

# Teaching Debate In Japan

## Part One

### 日本におけるディベート教育

#### 第一部

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**Summary** : An Instructor of debate in Japan needs to be aware of some fundamental similarities and differences between Japan and the western countries. It is necessary to understand and account for these, before designing a course to successfully teach students the skills needed to be successful in Debate. The first step is to understand the basic philosophical differences between Japan and the west. The second step is to look at specific philosophers that had a significant impact on the development of political and educational systems in Japan and the west.

The Greek philosophers Plato, Socrates and Aristotle form the basis of western ideas. The French philosopher Rosseau refined this thinking. The Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau further developed the ideas. Ghandi and Martin Luther King also had important impacts on the thinking of the west. Japanese philosophy has its roots in Confucianism and Shinto. Buddhism and Legalism later refined the philosophical basis of Japan's educational and political systems.

**Key words**: Debate, Teaching, Social Contract, Civil Disobedience, Meritocracy

## 1. Philosophical Differences

Beginning with Confucius and Buddha in the East and Plato in the West, two philosophical traditions have evolved over time. Despite specific differences, both Plato and Confucius began from a set of somewhat similar premises. The traditions of the East and the West developed very differently. Both political and educational philosophy of the west as represented by Rousseau, Emerson, Thoreau, Ghandi and King moved in the direction of individual rights and freedom while Eastern traditions like Shinto and Legalism moved in the direction of submission of the individual to authority.

## 2. Plato and Socrates

Our knowledge of the Greek teacher and philosopher Socrates comes to us through the writings of his student, Plato. Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" presents the idea that all knowledge is innate, but hidden from the clear view of the learner. It is through Socratic questioning that the real truth is revealed to a student. This implies that students already have innate knowledge but need a teacher to help reveal it (Linder, 2002 ; Dillion, 2004).

Because education is so important, particularly education of those who will be the "philosopher-kings" it should be carefully administered with a goal of revealing truths and revealing who the true leaders are. These "philosopher-kings" should be educated differently than others, with a goal of revealing 'ultimate good.' While

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Socrates, through Plato, proposed a rigid system to promote the leader's learning, within this system it is based on an internal desire to work hard, thus exposing the student's true nature. In the end the purpose is to have just, intelligent rulers who are self-motivated (Dillon, 2004).

In this way, compared to later Eastern philosophies like Shinto and Legalism, Plato and Socrates were focused on the individualism and the ability to see truth as central to the ability to lead. While Plato saw an "aristocratic" state, it was one based on rationale thinking and strict intellectual discipline. He also saw the need for trained professionals to run the government – but under the control of the philosopher-king (Lines, 2009, 41-43).

### **Aristotle**

Like Plato and Socrates, the Greek philosopher Aristotle believed that the aristocracy should be educated differently than the poor and the slaves, who could be trained to perform whatever tasks were necessary. These enlightened leaders should rule by reason and logic. According to Aristotle the goal was a well-educated constitutional monarch who would balance the demands of the powerful and wealthy with the needs and interests of the masses. Education was a necessary function of government as it taught men how to reason logically, something they did not do if left untaught (CAL.S.NCU, 2011 ; Mays 2011).

## **3. Rousseau**

Eighteenth Century Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau shared some ideas on government and education with the ancient Greeks [and with Confucius], though in other ways his views were quite the opposite. Like Plato, he looked for education to expand on the 'natural proclivities' of a student, though in contrast he opposed a leadership elite and he opposed a focus on art and science, which had been central to the curriculum of Aristotle. He is most famous for the concept of the 'noble savage' – meaning that society's injustices were primarily because of corrupting failure of society to properly lead and educate citizens. Rather than leadership by a trained and aristocratic elite, Rousseau saw society as a "social contract" in which the citizens, properly educated, voluntarily consented to be ruled (Kemerling, 2006).

Unlike Plato who saw the education of an elite leadership class based on rationality, discipline and reason, Rousseau saw a broad education based on releasing inner emotion and wonder. Both, however, saw education by the state as a necessity for the benefit of the state (Lines, 2009, 41).

