Neoconfucianism, *Kokusaika* and Japanese ELT

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1.0 Introduction

The past few years have seen remarkable changes in Japanese English language teaching (ELT). In 1991, the Japanese Ministry of Education (*monbusho*) abolished the general education requirements for colleges and universities. Three years later, the Ministry called for more communicative high school English classes (Goold *et al.* 1994). And while there are questions about what shape it might take, plans are still underway to introduce ELT to primary schools in the future (Suwa 1994, Daily Yomiuri, 1996).

One major justification for these changes is the need for the continued internationalization (*kokusaika*) of Japanese society (Nakata, 1995, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 1989). Internationalization is seen by some as a key factor in exposing Japan to new ideas aimed at stimulating renewed international economic success and enlightened social reforms. This includes Japanese educational reform, as seen most recently in the increase of schools changing their foreign language departments (Oishi, *et al.* 1996, Gorsuch, *et al.*, 1995).

But problems have surfaced in the drive for internationalization and language curriculum reform. There appears to be little understanding on how current innovations in language curricula and internationalization, whatever this term may mean, interacts with other established cultural values outside the school.

Sectors of the Japanese establishment, by the very nature of the traditions and beliefs they uphold, can frustrate the plans of those working for positive change. White (1995:152-3) says that if those outside the educational institution (see Figure One) perceive ELT changes as incompatible with the general cultural framework, any innovations will be resisted and reduced to the level superfluous anomalies. This may account for the reason innovators find that internationalization and/or current language curricula are passively, if not actively resisted not only by visible elements in the society (students, educational traditions, company hiring practices and needs, etc.), but also from places so deep in the fabric of the culture, no one truly discern where it is coming from (cf. Biegal 1996, Foley 1996, Aherns 1996). White (1995) explains that if innovators work from a deeper understanding of beliefs, values and historical background of the surrounding culture, innovations proposed in the language curriculum stand a better chance of long-term acceptance.

1.1 Purpose of this Paper

This paper highlights some of the major influences contributing to the present situation in Japanese ELT. Beginning with the historical development of Confucianism and Neoconfucianism in China, we will study it's influence in Japanese culture, education and ELT up to the end of World War II. Following an overview of the factors leading up to our present situation since the Second World War, our attention will focus on Tollefson's (1989) sociolinguistic framework, which helps to bring out the present dynamics in Japanese ELT.

2.0 Confucianism

Confucius, or K'ung-fu-tsu (551-479 BC), taught that life's problems sprang from abandoning one's station in life, and rulers leaving the path of virtue. He developed a socio-political philosophy emphasizing the knowledge of one's place in society, being satisfied with it, working hard, and studying hard. The key to restoring social and political harmony was through proper outward conduct (*li*), humane benevolence by rulers (*jen*), children loving their parents (*hsiao*), citizens obeying their rulers (*chung*), and reciprocity between friends and business partners (*yi*) (Chung 1995).

According to Confucius, through proper educational discipline, one could learn to love his or her parents, maintain honest relationships with friends, practice justice with benevolence (*jen*) to those below him, and respect those above him. Such a person might even become a *chün-tsu*, (lit. "son of a prince"), usually translated in English as a "superior man". The superior man, by virtue of being a scholarly, ethical individual established in the *tao* (lit. "the way"), could teach others the right way in which to live (Muller, unpublished :3).

Confucius also maintained that Heaven had mandated five relationships (*wu-lun*), which must not be forsaken:

"The relationships are those between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and between friends." (Doctrine of the Mean: v. 20).

The parent-child relationship had priority even over one's obligation to the ruler. By prioritizing the parent-child relationship, harmony in all other relationships could be maintained.

Upholding *jen* and proper behavior (*li*) however, were more important than maintaining relationships with people who were not following the *tao* of Heaven: "It is better to value *jen* than to passively follow your teacher" (Analects, 15:35). This was emphasized again 200 years later in the teachings of Mencius (Meng-tzu, 371-289 BC), who wrote that emperors had the right to rule only as long as they followed the *tao* of Heaven. Otherwise, they should

be deposed by force (Tomikura 1981).

