

## Conceptualising Education for Constitutional Monarchy System: Meiji Japan's View and Approach

Masanori Kakutani

### Introduction

A constitutional monarchy system is being introduced in the Kingdom of Bhutan. It has already been placed on the political agenda. It is a significant reform to change the fundamental structure of the country. Therefore, the GNH policy will be surely affected by the performance of the system. In other words, the GNH policy will not succeed if the system failed.

For the successful introduction of the constitutional monarchy system, a variety of preparations are being made in many socio-political sectors. However, the matter of education does not seem to be central to the discussion.

When looking around the world, there are some pilot examples of considering education in relation to a constitutional monarchy system. Japan in the Meiji period (1868-1912) is one such example. In Meiji Japan's case, education was regarded as *the key* to success in the establishment of the new political system. By examining the Japanese case, some useful implications for Bhutan's attempt may become available.

In the following sections, Meiji Japan's case is explored with a particular attention to its concept of education. Its views and ideas of education will reveal why education became such an important issue. At the end of the paper, some suggestions will be offered to

concerning the role of education in Bhutan's context of constitutional monarchy system.

### **Meiji Japan's political problem**

In a sociological sense, Meiji Japan can be understood as a process of national modernisation, just like the current Bhutan is. The start of the process in the Japanese case was the Meiji Restoration (1867) in which the rule of samurai warriors was finally terminated since 1192 and the power and order of Japan's Emperor and the Imperial family were revitalised. After the restoration, the newly born Meiji government launched a series of major reforms and changes in order to catch up with the Western countries.

The road to national modernisation however was not smooth. Japanese society was unstable due to political arguments and struggles among different groups.

When looking back the chaotic socio-political situation during the first twenty years of Meiji period, three major players can be pointed out. Their political roles and characters can be simplified and summarised in the following way:

Player	Role	Character
Imperial Court	Head of the State	conservative
Meiji government	Leader for modernisation	westernised
People's Rights Movement	Seeker for democracy	liberal

The Imperial Court with a young Emperor wanted to govern the country with Japan's traditional Imperial authority. Their idea was conservative and maintained traditional values.

Meiji government was formed by a group of young former-samurais. They understood the difficult situation in which Japan found herself under the pressure of Western powers. Their prime task was to modernise the country as soon as possible, and for this purpose they introduced a wide variety of Western systems and values in Japanese society.

People's Rights Movement was a somewhat anti-governmental movement of those who were attracted to British, French and American liberal ideas and thus actively demanded a democratic system to the government. The movement was also supported by those who did not enjoy the new governance: former-samurais who lost their supreme status and financial standing they had enjoyed in the previous feudal period and also those who could not develop their careers as much as they wished in the new government.

The relationships among the three players were complex. The Imperial Court and the government formed the Meiji regime, and they were on the same side in that sense. But their political ideas were far different. The Imperial Court often intervened in governmental policies, promoting Imperial tradition and values based on Confucian doctrines. On the other hand, the Meiji government and the People's Rights Movement shared common aspects by understanding the necessity of introducing Western thoughts, systems and values. But those in the People's Rights Movement were more radical in thought, and therefore severely criticised the government for its authoritarian leadership. The rest of the nation was conservative, still in traditional manners in thinking and values, and did not always welcome Western-style changes and reforms enforced by the new government. The Imperial Court was close to their feelings.

The Meiji government needed to manage politics between the conservative authority and the people's liberalistic demand. The government had to pursue national modernisation in such a difficult situation.

To deal with this situation, the leaders of the government began seeking a new perspective for governance, in which the nation would be united and start making progress toward modernisation under governmental leadership. Until then, the Meiji government was inclined towards Anglo-American liberal ideas in order to catch up with those countries. But, the promotion of those ideas would only fuel the fire of People's Rights Movement and further upset the Imperial Court.