## **4. Emerson and Thoreau – Transcendentalists**

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were mid-nineteenth Century American Transcendentalists. This meant that like Plato, Rousseau and other earlier Western Philosophers they shared several views on the education of the individual and the individual's role in society.

In many ways Emerson's views on government, individuals and society were a reaction to the strict and disciplined type of education popular in his time period, an educational method that relied heavily on memorization and rote instruction. While New England and the United States in the 19th Century espoused democracy as a form of government, Emerson reacted to the undemocratic features that remained. Transcendentalists were early abolitionists and women's rights advocates. Educationally Emerson saw the need to allow individual talents to unfold and saw nature as the most valuable classroom to allow this to occur (Beck, 1996a).

The basic premise of Emerson's thinking includes the innate creativity and individuality of all learners and the need for an education unfettered by group discipline. There is also a belief in the equality of all people, not just a small aristocratic elite. This would be a logical extension on the American democratic tradition (Beck, 1996).

Thoreau attempted to live Emerson's ideas. He is most famous for his views on "civil disobedience." Opposing any imposition by government on the freedom of individual thought, he opposed war, slavery and any limitation on individual actions. Like Emerson, Rousseau and the Greek philosophers, Thoreau saw the inner nature of the individual as more important than the will of society. As a Transcendentalist he denied the right of a ruling elite or any government to control the individual. Such views are in stark contradiction to those being expressed in the East by Shinto and Legalism (Beck, 1996b).

## **5. Ghandi and King**

Mahatmas Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. were 20th Century pacifists, one Hindu the other Christian, one an Indian independence leader the other an American Civil Rights leader. Both shared a basic premise upon which they preached non-violent resistance to individual oppression. Unlike the Greek or Eastern views on an educated elite or individual responsibility to society both extended the views of the Transcendentalists on the importance of the individual and of equality. Ghandi emerged from an Indian society with a strict class structure, upon which the British imposed their own governing elite, while King lived in a supposedly democratic United States where racial segregation and economic conditions created a two-tiered society.

Ghandi believed in "Satyagraha" or "grasping forth and holding on to God" who he saw as truth. The inner faith in an individual was more important and could require extreme will as it meant passively resisting the sometimes brutal reactions of the government. Operating from the premise that 'just ends could not be reached through unjust means' there is a Platonic idea in his methods. Just as Plato taught that one must learn the basic truth that is hidden from a person, Ghandi's method of teaching the rulers was to endure their oppression in a way that reveals the brutality to the rulers themselves, for whom this reality may be hidden (Hindusism Beliefs, 2011).

Martin Luther King, Jr. extended Ghandi's basic educational premise further and incorporated modern technology to make it into a learning tool for society in general. His adoption of non-violent protest methods to the American Civil Rights movement meant that for the first time millions of Americans saw the brutality of Southern racists on their television screen.

In this way, King represented another step in Western philosophy on government and education. He used television images of racial brutality to educate citizens of a nation that previously were unaware of more than the most rudimentary reality of racism – like the prisoners in Plato's cave – enlightenment came from within. He also shared Rousseau's view of society as operating under a social contract where all are equal, thus extending the ideas of the Transcendentalists. The basic premise re-emerges that education helps individuals see objective truths and leaders to make fair decisions for all in society, without needing any special or elite form of education (Time Frames, 1964).

## **6. Shinto**

Japanese Shintoism represents a radically different view of the world and of government than the Western, Buddhist or Confucian models. In its origin, Shinto pre-dates Confucianism and Buddhism. As its premise is

the belief in shrines and spirits that represent the natural world in which the Japanese are related. While Shinto came to be influenced by both Buddhism and Confucianism, during the latter 19th Century under the Meiji, it was re-established in a way that focused on Japanese nationalism and emperor (Hoffert, 2011).