2.1 Neoconfucianism

Mencius was not the only one to further develop Confucius' ideas. Another scholar, Chu Hsi (1130-1200), felt that many aspects of popular Confucianism during his day had fallen into a state of disrepair (Ichii 1974). Chu Hsi and his disciples set about collecting and codifying the extant writings of Confucius, Mencius and other Chinese classics.

The Chu Hsi school built upon the teachings of Confucius and Mencius by greatly emphasizing outward form and rituals (*li*), and by mixing *li* with elements of Taoism (Tomikura 1981). Through strict discipline, Chu Hsi taught that a man (women were ignored by Chinese philosophers) could refine his heart through conforming to various social and religious rituals. When the external refinement was carefully followed, internal substance would ultimately be manifested:

"...Refinement *is* substance; substance *is* refinement! When the hair is taken off the hide of a tiger or leopard, it looks the same as the hide of a dog or a sheep" (Analects: 12:8).

Chu Hsi's system had something to say about virtually every aspect of life (Kim 1977), but the core of his teaching can be found in Confucius' book, The Great Learning (*Ta Hsüeh*), which admonishes those in power to study hard, live a moral life, and lead by example:

"When things are investigated, knowledge is extended.
When knowledge is extended, the will becomes sincere.
When the will is sincere, the mind is correct.
When the mind is correct, the self is cultivated.
When the self is cultivated, the clan is harmonized
When the clan is harmonized, the country is well-governed.
When the country is well-governed, there will be peace throughout the land" (Great Learning: v. 1).

Chinese Confucianism and Neoconfucianism had significant influence over Japanese culture for the next 1,500 years. However, depending upon ones interpretation of Japanese history, there are questions as to if Confucianism changed Japan, or if Japan changed Confucianism (van Wolferen 1989).

2.2 Beginnings of Japanese *Shushigaku*

Confucianism entered Japan as early as the 4th century. It's influence can be seen in many ancient political writings at the time. By the seventh century, the main tenants of Confucianism had affected the Japanese educated classes, although it was sometimes questionable if Chinese ideas such as *jen* or *li* (Japanese: *ri*, meaning "principle" or "basis") were clearly understood. Very little of this reached the lower classes, except for vague ideas that one's position in life was decided, one should always love his parents, and that

propriety should be maintained in worshiping one's ancestral spirits (*ujigami*) (Tomikura 1981, Anesaki 1980).

The Neoconfucianism of Chu Hsi (Japanese: *shushigaku*) was introduced to Japan by Zen priests in the late 12th century. *Shushigaku* was taught in monasteries or schools such as in Mito, where the Tokugawa clan ruled. During the next 400 years, the *shushigaku* developed by Japanese Neoconfucian scholars (*jusha*), emphasized unique interpretations about what constituted sacrificial love to one's parents (*oyak_-k_*) and "the right way" (*to, do* or *michi* in Japanese) (Tomikura 1981).

The interpretation of the parent-child relationship in Japanese *shushigaku* differed significantly from Confucianism and Neoconfucianism. Devotion to one's lord, teacher or other superior was taught to be the same as love for one's parents. One should unquestioningly obey and love one's higher parents over the will and needs of their biological parents (van Wolferen 1989, Anesaki 1980). This resulted in an emphasis on a top-down hierarchy based on age, social status, and scholastic knowledge. It also contributed to the formation of an interconnected family-like system of interdependence (*amae k_z_*) between people in business, politics, school and personal relationships (Doi 1985).
Sometime during this period, Japanese scholars changed the concept of *ri* to *rei*, meaning "ritual" or "rites. An increased focus on ritualism, together with the upholding of the *tao* (Japanese *to, do, michi*) inspired mystic discipline in several preexisting art forms, religious practices and codes of behavior: *bushido* (the way of the warrior), *shod_* (the way of writing), *kad_* (the way of flower arranging), *sad_* (the way of tea), *shint_*, (the way of the gods) and so on (Tomikura 1981).