The governmental leaders came to have a vague idea that such new perspective might exist in German countries. Countries such as Prussia and Austria seemed less advanced than those like Britain though their political systems, with Kings and Emperors, were similar to the Japanese Imperial system. This led the Meiji government to examine these countries for a new idea of managing Japan.

In March 1882, the Meiji government sent a mission to Prussia and Austria. Hirobumi Ito, then governmental leader, himself led the mission and went to those countries.<sup>1</sup> What he discovered there will be examined in the following section.

### **Lorenz von Stein's view of education**

The Meiji government, by the name of the Emperor, announced in 1881 that the Diet would be opened in ten years time. Ito's prime concern was to learn about constitutions and administration for Japan's forthcoming constitutional monarchy system. An important point that should be noted here is that what Ito was looking for was not just technical things and matters of constitutions and administration. He wanted to discover a new perspective of governance upon which the nation of Japan could be firmly founded.

At the beginning, however it was not easy to get an answer to that question. Although he met a number of scholars, politicians and governmental officials he thought worth to listen to, virtually none of them gave him a satisfactory answer. But eventually he met a person who impressed him, Lorenz von Stein, then a professor of economics and administration at the University of Vienna.<sup>2</sup>

Why Ito was so impressed by Stein can be seen through Ito's letter sent to his colleagues in Japan:

By studying under two famous German teachers, Gneist and Stein, I have been able to get a general understanding of the structure of the state.<sup>3</sup> Later I shall discuss with you how we can achieve the great objective of establishing Imperial authority. Indeed, the tendency in our

country today is to erroneously believe in the works of British, French, and American liberals and radicals as if they were Golden Rules and, thereby, to lead virtually to the overthrow of the state. In having found principles and means of combating this trend, I believe I have rendered an important service to my country, and I feel inwardly that I can die a happy man (Ike, 1950, 175-176; Tsuchiya, 1962, 412-413).

In the quotation above, Ito stressed his great satisfaction in finding a new perspective to replace Anglo-American and French “Golden Rules”. Also the quotation suggests that Ito had an idea of re-organising the country by developing Imperial authority.

The next question concerns the new perspective itself. To investigate this, it is necessary to examine what aspect of Stein’s socio-political idea appealed to the Japanese he taught. The following episode is useful to understand this point. It is a part of a proposal submitted by Jun Kawashima, who was a former student of Stein’s and a member of Ito’s mission, to Japan’s then Education Secretary Takachika Fukuoka two months before leaving for Europe with Ito.<sup>4</sup> The proposal is entitled “Politics for the hundred generations cannot be established without gathering people’s thoughts through education reform”. Kawashima acknowledged that the proposal was based on Stein’s idea.

The episode is as follows (Tsuchiya, 1962, pp. 414-417). One day, Stein asked Kawashima about the general situation in Japan after the Meiji Restoration. Kawashima answered that only a little more than ten years had passed since the Restoration, but added that the government recently made a petition to the Emperor to open a Diet. People were hoping to develop a civilisation like that of the British, French or Americans, and translations of scholars’ books of those countries were the most popular of all foreign literature. Then Stein asked:

I am a foreigner to your country and do not understand your language, let alone your laws and politics. In Europe, it is universities that advance people’s intelligence, gather people’s thoughts and advance the societies. What about your education system? (Tsuchiya, 1962, p. 415)

Kawashima explained that Japan's traditional education was based on Confucianism and other classics. But after the Restoration, Kawashima added, the Japanese sought universal laws of social advance and created Western-style primary, secondary and tertiary schools. In the university, literature, politics, economics and laws were founded on British or French academic traditions.<sup>5</sup> There were many British and French teachers in the university. The army adopted the French system, and the navy introduced the British system. Only medical knowledge was borrowed from the German intellectual tradition. Kawashima pointed out that the thoughts of the Japanese were therefore becoming similar to those of the British and the French.