Japanese education under Shinto became militaristic and nationalistic. The Emperor was identified as a direct descendent of the Gods. While this would seem to mean that as, in the Greek tradition, there is a belief in innate knowledge resided within the individual, unlike the Greek idea of revealing this innate knowledge, learning involved “indoctrination” and the teaching of both cooperation with and subservience to authority (Hoffert, 2011).

Japanese Shinto might be seen as a polar opposite to the 19th Century Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau whose premise involved the individual, although both did also focus on learning through nature. The militarism and regimentation could also be seen as opposite to the non-violent and democratic views of Ghandi or King.

## **7. Confucius**

Confucius, born in 551 B.C.E., was a Chinese philosopher whose basic educational and political premises contained elements remarkably similar, but distinctly different from those of the Ancient Greeks philosophers who emerged several hundred years later.

A striking similarity is his belief in the necessity to educate or personally tutor those who will be leaders. Rather than an aristocratic elite, however, he saw the elite as being based on merit or ability. He also saw the need for a ‘liberal arts’ education and a lifelong educational process similar to the views of the Greeks. Like Rousseau he saw a need for social order based on enlightenment, not wealth or force. Like the Transcendentalists he saw the importance of learning about nature and accepting any student [though he did not advocate for women]. Like Ghandi and King, he rejected violence and favored the use of reason and logic that resided in all, though, like the Greeks, he saw the need of a private tutor to help the individual reveal it (Sun, 2009, pp. 560-562).

Like Socrates focused on a specific tutorial method of questioning to draw the knowledge from within, Confucius also focused on a way of learning that would reveal truth human nature. His goal was a “Sage” or wise ruler, who in some ways was similar to the Greek’s ‘Philosopher King.’

Confucius did not see a government running schools as this may lead to a monopoly by the aristocrats. He favored a meritocracy rather than an aristocracy to make just decisions. Like the Greeks he saw that music, physical education, art, history and math among the subjects to be learned as each helped to hone a specific form of self-discipline (Sun, 2009, 562-563).

Most important, the ruler had to understand and lead morally so that the people would have a good example. Rather than rule through laws and edicts, government should lead by example and moral authority, again ideas not unlike those of Aristotle, Socrates or later Rousseau (Sun, 2009, 562-563).

## **8. Buddhism**

Buddhism based on the teaching of Siddhartha Gautama started in India at roughly the same time as Confucianism was gaining popularity in China and several centuries before the three Greek philosophers.

With a few major differences, many basic premises of Buddhism can be seen as similar to those of Western

philosophy. Among these are the value of education for one to learn to think for one's self and the secular nature of the philosophy. Neither a God nor another human should have control but rather each person should seek knowledge, truth and happiness. It is up to each individual to improve him or herself. As in the other traditions a great teacher is considered important. Unlike Western traditions, however, meditation is important as is a belief in reincarnation (Buddhism Beliefs, 2008).

Unlike the Greeks, Buddhism does not focus on a particular curriculum, a need to constantly guide the individual or the need to prepare leaders for society. Like Transcendentalism [which it influenced through Emerson's readings] individual fulfillment is a key (Buddhism Beliefs, 2008)

## 9. Legalism

Japanese Legalism also represents a radical shift away from the Confucian model and thus is also a polar opposite to Rousseau, Ghandi and King.

Legalism rose in a period of turmoil several centuries after Confucius. It grew as more of a system of political rationalization for total control than a formal philosophy. Confucius, like the Western philosophers, had begun from a basic promise that people were good. Legalists, however, looked at the chaos and feudal fighting of their time and concluded that people were basically selfish. As a result there was a need for strict societal controls and loyalty to authority. This meant a comprehensive system of laws and a structured government. In time Legalists included any activity that was not socially productive to the group as 'evil' including even reading and scholarship. Unlike most of the Western philosophies that stressed individual learning or intellectual topics, the Legalists focused learning on only practical subjects like farming or weaving. Scholars who pursued individual inclinations or refused to heed authority were put to death (Hoffert, 2011).

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