This redefinition of *shushigaku* continued during the Tokugawa regime of the Edo period, all the way up to the end of the Second World War. The repercussions of this distinctively-Japanese ideology can be still be felt up to the present.

2.4 Further Development of the National Ideology

To harmonize regional clans after years of civil war and retrain *samurai* for service as bureaucrats, the Tokugawa government closed the borders to foreign barbarians, and reordered the nation along their modified Neoconfucian lines. A major ally in this process was the Mito school, which created over the next two hundred years a unique synthesis of Neoconfucian concepts, Japanese mythology and Shintoism (Anesaki 1980).

Mito *shushigaku* taught that a natural top-down hierarchy could be observed in

nature. The emperor, as the descendant of the sun goddess, was at the top of this hierarchy. Others in this hierarchy, in order of status, were the *samurai*, farmers, craftspeople, and merchants. Foreigners, besides threatening the establishment with unsanctioned ideas, such as Christianity, had no place in this natural hierarchy. Earlier interpretations of the parent-child relationship evolved to the point where the Emperor was believed to be the supreme spiritual parent of all Japanese. Senior government officials, teachers and *samurai* were also viewed as elder brothers serving under the Emperor to take care the national family (*kazoku kokka*). The common people were taught to maintain the natural harmony by staying in their place, and unquestioningly obeying the will of their superiors. *Samurai* and teachers were upheld as superior men by which all could learn the right way to live (Bellah 1957, Anesaki 1980).

Earlier changes to the idea of *li* aided the government's justification for the formation of rules on the proper way to act, think, dress and speak according to one's status in life. These were strictly enforced to ensure social harmony. All mention in Confucian and Neoconfucian writings about deposing corrupt and evil rulers was discreetly ignored (van Wolferen 1989).

These teachings were bolstered among the common people through small government-sanctioned private schools (*juku*). Teachers at these schools taught selected passages of Confucius and other subjects from abacus (*soroban*) to calligraphy. Tomikura (1981), comments on this popular expansion of *shushigaku*:

"All this took place, however, within the framework of a partitioned society and with the aim of fitting people for work in their particular social position. Thus the Confucianism that reached the masses was in the last analysis an establishment doctrine. Whether people received instruction as a pastime or as a means of education and moral improvement, they were taught, in effect, to stay in their place and find satisfaction in it" (p. 117).

However, the shifting of one's loyalty from the local *daimyo* to the emperor as supreme father was a major factor contributing to the *samurai* class losing their place, much to the dissatisfaction of the Tokugawa government (Bellah 1957).

The Meiji era until the end of World War Two was another era of change and instability. Feeling threatened by the technological superiority of the West, Japanese society inaugurated many political, social and educational changes with the goal of catching up with the West as quickly as possible. A major part of reaching this goal involved the intensive study of foreign languages.

Most of the cultural ideas developed during the past 250 years remained firmly intact and continued to evolve. While the class system was officially abolished, a top-down, parent-child hierarchy still colored every relationship. The role of the emperor as the parental *kami* over the family nation of Japan became more pronounced. The people of Japan, as children of the emperor, were now told they were a uniquely superior race through their connection to his divinity. Bushido, the code of the *samurai,* was taught in public schools as the moral code for every citizen following the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905 (Tomikura 1981). The family of Japan was called to work together and develop the country for the goal of her greater unity and harmony. Teachers were assigned a great responsibility in assuring that Japanese morality and education complemented these national goals (Terasaki, 1995). This state of affairs continued until Japan's defeat in the Second World War.

Before moving on to the Confucian/Neoconfucian influence on Japanese education and ELT, let us sum up some significant social features of Japanese society up to the end of World War II: 1) A top-down hierarchy in nature and human relationships, 2) A symbolic parental god at the top of this hierarchy, practically administrated by older and wiser big brother figures, 3) Total loyalty, trust and dependance upon one's teachers and superiors, 4) A focus on status, form and ritual, 5) The uniqueness of the Japanese race as a special family working together for a common purpose, and 6) A distrust of foreigners and foreign ideas unless able to further the drive for Japanese success.