Then Stein gave the following words. Although it is quite long, it is worth to quote in order to grasp Stein's idea of politics and education:

It looks as if your country has a desire to establish itself by discarding its own history and tradition in exchange for foreign systems and matters, and hasn't succeeded yet. You can introduce the best possible medicine and other technical matters from abroad, because [technical] facts are the same everywhere. But politics and education are completely different matters. You have to make it clear whose is the principle and whose is the subsidiary, and then decide what you take from the subsidiary. [This point is important] Because the rise and fall of a country depends on its politics and education.... If you study such foreign laws and literature while ignoring your own history and customs, you study them not with reference to your real situations but as empty theories. As was so in France before, the people would fiercely assert people's rights. It is as if you would give guns to children, and therefore your country may face a crisis.... Civilisation and enlightenment are not something you can achieve soon after changing laws and politics.... They can be achieved only gradually in accordance with a country's history and trend, and the results are not necessarily the same as those in other countries'. Britain, France, Germany, Austria and Italy are all different in language and system. So they are in education. It is all because they have established an education system depending on their own customs and manners. Hence one country comes up with one particular education system. This is how they can manage themselves.... Those impetuous ones who do not pay attention to what happened in the past would not discover the history of the British or French system. They just adore the appearances,

and then attempt to decide their own national policy. That is shallow. That is what happens when you do not differentiate the principle and the subsidiary, do know other countries but yourselves and get your priorities wrong.... It is apparent that those who follow the French and assert people's rights could overthrow the state. If you need a proof for what I have said, select some more bright students and send them to the countries in the West to find out how their education systems are so diverse and why their practices are different from their theories. I hope that your country will decide on its education system and national policy by doing so (Tsuchiya, 1962, p. 416).

There can be seen a sharp contrast between then Japanese strategy of national modernisation which Kawashima described and Stein's advice. According to Kawashima, the Japanese strategy was based on a lot of borrowings from the West. The Japanese were also acquiring Western mentality, so Japan's modernisation would be in due course realised, even though the country was struggling at that moment.

Responding to this, Stein gave an extremely different advice. In the above quotation, Stein stresses that a country's fate depends on politics and education; and politics and education should be developed on the basis of the country's own history and tradition. A country can mismanage itself if it eagerly introduces other countries' approaches and methods in such areas. Kawashima made a follow-up comment in his proposal, saying that he had investigated the Western countries' education systems, as suggested by Stein, and discovered that what Stein had said was correct (Tsuchiya, 1962, pp. 416-417). He concluded the proposal by saying that the most important policy for preserving the "public order (*chian*) of the nation" was to reform the education system and establish universities (Tsuchiya, 1962, p. 415).

In terms of searching a new perspective of Japan's national modernisation, what Stein said was straightforward and practical. It accounted for Meiji Japan's socio-political turmoil caused by rushed borrowings of foreign ideas, and also offered a solution to the problem: education in accordance with Japan's own history and tradition. Stein stated definitely that Japan's education should be

Japanese, and this must be how Japan would succeed in organising herself and also starting national modernisation as well. For Ito and other governmental officials, who had been eager for catching up to the West since the Meiji Restoration, highlighting Japanese own customs and tradition in education must be a fresh idea and also a perspective for national modernisation. Ito was therefore able to show strong confidence in the letter to his colleagues after seeing Stein.

In Europe, Ito met another important person who would be able to carry out education reform upon the new perspective. It was Arinori Mori, then Japanese ambassador to Britain, and later regarded as the architect of pre-war Japan's national education (Passin, 1965, p. 88; Morikawa, 1989, p. 39, 59; Marshall, 1994, p. 57). His view of education and politics is examined next.

### **Arinori Mori's idea of education**

Ito encountered Mori in Paris in August 1882 during the term Ito was being given a series of lectures on constitutions, administration and education by Stein.<sup>6</sup> The two met and talked in a hotel for a few days. At the end, Ito made up his mind to appoint Mori as his Education Minister, when the Meiji government would establish a cabinet system with Ito as the Prime Minister. This chronological order of the events suggests that Mori's view of education and politics was quite close to that of Stein.

