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JAPANESE RESEARCH AND REALITY IN THE FIELD OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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I am a developmental psychologist whose principal research interest is in "development-in-context"; that is, the study of basic developmental processes as they occur in the real life settings in which human beings live and grow. For someone with this scientific focus, an opportunity to spend five weeks in Japan proved especially rewarding in two major spheres: the first area was Japanese research in child development; the second was Japanese reality in this same domain. I shall speak of each of these worlds separately (since that is the way I experienced them), and then point to the importance of strengthening the linkages between them in the interest both of science and social policy, not only in Japan but in post-industrialized societies generally.

On the scientific side, the visit led to a surprising discovery. On the basis of my prior reading of Japanese research on human development available in English, I had gotten the impression that with some notable exceptions (reviewed in Azuma, 1982), much of the Japanese empirical work done in my area was devoted to the replication or follow-up of lines of investigation originating abroad, mostly in the United States. What I discovered over the course of my visit was a growing body of original thinking and research that was only partially reflected in the published scientific literature, apparently even in studies published in Japanese. One reason for this state of affairs is that some of the most promising research is still under way. But, as I discussed the phenomenon with Japanese colleagues, I became aware of two other, actively inhibiting factors that may deserve consideration. The first is what impressed me as an undue deference toward Western scientists and their work, coupled with an undue modesty about one's own. As a result, Japanese scholars have often been hesitant to express in print ideas or research results that go beyond, or call into question, conceptions and conclusions appearing in Western scientific literature. I became aware of such innovative ideas and activities mainly through conversations, or less frequently, from indirect references in published work. This realization prompted me, especially during the second half of my visit, to take the opportunity, both in more formal scientific meetings and in informal discussions, of encouraging my colleagues to overcome their hesitancy and to submit for publication papers reporting on their own independent ideas and investigation and their criticisms and reinterpretations of Western work.

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During August and September, 1983, as a visiting scholar of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Professor Bronfenbrenner visited the RCCCD where he gave lectures and conducted a seminar. This is an excerpt from his research report presented to JSPS in October 1983.

The second inhibiting factor I encountered is substantive rather than motivational in nature. In part because of the deprecating view Japanese colleagues in my field take of their own work, when they do pursue an original idea they often do so somewhat casually without paying heed to conventional requirements of systematic research, such as not altering procedures while collecting data for purposes of comparison, clear separation between data and interpretation, etc. As a result, when the work is reported or submitted for publication, it risks being dismissed on purely technical grounds, with the result that its substantive significance is overlooked. The importance of this problem was reinforced when, after my return to the United States, I began talking about my interest in Japanese work with American colleagues. All too frequently, the technical weaknesses of one or another piece of research prevented them from appreciating its scientific value.

Taken together, these two inhibiting features result in a lack of awareness and appreciation abroad of important work in the field of human development being done by psychologists (and also sociologists) in Japan. To be specific, in the research centers that I visited, or learned about secondhand, I was particularly impressed with the ideas and research activities of the following researchers and research teams. I shall describe them in the order in which I became acquainted with them over the course of my travels, which began in the southwest at Kobe University and proceeded northward through Kyoto, Nagoya, Tokyo, to Sapporo.

1. At the University of Kobe, Professor Kunio Wakai is a talented developmental psychologist who, as the result of his training and experience is now at a point in his career when he can make significant scientific contributions to the field. His present situation at Kobe, however, is not conducive to the realization of his potential, since the University has only a Master's program in developmental psychology, and he himself is overburdened with administrative and teaching duties and lacks colleagues and graduate students with whom he could develop his ideas and translate them into empirical research.

2. One of the most exciting centers of research in human development with which I became acquainted is at the University of Nagoya, where Professor Hideo Kojima is its guiding mind and spirit. Kojima's recent papers, as yet unpublished, break new ground in two seemingly diverse, but actually interrelated areas. The first paper reports an experimental study of the development of an infant's capacity to perceive, understand, and deal with interpersonal relationships within the family. Once the paper is published, it will, in my judgment, become a minor classic in the field. The second article is a historical-ethnographic analysis of Japanese documents containing advice given to parents and other persons responsible for the rearing and education of children and youth. The article traces the evolution of Japanese views in this area, beginning with influences emanating both from China and the West, but demonstrating the evolution of a distinctive Japanese point of view that is remarkably contemporary in its conception of the importance of reciprocal processes between adult and child as the principal vehicles of development. As far as I can determine from inquiries I made of scholars both in Japan and here in the United States after my return, Kojima's work will be the first systematic historical analysis of child rearing patterns in Japan. As such, it will take an important place in the

newly-developing scholarly interest in the history of childhood from an interdisciplinary perspective.

In this connection, I should mention another noteworthy aspect of Kojima's work. On the world scientific scene, the study of human development is rapidly becoming an interdisciplinary science involving collaboration among a number of fields, most notably developmental psychology, pediatrics, education, sociology, anthropology, and — more recently — history and economics. Relevant work is being done in all of these disciplines in Japan as well, but, as in some other countries, there appears to be little contact between specialists in different disciplines who are working on what are, in fact, related problems. I shall comment further on this phenomenon below, but here I want to identify Professor Kojima as an outstanding exception. As part of the program that he arranged for me, he set up a day-long research workshop for which invitations were sent to researchers from a variety of disciplines (including psychiatry, education, psychology, sociology, and anthropology). Papers were circulated in advance to the participants, so that our day's meeting could be devoted to the discussion of each paper from a variety of perspectives. I believe I am not mistaken in saying that this proved to be a rewarding experience for all who attended, and I would recommend it as a model to be incorporated in the planning of future visits by JSPS Fellows.