3.0 Influence on Japanese Education and ELT

Confucius emphasized education. He felt that one's ability was determined by their effort, not by birth (Chai and Chai, 1973). Confucian education consisted of constant study of the ancient classics, the memorization of Chinese characters, and the observance of certain rituals (Stapleton 1995). Students quietly listened to the words of the teacher as a way of learning proper conduct and respect for superiors. In time, students could learn the right way to read, write and interpret Chinese literature. Several hundred years later, to insure that knowledge would be extended, wills would be sincere and minds corrected, scholar-bureaucrats formed schools to teach reading, writing, moral education, and the rote memorization of Confucian classics. Social advancement and government positions were available for anyone who passed a series of civil service examinations. These tests measured how hard one had persevered in memorizing the writings of Confucius and other classics. (Encyclopedia Britannica 1979). This was essentially the same system brought to Japan in the 4th century. It was quickly accepted and soon became the right way to learn for Japan's upper classes (Tomikura 1981).

Except for Chinese, foreign languages were prohibited from being taught in *juku* before the Meiji period (Doyle 1994). During this time, only a few scholars ever received permission to study a Western language. Perhaps one reason lies in the Japanese concept of *kotodama,* which teaches that the spirit of the culture is hidden within the language. Preventing the study of foreign languages kept the Japanese soul pure from foreign influence. While English (*eigogaku*) was studied by a few, the emphasis was naturally upon Dutch and Portuguese (Reinelt 1993). Western languages were learned essentially in the same manner as Chinese: through the translation of written texts.

Following the Meiji restoration in 1867, the *samurai* class was stripped of its power, and the new government enacted several policies aimed at making Japan a modern nation that could catch up technologically with the West (Fujita 1985, Aso 1982, Amano 1982). This involved the creation of a national compulsory school system. Disenfranchised but well-educated, many from the *samurai* class became teachers in these new schools. Through their efforts, a national education system based upon elements of *shushigaku* was formed:

"School education became an institutional nexus among family, community and polity, and in turn served to diffuse various formal doctrines, promoting diligence at work and in school, advocating the virtues of loyalty and filial piety, and strengthening the Confucian moral order and the emperor system" (Fujita, 1985:150).

Further support for this educational theory came in the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890, which reaffirmed the five relations of Confucianism and the importance of their inclusion into every aspect of Japanese education (Fujita 1985).

The result of these decisions was an education system that valued teacher-student relationships patterned after the parent-child model. Students followed the parental authority of their teachers by not questioning their instructions. Entrance into universities focused on examinations, which promoted diligence and memorization. Examinations were also believed to advance harmony by diminishing classroom competition and downplaying any differences in ability students might have (Reichauer, 1988). Knowledge was valued over creativity. An important function of schools then was to instill these Confucian values, and also a knowledge of proper conduct in Japanese society.

It was in this framework that foreign language study became a tool in the drive to improve the nation both economically and technologically. It is possible as well that the concept of *kotodama* led some to believe that foreign

language study could encourage positive attributes supposedly seen in the culture from which it came.

English was taught at prestigious universities starting in the Meiji era by foreign experts from well-known Western universities. They taught English through the Grammar-Translation method, which complemented earlier forms of language study in the Edo period. Grammar-Translation (*yaku-doku*) soon became "the right way" to study the language. Once this tradition was established, later efforts, such as those by Palmer (Doyle 1994) or Ogden (Littman 1992) to make ELT more conversational, failed.

To summarize this section, until the end of World War II, language education in Japan valued some following: 1) A Confucian ethic of hard work and memorization, 2) Written examinations designed to insure conformity, equality and diligence, 3) An emphasis on the right way and proper form (grammar-translation), 4) An emphasis on knowledge of the classics over innovative analysis and 5) A belief that language study could infuse one with elements of the culture from which it came (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1987, Amano 1982).