What they discussed can be outlined by Sadanaga Koba's writings. Koba was sent to Europe by the Department of Education to study German politics and administration with Ito. Together with Ito, Koba also listened to Stein's lectures.<sup>7</sup> He described the Paris meeting of the two as follows:

Mr Mori ... visited Mr Ito's hotel and had heated discussions about the future of the State. Mr Mori insisted on the necessity to promote education. He said that it was essential to pay attention to the development and spread of education as the most important condition, if Mr Ito was considering introducing a constitutional monarchy system to Japan.... As a result, Mr Ito totally agreed with Mr Mori and was



convinced that there would be no one but Mr Mori who could accomplish this important task.... Mr Mori excused himself from accepting the offer first, but finally gave in for Mr Ito's persistence in his persuasion. After coming back to London, Mr Mori began making even greater efforts to research education (Tsuchiya, 1962, p. 435).

According to the above quotation, the two discussed education with constitutional monarchy system in mind. It was in this context Mori offered his idea to Ito that education was extremely important for the political system.

Details can be revealed through the correspondence exchanged between Ito and Mori soon after their Paris meeting. Ito's letter (dated 4 September 1882) reads:

... Although there are persons who preach the necessity of basing political progress on education ... I do not find anyone with the vision to establish the foundations of education with an eye to the future stability [*chian*] of the nation... (Tsuchiya, 1952, p. 444)..

Ito continued that he would expect the future Education Minister of his cabinet to possess "the vision to establish its (i.e. education system's) foundations in such a fashion that the common people, in the future, would have their guidelines laid down in their minds while they are young" (Hall, 1973, p. 362).

Responding to the letter, Mori wrote back to Ito (dated 12 September).<sup>8</sup> His letter was titled *Gakusei hengen* or "A Fragmentary Remark on Educational Administration":

... First of all, we must take under consideration the temperament of our people and their traditional customs; distinguish between the merits and the defects of educational methods in effect up to now; and take measure of what is suitable and what is not. Having got that far, there will be one point which will require our very special attention: namely, that we should conform to the characteristic political heritage of our land...(Hall, 1973, p. 360).

The contents of Ito's and Mori's letters share a similar view of education and politics. Ito's letter expresses that education should be aimed at maintaining *chian* (public order and stability), and

suggests that Mori had the same concern. Ito also insisted that the sense of public stability should be stressed to young people through education. Then Mori's letter points out the necessity of establishing national education on the basis of Japanese people's own customs and tradition. In other words, Mori answered that education for public order and stability could be realised by using Japan's own traditional political heritage. On this point, Mori later asserted that the Japanese tradition of having the unbroken lineage of the same Imperial family was the 'peerless capital' on which Japan's own national education could be founded. It is symbolic indeed that the Imperial University, which was at the pinnacle of Japan's entire education system and established by Mori in 1886, had the word 'Imperial' in its name.

There was some more elaboration in Mori's idea. Although it was 'Imperial' University, the actual role of the school itself was not purposed for maintaining public order and stability. On universities, Stein once said:

There are two kinds of education. One is general education by which the general public acquire general knowledge. The other is higher and specialised education by which the State can develop necessary knowledge and personnel (Tsuchiya, 1962, pp. 422-423).

Similar to this idea, Mori also noticeably differentiated between *kyoiku* (education) and *gakumon* (academic study and research). With this differentiation, Ito's and Mori's concept of education can be described as follows. First of all, the entire education system should be guided by Japan's Imperial heritage. But inside of the system, the Imperial University and other higher schools were different in roles and characters from the rest of the schools. The higher institutions were purposed to contribute to national modernisation. Hence those in the university, for example, studied and researched the latest knowledge developed in the West. On the other hand, the main duty of other schools in the lower segments of the education system was to maintain public stability and order for the nation's constitutional monarchy.