3. The isolation of disciplines is perhaps best illustrated by my experience in Tokyo, where I met separately with groups of sociologists, educators, and psychologists. The first two meetings were arranged in response to my own initiative. Although important work in the field of human development was being done by researchers in each of these groups, they often had none or only superficial knowledge of the studies being conducted by their colleagues in other disciplines. For example, the pioneering longitudinal study of two and three generational families being conducted in Shizuoka City under the leadership of Professor Kiyomi Morioka of Seijo University promises to be of major significance for enhancing our understanding of how family structure influences human development throughout the life course. Yet, this ongoing research appears to be little known to Japanese developmental psychologists. The absence of such involvement is regrettable, and may entail some lost opportunities. For example, there are children present in most of the families in Morioka's sample, and the rich data being collected on the adult family members provide a unique opportunity for assessing the impact of contrasting types of family structure on the psychological development of the young. Correspondingly, Tokyo sociologists could contribute in important ways to researches being conducted by the substantial community of developmental psychologists in that city, which included outstanding investigations directed by Professor Hiroshi Azuma, and, in the next younger generation, Professor Giyoo Hatano (whom, unfortunately, I did not get a chance to meet).

4. Although notable scientific work is being done in child development by individual investigators and their teams, I was told that the only research center explicitly dedicated to this area is that established under the leadership of Professor Kazuo Miyake at the University of Hokkaido. Miyake is a man of extraordinary energy and vision who

has brought together a highly motivated group of younger researchers and initiated a program of considerable promise. He has also been extremely resourceful in bringing to Hokkaido, and thereby to Japan generally, a series of visiting scientists from overseas, a number of whom have remained for extended periods, thus permitting the development of a genuine exchange of ideas, methods, and research products. These very accomplishments, however, could become the source of a problem; namely, Professor Miyake has so many responsibilities that the research efforts he has stimulated may be deprived of the full benefit of his needed scientific wisdom and skill. He desperately needs a second experienced scholar and researcher who can give leadership and expertise to the ongoing scientific activities. Potentially, these activities can contribute significantly to research on human development. For example, the work currently being done at his laboratory calls into question, and places in a new cross-cultural perspective, a well established line of American research on mother-infant attachment. Also, as in other Japanese universities, there are relevant investigations being conducted at Hokkaido in other departments of the University, work that could both profit from and enrich researches currently under way at Miyake's Center. For example, a study of multigenerational families being carried on by Professor Tetsuo Mitani and his colleagues in the Department of Sociology is yielding findings that complement results of the comparative investigation of rural/urban differences in socialization being conducted by Miyake and his coworkers. In both instances, the scientific issue is whether the results of such studies parallel those obtained in other modern industrialized countries.

This reference to Japanese social realities speaks to the second area of major impressions garnered during my visit. As a researcher who has been especially interested in cross-cultural studies of children and families. I was struck by the richness of Japanese society in these two domains, and by the paradoxical absence of scientific investigations of some of the most prominent, and perhaps problematic, aspects of the Japanese scene in these areas. On the one hand, in visits kindly arranged at my request, to baby homes, day care centers, children's institutions, schools, parks, and other settings for children and adolescents, I was struck by the competence and vitality of Japanese youngsters from earliest ages onward, and by the attention and care that is lavished on children by parents, teachers, and adults generally. On the other hand, during the period of my visit, your excellent English-language newspapers referred repeatedly to phenomena of another kind — the proliferation of so-called baby hotels, the unconscionable number of hours that children are spending after school and during weekends in *juku*, the effects of such strain as reflected in mental breakdowns and suicide among the young, the reported increase of vandalism and violence in schools and peer groups, and — perhaps more important in the long run — changes in the Japanese family, which, probably more than any other institution has been responsible for the high level of competence and motivation manifested by Japanese children, and the resultant commitment and productivity of the adult population. As documented in various surveys I read in the press, these changes include a marked decline in the number of three generation households, and a substantial increase in maternal employment, with more than half of all mothers now in the labor force, 12% of whom do not return home until after 8:00 at night (editorial in the

Japan Times, September 6, 1983). These phenomena take on added significance in the light of what appears to be another feature of contemporary Japanese family life. Although divorce rates in Japan are much lower than those in the United States, I could not escape the impression, from what I read and heard, that Japanese fathers surpass even their American counterparts in the number of hours that they are away from home, thus creating a *de facto* condition of father absence. My concern is not with these phenomena as such, since most of them affect only a small segment of the population and do not begin to compare with the large-scale changes in family life taking place in my own country. Rather, I wish to highlight the failure of these social developments to attract scientific attention. Insofar as I could discover, the changes occurring in Japanese society are not becoming the object of systematic investigation by Japanese students of human development — inattention that is puzzling to a developmental researcher from abroad. For, the occurrence of such profound transformations in the way in which a new generation is being reared creates a rich opportunity for basic science, but, at the same time, raises uncertainties, and perhaps dangers, for the well-being of the larger society. It may therefore serve as a boon both for Japanese science and for the Japanese nation if resources were directed to the systematic investigation of the nature, causes, and developmental consequences — both immediate and longer-range — of the changing circumstances of life for Japanese children and those responsible for their care.

I trust these comments, based as they are on only a brief, fragmentary, and superficial acquaintance with work being done in my field in Japan, do not strike the reader as presumptuous or ill-advised. I debated for a considerable time before deciding to write as I have (the principal reason for the delay of this report). I finally concluded that the respect and admiration engendered by the experience of becoming acquainted with your scientists and your society called for the most responsible answer I could give to the principal request posed by JSPS in the outline for my report — a statement of “impressions about the present state of science in Japan in the field concerned.” That is what I tried to provide.

REFERENCE

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