4.0 Reform and Tradition: 1945 to 1985

The tenets of Japan's national ideology and educational theory were called into question at the close of World War II. Largely through the work of the American occupation, great efforts were made at rebuilding Japanese society along western lines. Occupation administrators swept away the emperor system and attempted to replace Japan's national ideology by encouraging a democratic form of government, urbanization, industrialization, social reform and educational reform. The resulting changes were numerous: Women received the right to vote, workers and teachers formed unions to protect themselves from the domination of their superiors. The educational system was changed along Western lines. English became a compulsory subject in public middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities.

Although these and other changes in Japanese society should not be minimized, the efforts of the American occupation to erase the influence of Japan's prewar cultural ideology can be likened to a gardener cutting the top off an ancient tree, but leaving it's 1,500 years of roots behind. Vestiges of the old system remain (Fukue 1991, Tomikura 1981). As van Wolferen (1989:168-171) has observed, Japanese economic, political and educational institutions still uphold prewar structural models. The following features can be found in most Japanese organizations:

1) A top-down family-like hierarchy consisting of an "emperor-father" who symbolizes the public face of the organization, 2) Various administrators

serving under the symbolic leader who, besides wielding real power and authority, care for their people below them, 3) Submission and cooperation of subordinates to assure the success of the organization, 4) Slogans, rituals, meetings and songs emphasizing proper form, harmony and the special status of belonging to the organization.

Despite their new freedom from direct government control, educators on a variety of levels also found it difficult to discard over a millennium of Confucian practices, traditions and teaching styles (Nozaki 1992). Schools continued to value a meritocratic system of testing and scholastic achievements for their teachers such as publishing papers or giving presentations (Evanoff 1992:21). The role of the teacher as a scholar-parent was still intact, and encouraged by the Ministry of Education (Shimahara 1986). Japanese teachers of English and approved textbook publishers continued to uphold "the way" of Grammar-Translation. Students were expected to be quiet and take notes. Historic Confucian ideals of rote memorization, hard work and a strong focus on written examinations and form continued to be the established norm in high school and university ELT.

4.1 Calls for Internationalization Through ELT

Several weaknesses in the education system became apparent during the postwar years. Mass communication and opportunities for international commerce created the need for better spoken English skills, which compelled many in Japan to rethink their nation's English education policies. Criticism from international observers, parents, students and Japanese educators grew over the years. As a response to calls for the further internationalization of Japan through ELT, the Ministry of Education allowed for the JET Program in the mid 1980's. This program continues to provide opportunities for young English-speaking college graduates to teach spoken English as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Japanese junior high and high schools. Simultaneously, many expatriate teachers were accepting jobs in National and private universities, creating a large lobby that soon began urging for further internationalization through educational reforms. This leads up our present situation in Japanese ELT.

5.0 The Current ELT Situation

The past few years have seen both progress and conflict in Japanese ELT. Innovators continue to work for a transition away from traditional language teaching approaches toward newer theories that emphasize experiential learning and spoken communication skills. At the same time, conservative elements wish to slow the process of change.

Tollefson (1989:26) provides a helpful model for understanding the role of

national language planning. While this diagram (see Figure Two) is usually applied to a country's general language situation, we will use Tollefson's framework specifically to provide a brief overview of the current role of English in Japan.

5.1 Language Situation

Tollefson (1989) says that the language situation refers to " . . . who speaks what language varieties to whom for what purposes" (p. 26). Apart from limited contact with native English speakers, very few Japanese use English in their everyday life. This will be discussed further in the section on input variables.

5.2 Macro-policy Goals and Implementation

Macro-policy goals, according to Tollefson (1989), " . . . refers to the aims and plans formulated by authorities with responsibility for the national community" (p. 27).

The Ministry of Education says their recent changes in the high school curriculum is aimed at helping students communicate their ideas more clearly in English through debate and role play. This emphasis of more international and communicative skills is planned to compel teachers to do away a Grammar-Translation approach. (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 1989). The Ministry actively encourages these goals on the high school level by sending ALTs to more traditional, rural schools.