After being appointed as the Education Minister, Mori carried out education reform as he and Ito conceptualised it. Meiji Japan's constitutional monarchy system was founded with the promulgation of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan in 1889, and Mori was assassinated on the very day of the promulgation. Hence Mori could not see how his education system served the country. But surely his education system survived much longer than himself; it was finally discontinued after the end of the Second World War.

### **Summary and suggestions**

This paper has outlined how Japan conceptualised a particular educational idea with constitutional monarchy system in mind. In this respect, the Japanese experience can be suggestive to Bhutan's education policy.

The Japanese case can be summarised as follows. First of all, Meiji Japan was in a process of national modernisation. The Meiji government's prime concern was to modernise the nation. But there was a traditional authority, i.e. the Imperial Court, and their interest was to restore a conservative order and put pressure on the government. On the other hand, there were those in society who were inclined towards Western liberal ideas. They criticised the government severely for its non-liberal leadership and demanded a democratic polity and open society. In addition, the majority of the nation had little idea of why the country started so-called modernisation. Therefore they were reluctant to follow governmental policies. In such a situation, Meiji Japan was stuck in socio-political disturbance, and little could be done for national modernisation. Moreover, the government did not have a clear perspective on how to reform Japan, despite the fact that a constitutional monarchy system was to be introduced and a Diet was to be opened shortly.

The government sent a mission to German countries to study and research constitutions and administration. The mission discovered the idea of using education for socio-political purposes. They

determined that the nation should be educated with the nation's own customs and tradition, especially for the successful introduction of constitutional monarchy. Only universities ought to be directed to work and function for national modernisation. Meiji Japan reformed its education system accordingly, by which the country became able to achieve both national integration under constitutional monarchy and rapid national modernisation.

With the Japanese experience, a variety of suggestions can be offered to Bhutan's education policy. In the following, three points are put forward as a regarding education.

***How education is characterised in a socio-political context?***

In developing countries, education is often discussed in relation to national economy. Therefore, the acquisition of the latest knowledge and skills borrowed from foreign countries is emphasised to foster good workforce. But economic prosperity does not necessarily mean achieving socio-political stability. The thesis of market economy spreads liberal as well as individualistic ideas among people, and economic discriminations among them can lead to anti-governmental campaign by those who have been inspired by liberal ideas.

In the Japanese case, people were stabilised and integrated within the constitutional monarchy system through education. It is, however, inappropriate to stress such political use of education in this modern time; education is now regarded as an indispensable part of human rights. Still, some kind of treatment through education may be necessary for people to be founded on a specific manner. Then what option can be considered?

***What should and what should not be imported from the developed countries?***

For developing countries, it is reasonable to introduce useful and usable systems and ideas from outside. In addition, people are continuously exposed to foreign influences in this internet age.

Hence it is inevitable that people's minds change, influenced by the ideas and values of those in the developed countries.

But in Meiji Japan, it was foreign influence that existed behind social and political problems. Stein advised the governmental leaders that the Japanese should establish themselves by learning their own customs and tradition. It is, however, not just a matter of emphasising one's own heritage in education. There are two aspects that should be considered. Firstly, there must be a clear standard of judgement to distinguish what can be imported from outside from what should not be imported. Secondly, the emphasis on one's own customs and traditions must be done cautiously, because such an education policy can reinforce traditional authorities. If not done cautiously, such authorities could start making retrogressive and conservative interventions to governmental policies. Such a reverse effect was observed in Meiji Japan after Mori's tragic death.

***Which domestic elements can be used for education?***

Ito and Mori agreed to "use" Japan's traditional Imperial system as the foundation of their forthcoming new education system. In Mori's view, the Japanese tradition of having the unbroken lineage of the same Imperial family was the 'peerless capital' with which people's minds could be stabilised through education. History tells that it worked, and it worked too well; the Japanese Empire accomplished national modernisation and then recklessly challenged the West, only to perish soon after the World War II.

