

Agreeing on the Definitions

by Professor A. Fujisawa

Japanese Co-operators and Co-operative scholars have always been positive in responding to reports for the I.C.A. Congress, especially those of 1966 on Co-operative Principles, 1980 from Professor Laidlaw and 1988 from Mr. Marcos. This last led at the Congress to the resolution for the two-year project on "Basic Co-operative Values" - see the description of the project in Journal 68. In this case our studies started even several months previous to the Stockholm Congress. After the Congress, which quite a number of Japanese participated in or attended as observers, various views and opinions flourished in study meetings and in Co-operative journals or other periodicals.

With a little exaggeration, it may be said that the discussion of Basic Values came into fashion among Co-operators. This may partly be because we are going to have the 1992 I.C.A. Congress in Tokyo for the first time in Asia, and the same subject is expected to have further discussions there. More than eleven thousand copies of the Report in Japanese translation have been circulated and the number is still increasing. This means as many people read it and some more may have heard about it.

This trend, a sort of fervour, is not bad in itself, if properly oriented. However, there is something at the bottom of the ongoing discussions that makes me feel apprehension for the correct understanding of the Report, not only literally but with its deep connotations. It is about the interpretation of some of the key words in the Report and this is presumed to have its root in the diversity of languages and cultures between Western nations and Japan.

1. Interpretation of the Term "Basic Values"

Some of the distinguished professors specialized in Co-operative Studies take the word "values" for "quality in something which makes it helpful, useful or desirable", which is the first meaning given for "value" (singular) in most English-Japanese dictionaries. They proclaim that 'basic values' mean some basically important particularities of Co-operatives found in their organisational and managerial aspects, which are useful and valuable to members and the general public. Along this way of thinking, some of them, who are rather critical of the ethical nature of the Report, listed up their own "basic values" consisting of six or more items. They are a little different in arrangement and expressions from those usually used in the discussions on the merits, valueness of Co-operatives, but virtually the same.

Attribute of the Organisation – or the Individual?

My interpretation is somewhat different from theirs. Mr. Marcos stated in the

Report, "We also talk about our specific nature, about what makes us different from capitalist or public enterprises. We have generally talked less about our basic values. This could be because they are not unique." Here the distinction between basic values and the common particularities of Co-operatives is clearly shown. He also said, "I only intend to indicate some major characteristics of human behaviour which influence the birth, life and death of a Co-operative." This leads me to an understanding that basic values are not the concept that belongs to the dimension of a social group or institution but to that of an individual. They must be something to be kept in the mind of those who work for Co-operation. His remark, "Co-operatives in fact started from basic values" makes his idea clearer. They must be something which had been existing among people before the Movement started. They can not be what some Japanese scholars think them to be. How could Co-operatives start from "basic values" if they mean the specific nature of *established* Co-operatives?

We have exchanged our views many times in the periodicals, in the study meetings trying to narrow the gap so that our studies will help all the Co-operators in understanding the Marcos Report, but without much success.

Agreed Definition of Terms

We Co-operators have talked much, or too much, about our superior nature as compared with capitalist or public enterprises. Still the superiority is not fully realized and some of us are faced with serious crisis or even failures. So it is now the time for us to reflect what we have been doing from an entirely different angle on a more fundamental dimension. This is why Mr. Marcos produced the four values, I understand - *participation, democracy, honesty and caring for others*. I suppose those Co-operators in the fighting front can, and do, feel the same anxiety with Mr. Marcos through their experiences of walking along the painful course between harsh, relentless reality of business management and Co-operative ideal. But, different from practitioners, some of the scholars like to analyse before tasting and feeling.

In order to prepare ourselves for the Tokyo Congress, it is most desirable for us to reach a common understanding of the Marcos Report at least about the main implication of the term "values", though of course there may remain some minor differences. For this purpose we need good translation of the text. But the existing edition has a wrong Japanese name for the title, which can only be understood as "Co-operatives and Their Essential Worthiness". This title is, I am afraid, very misleading. Moreover there are quite a few apparent mistranslations there. Some of my colleagues and myself are thinking of publishing another edition.

Our debate on the meaning of the term *values* may sound strange and absurd to native English speakers, but there it is. And this is not merely a problem of

language. After the end of the World War II, our traditional values based on Buddhism and Confucianism have markedly weakened and almost faded, and the majority of people younger than middle age seem to live with little or no consciousness of values, principles or philosophy of life, whatever you may call them. Such usage of the word *values* as I understand Mr. Marcos used it is anyway far from familiarity for some (not all) Japanese nowadays.

2. Connotation of the Other Four Key Words

The second point of my apprehension is about how to grasp the connotation of the four values, already specified above i.e. participation, democracy, honesty, and caring for others. Of course it is easy to find Japanese words, or groups of Chinese characters, which literally mean these four terms. However, as is often the case with abstract nouns with philosophical or ethical implications such as these, each English word cannot be exactly identical with the Japanese equivalent, on account of the different logic in language and further of diversion of cultures. If I take "caring for others" for example, the idea may be better understood by having the concept of charity or Christian love at the bottom of one's mind, even unconsciously. There must be some common ground of understanding the idea among Western nations, but we do not have anything like that in our spiritual tradition or mental environment. The literally translated Japanese phrase may mean "to have concern for or/and do something good to others, either for others' sake *or for one's own sake*". Mr. Marcos says that "caring for others" is not something calculated to bring in customers. The italicised part above permits what is thus denied. . . It becomes all the more dangerous when they say "caring for their members". The original profound intention is threatened to be lost.

The Concept of Democracy?

Democracy is the most tricky of the four. There are no Japanese, except very old generation, who have not been taught democracy in schools, and they think they know democracy and can act democratically. But democracy is an imported idea and system for us. Its history, though not so short as most Western people might wrongly believe, is only about a hundred years, and we do not have so-called Greek and Christian background of democracy as in Western countries. In short, the concept is not fully established. People may discuss something using their own home-made concept of democracy. Besides, the same term "democracy" is used in the Co-operative Principles and also as one of the Basic Values, and these two belong to a different dimension of thinking. In the two cases the usage of the term must have some subtle difference in its connotation. This makes us feel more confused.

Similar questions may arise with the other two values. All the same, we are requested to read and understand the report as correctly as possible to get as

close to the intention of the author or the ICA. It is a hard task. If I may be very frank, I should say that such sentences as "I have blue eyes", and "we have all our pigs in the same forest", which seem to be Swedish sayings, make our task harder. Generally speaking, non-English-speaking nations would be happier, if the term "values" was define or explained, in the original paper.

Reaching the Members

There is another question of a different nature. It is about how far and wide the intended effect of the Report can penetrate into the Co-operative organisation. Our consumers' Co-operatives have 10 million members, agricultural Co-operatives 7 million, – and they have nearly 0.5 million officers and staff. How trivial is the 11 thousand circulation of the Report!

As to the ICA Report on Co-operative Principles maybe 80 or 90 thousand copies were sold, and they have quite often been referred to in various courses of staff education.

In addition to this quantitative difference, there is a conspicuous qualitative difference between the nature of these two Reports, concerning their function and effect. The ICA Principles can be put in effect to some extent by some key personnel in a Co-operative society, even when other staff and most members are left ignorant about them, because they are the practical rules of conducting the society on the dimension of a social group. On the other hand, Basic Values are something that work fundamentally in the mind of an individual person. Without being grasped firmly by the leaders, both professional and amateur, the "VALUES" printed on the paper and confined within some academic groups can have no value at all. It is all the more necessary for us to make the Report familiar to all the leaders and some followers, as many in number as possible, by providing them with all possible opportunities to study it.

The Author

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