinking may be fully consistent with the principles of America's founding fathers, but in other places it may be a very radical concept indeed. Potentially it has great liberating power, but it also can threaten many aspects of the social system and common assumptions about life and human relationships. As a result, critical thinking can not expect to make progress without significant resistance and difficulty in such places. Yet since men are basically rational beings, one can also expect these concepts not to be alien to any of them in the end. This gives hope that people from any background can be trained to think critically. As one specific instance of this fact, we can consider Japan, where both impediments and inducements for critical thinking exist. Both afford incentives for aggressively taking critical thinking education there. Where it does not exist in strength, it is needed; where the indicators show that the door is open and the response good, more educators should walk through the door. Without doubt, Japan has already become a major nation on the world stage, and the thinking qualities of its citizenry will certainly have profound repercussions throughout the world, as Japanese citizens make decisions based on their thinking processes, good or bad. Even part from global considerations, Japan itself needs critically thinking citizens, as New Japan Party leader Ichiro Ozawa recently observed about Japanese High School students :

> They are not encouraged to talk or to write. They are not trained to think or to debate. They do not even learn that there is more than one way to interpret a single issue. Memorization takes priority over analysis. . . From elementary school to high school, children busily cram themselves with the correct answers. They go all the way to college without developing the habit of thinking for themselves. They cannot possibly produce autonomous citizens (1994).

Since a lot of expertise and experience in critical thinking education is here in the U.S., I would like to issue a kind of "missionary call" to critical thinking educators and say: come to Japan. Help me by finding ways to bring these concepts to the attention of especially the Japanese educational world.

When educators do come, they should come prepared for frustrations and difficulties. Their work will be cut out for them. Considering the considerable obstacles to critical thinking in Japan, instructors will need to introduce these skills patiently, gently, and insightfully. Students need to see that people can challenge each other's thinking and disagree without becoming enemies. In many minds, the perception is that one can only choose between complete uniformity and hostility, a false dilemma that causes the possibility of amiable disagreement to be ruled out from the outset. Students must be gradually weaned away from irrational ways of responding to disagreement, such as capitulation or silence. Acknowledging that "it is extremely difficult to teach English logic to Japanese students who are not used to it," one Japanese educator nevertheless hopes foreign teachers will "guide Japanese students with warm eyes and patience" (Kobayashi, 1990). This sociological reality will probably require some changes in pedagogical approach. For instance, in a society in which people are often afraid to air their opinions and to disagree openly with others, it may not be possible to hold Socratic discussions with students in exactly the same way that such discussions can be held in an American classroom. Adaptations and modifications to suit the Japanese scene will be necessary in many cases.

The barriers may be great, but critical thinking educators can also expect rewards, as they witness thinking individuals emerge from mindless conformity and submission. When I first described the critical thinking approach to one of my Japanese colleagues, she immediately became excited and exclaimed "If they need

this in America, we need it even more in Japan!" She then eagerly borrowed a copy of Chaffee's textbook *Thinking Critically* from the library to read through at home (1990). Not all have reacted with such enthusiasm, but a quite a few have and will.

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