What can be used in Bhutan? Because the issue is deeply related to the matter of constitutional monarchy, Bhutan's honourable Royal system would be a logical choice to emphasise. But the emphasis of pre-modern aspects such as Imperial or Royal authority can be regarded as retrogressive in this modern time. The same view can be applied to Bhutan's Buddhist tradition; in the modern idea of education, however, education, especially universal and compulsory education is commonly accepted as being separate from any particular politics or religion.

Then, can the concept of GNH be the alternative? There ought to be possibilities if the GNH concept develops to be the national principle, in deliberate relation with both the Royal and the Buddhist traditions.

## **References**

- Hall, I. P. (1973). *Mori Arinori*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Ike, N. (1950). *The Beginning of Political Democracy in Japan*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Koba, S. (1981). Mori monbudaijin no kaikaku [The Education Minister Mori's Reform]. In Kokumin kyoiku shoreikai (Ed.), *Kyoiku gojunenshi* [The Fifty Years of History of Education in Japan]. Tokyo: Tosho kankokai.
- Kuki, Y. (1984). Mori Arinori – the 'Political Plan' of the First Education Minister -. In Y. Shimohodo (Ed.), *Nihon no kindai ka to ningen keisei* [Japanese Modernisation and Moulding of Man]. Kyoto: Hohritsubunka-sha.
- Marshall, B. K. (1994). Learning to Be Modern: Japanese Political Discourse on Education. In A. Embree & E. Farmer (Ed.), *New Perspectives on Asian History*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Morikawa, T. (1989). Mori Arinori. In B. C. Duke (Ed.), *Ten Great Educators of Modern Japan: A Japanese Perspective*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.
- Passin, H. (1965). *Society and Education in Japan*. Columbia: Teachers College Press, Columbia University Press.
- Tsuchiya, T. (1952). Mori Arinori no kyoiku seisaku [Education Policy of Mori Arinori]. In S. Ishiyama, et. al., (Ed.), *Ishikawa Ken hakushi kanrekikinen ronbunshu: Kyoiku no shitekitenkai* [The Historical Development of Education: A Collection of Articles Presented to Dr. Ishikawa on His 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday]. Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Tsuchiya, T. (1962). *Meijizenki kyoiku seisakushi no kenkyu* [A Study of the History of Education Policy of Early Meiji Japan]. Tokyo: Kodansha.

<sup>1</sup> Ito came back to Japan in August 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Ito was so impressed by him that Ito asked Stein to come to Japan and take an advisory position for the Japanese government. Stein eventually declined the offer after considering his age. He was sixty-seven years old when the two met.

<sup>3</sup> Before coming to Vienna, Ito met Heinrich Rudolf Hermann Friedrich von Gneist and Albert Mosse in Berlin. They gave lectures about constitutions to Ito, but Ito wrote to the Meiji government that he was struggling to get a clear idea of what Japan's constitution should be. Then he went to Vienna to see Stein. Hence Ito mentions both Gneist and Stein in the quotation though, it is clearly Stein he was impressed.

<sup>4</sup> Kawashima was a senior secretary of the Department of Finance and the Department of Foreign Affairs. After becoming a secretary of the foreign office in 1874, he worked at the Japanese embassies in Prussia, Russia and Austria. While staying in Austria, he studied politics and economics with Stein. Tsuchiya suggests that Kawashima acted as a mediator between Ito and Stein. (Tsuchiya, 1962, p. 414)

<sup>5</sup> The university, which Kawashima mentioned, was Tokyo University. It was later re-established as the Imperial University in 1886.

<sup>6</sup> The last of the lectures which Stein gave to Ito in Vienna was entirely about educational administration (31 October 1882).

<sup>7</sup> After coming back to Japan in 1886, Koba became Mori's secretary at the Ministry of Education.

<sup>8</sup> On their correspondences, see also Kuki, 1984.