2  Becoming Modern: and Forces of Change in Education

A. BECOMING MODERN: JAPAN, SINGAPORE AND HONG KONG

Although Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong have strong traditional cultures, with increasing international contacts and because they have embarked upon the process of modernisation, all three are more and more characterised as modern societies. Japan was the first Asian country to achieve modernisation and is considered the most advanced and modernised country in Asia (P. Chen, 1980, p. 120). Although less advanced than Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong have also achieved a certain degree of modernisation (Hseuh, 1972, p. 26).

Modernisation has a long history in Japan. Early in the 1860s, both leaders and opponents of the Tokugawa shogunates realised the need to build up a more unified and 'modernised' state. Then came the famous Meiji period, which was characterised by the adoption of modernisation as a means of self-improvement and advancement (Jansen, 1965, pp. 44, 66). During the occupation after the defeat in the Second World War, Japan was under strong Western influence. Some scholars even believe that it is this period that marks the 'true modernisation' of Japan (Burks, 1981, p. 127). Singapore and Hong Kong started their programmes of modernisation under British rule. Since becoming an independent state, Singapore has sought to establish a modernised – technologically and institutionally advanced – state to overcome its smallness in size and to enhance its competitive ability in the world (Chew, 1973, pp. 117–18). Although Hong Kong remains a British colony, under British influence, it has taken the same road of modernisation.

Definitions of Modernisation

Modernisation has been given a variety of definitions by scholars. For some, modernisation is a synonym for economic development, industrialisation, Westernisation, or even urbanisation. For instance,
in ‘Changing Japanese Attitudes towards Modernisation’, Marius Jansen (1965, pp. 43–89) uses the term ‘westernisation’ rather than ‘modernisation’ throughout the essay. Wilbert Moore (1974, p. 96) defines modernisation in terms of economic growth and concludes that ‘we may pursue the convention further and speak of the process of industrialisation’. When discussing the effects of urbanisation on Philippine culture, Dominador Reyes (1980, pp. 172–3) regards an urbanised society as a ‘modern set-up’. And he closely relates the term ‘urbanisation’ to concepts such as industrialisation and modernisation.

On the other hand, other scholars such as Reinhard Bendix and David Apter regard modernisation as a distinct concept that can be separated from the above-mentioned terms. For Bendix (1964, pp. 5–9), industrialisation and its correlates are not simply tantamount to a rise of modernity at the expense of tradition. Many ‘modern’ and ‘industrial’ societies have ‘partial development’ only, if the retaining of the traditions of these societies is taken into account. For him, modernisation means social and political changes. Apter (1965, pp. 43, 67) considers modernisation to be a result of commercialisation rather than industrialisation. Development, modernisation, and industrialisation can be placed in a descending order of generality in which modernisation is a particular case of development and industrialisation is a special aspect of modernisation. Norman Jacobs (1971, pp. 10–11) also distinguishes modernisation from development. For him, there can be modernisation without development.

Nevertheless, no matter how different scholars view modernisation, they seldom discuss the concept without making reference to the above-mentioned terms. The definition of modernisation suggested by Almond and Coleman includes the following seven elements: (1) a comparatively high degree of urbanisation; (2) widespread literacy; (3) comparatively high per capita income; (4) extensive geographical and social mobility; (5) a relatively high degree of commercialisation and industrialisation within the economy; (6) an extensive and penetrative network of mass communication media; and (7) widespread participation and involvement of members of the society in modern and social economic processes (see Coleman, 1960, p. 532). With reference to this suggestion, it may be said that the process of modernisation accompanies, to a greater or lesser extent, industrialisation, economic development, and urbanisation. They are interrelated in the sense that some characteristics may occur earlier or later, while other characteristics may be more or less distinct in modernising societies, according to the specific situations of these societies.