However, while the Ministry now encourages spoken English to be taught in the classroom, it has not changed any of the original written English requirements for high school and college entrance examinations. As Doyle (1994) says, "At the core they [the Ministry of Education] are adding new teaching methods to old ones" (p. 14).

The Ministry's policies for universities are making more visible progress toward the stated purpose of internationalization. As stated earlier, in 1991 the Ministry of Education abolished the foreign language requirements for colleges and universities (Wadden 1994). General education was placed entirely in the hands of each college and university. A school could decide to continue with the old system before 1991, make necessary changes, or do away with general education and transfer any courses deemed necessary to other departments.

5.3 Micro-policy Goals and Implementation

Micro-policy goals refer to how local administrations and teachers respond to the macro-policy goals and implementation. A key problem with implementing the new Ministry of Education guidelines in High Schools is the lack of concrete instructions on how to foster debate, role play and spontaneous

conversation to make "communicative" classes (Knight 1995). Goold *et al.* (1993) sum up the opinion of many high school teachers:

"With the exception of discussion, the classroom activities recommended by the guidelines to OCC (Oral Communication "C") appear to be a bizarre choice, if a move away from memorization, translation and multiple choice exercises is desired. It is difficult to imagine how these guidelines can result in anything more than a cosmetic change in the senior high school English classroom" (p. 39).

This reveals that high schools continue to be small, closed societies committed to egalitarianism, an upholding of the "way", insularism and a meritocracy measured by examinations. Because of this, Fujita (1985:157) states that Japanese high schools have remained relatively unchanged since their creation in the Meiji era.

High school teachers and administrators quietly "counter-plan" (Mackay 1993) the language curriculum for the level of their students. Since teachers must "finish" the required textbooks by the end of the year, and must continue to teach crowded rooms of forty-five to sixty students, most naturally have opted to continue with the "way" of the Grammar-Translation approach. On the days when the ALT comes, it becomes a "communicative class" -- i.e., language games day. But many Japanese teachers resent this intrusion. As Howard (1995) reports, most Japanese high school English teachers see the addition of ALTs as unwelcome outsiders who distract students from their main goal: to pass the university entrance exams.

On the other hand, some university curricula have become more progressive since 1991. Although all general foreign language requirements were also abolished, most Japanese universities have kept English as a subject. Some prominent Japanese universities, such as Keio University and Asia University, have begun changes that make their English classes more dynamic and conversational. Other national universities, such as Niigata University, are looking to make similar changes in their curriculum in the next couple of years (Oishi *et al.* 1996). But at this time, quiet turmoil continues to grip most Japanese universities. Behind the closed doors of curriculum planning committee and teacher's meetings, conservative and progressive factions are, like vast *sumo* wrestlers, struggling for the power to decide the future of their university's language curriculum. The next few years will reveal if most Japanese universities can break from traditional educational approaches for fresh innovations in language teaching.

But as long as written tests remain the standard for succeeding on college entrance examinations, many macro-policy goals of the Ministry of Education will not be successful in Japanese middle and senior high schools. Moreover, the continued influence of traditional educational standards in junior and

senior high schools may limit student willingness to participate with educational reforms on the university level, thus making the successful application of university micro-policies difficult.

5.4 Input Variables

The term *input variable* refers to the language that learners are exposed to either in or out the classroom (Kennedy 1996). Except for at schools and universities, some Japanese might use English as a work skill, but these types of positions are scarce. Opportunities to speak English are rare.

A recent study of the reasons for studying English by Japanese college students (Halvorsen 1995) reveals that most see English as important for business, becoming "international" and to experience non-Japanese thinking (p. 64). However, a survey of international companies in Japan (Kirkwold *et al.* 1995) shows that most English communication in the workplace is essentially the same as it was during the Meiji Era: Through the written word, namely through letters and faxes.

Most Japanese find their only opportunity to speak English is with native speakers in an English conversation class. This usually for the expressed purpose of passing an examination or to make friends with other class members. This has debilitative effects on the motivation of most students to acquire the language beyond more than a cursory level (cf. Hadley 1993b; McLean 1992).

5.5 Learner Variables

Kennedy (1996:82) defines learner variables as their generalizable behavior and characteristics. Much has been said about the nature of Japanese students. For example, in her book, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, Lebra (1976) identifies three domains that determine what behavior is appropriate for Japanese: Anomic, Intimate and Ritual.

Anomic situations refer to when a person is socially distant from another person, and sees no reason to care about their opinions (for example, riding with several people on a local train). *Intimate* refers to the open and warm communication that happens between family and co-workers after office hours. *Ritual* alludes to a situation where social distance must be maintained. One will be judged by how correctly a ceremony or function is performed. Silence and reticence is required. It is obvious from our study of the history of Japanese education that for most of Japanese students' school career, the classroom experience fits firmly in the domain of ritual. This helps to explain why students feel compelled maintain silence in EFL classrooms.

5.6 Learning Variables

Learning variables refer to the strategies one selects to learn something. We have seen that the learning strategy most selected in Japan consists of repetition and rote learning. Students are trained in this method as early as preschool. Peak (1986) observed that the same practice was followed with young students despite the skill being taught:

"● Calculated arousal of learner motivation to acquire as specific skill and to become a member of its social setting.

- Repeated practice of precisely defined component routines until they become automatic.
- Development of self-monitoring of learning performance" (p. 99).

I have personally observed identical teaching practices in classes taught by Japanese English teachers, and have been impressed by how well students respond to this style. Peak (1986) says this learning style is considered necessary by parents and teachers alike. Curriculum concerns will not addressed, according to Peak, until it is clear that all students have completely adjusted themselves to these learning variables.

5.7 Learned Variables

Currently in many high schools and universities, Japanese learners encounter two sets of learner variables: the traditional Grammar-Translation variables from the Japanese English teachers, "international" items (debating skills, role play, situational conversations, etc.) from the Ministry of Education, and a hodgepodge of "communicative" items from their foreign language teachers. In most situations, students are pragmatic enough to get the most out of whatever situation they are placed in. They get the necessary grammar items and real-life exams preparation from their Japanese teachers, and they enjoy themselves and work toward verbal fluency, listening skills and overcoming their affective barriers with the native English teachers. In doing so, most students feel they are striving to become more international.

6.0 Conclusion

Traditional elements in Japanese society see behind the drive for internationalization and new language curricula the potential for unwelcome educational and social change. Apart from the fact that no definition for what *kokusaika* means (Law 1995), inconsistencies in the stated macro-policy goals and actual micro-policy implementation of language policy on a variety of levels reveal that many in Japan are still unsure of the Ministry of Education's ambiguous policy of *kokusaika* through the medium of English.

Japanese Neoconfucian educational and social ethics, while not as strong as they once were, still exert great influence over today's society. This is one

reason western educational approaches are sometimes at odds with learner goals and the implicit goals of some schools. In this situation, some teachers seek ways to work inside this framework, while others will choose to work outside of it. While there are advantages to either approach, there is a wealth of literature out on how to work *within* Japanese cultural and communication patterns (cf. Mutch 1995, Hadley 1995, Hadley 1994, Anderson 1992, Wadden and McGovern 1992).

This paper has not sought to provide an overly-simplistic review of the historic factors effecting Japanese ELT, since Buddhism, Wang Yang-Ming Neoconfucianism, Christianity and a myriad of other elements have also influenced the development of Japanese ELT. Neither is the brief study on the current Japanese ELT situation meant to discourage innovators as they struggle for their learners' increased L2 acquisition and experiential learning of English conversation. It is hoped that teachers have gained a greater understanding of the complex processes at work in Japanese EFL. Innovators are encouraged to begin their own process of research and personal reflection on the historical, philosophical, social and educational factors that can either support or subvert internationalization and language curriculum reforms. Through the building of educational and cultural bridges, we will pave the way for greater understanding and rewarding experiences as we work together in the common task of teaching English.

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