

### Book Review

## **Islamic Versus Modern Western Education: Prospect for the Future**

*By Tetsuya Kitaji. Niigata-ken, Japan: Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, International University of Japan, 1990, 127 pp.*

The Islamization of education, which is part of the more overarching discussion of Islamizing knowledge, has activated Muslim social and natural scientists as well as scholars in the humanities. The wide extension of scholarly fields involved has colored the discussion and multiplied its views. For a reader in the subject of Islamic education, this multiplex picture can be confusing and make it hard to distinguish between the different components.

In his research, Kitaji has attempted to compare the modern western and Islamic educational systems. He has divided his research into four main parts. First he gives an outline of national education. In this part, he departs from the problems faced by the Japanese educational system, where the drop-out rates have nearly doubled in the last ten years. In the case of Japan, he finds that the curriculum is rigid and does not take into account individual differences in the ability to absorb information. He

further argues that the psychological atmosphere discourages pupils, for the system tries to control them by regulating their attitudes and psychical appearance (i.e., hair-style and clothes).

From the particularity of Japanese schooling, he turns to a description of the western educational system in general. What Kitaji does is to generalize the western educational system in terms of Japanese actual experiences, western educational philosophy (mostly French), and western domestic critics. This results in a generalization that is far too broad, and I, who live in Sweden, recognize only a few of the author's characteristics of the western educational system. However, Kitaji makes an important point, which I assume pertains nearly to all western countries' national educational system: neglecting the pupils' identity formation, particularly the spiritual part. He also emphasizes the fact that national education is based upon the state's demands rather than the pupils' individual needs. Although Kitaji stresses the state's role in the development of structure and of curriculum, his recurrent emphasis of the state's role in curriculum development makes it difficult to grasp whose conscious or unconscious forces are actually working. The research would maybe be more substantial if some comments had been made on this subject.

In the second part, Kitaji provides some basic features of Islamic education. However, the generalization here is also too broad. In contrast to his description of the western educational system, which began with how it functions in praxis, Islamic education is treated purely from an idealistic point of view. Kitaji tends to deal with Islam as a totally unproblematic concept and makes no distinction between Sunni and Shi'i or between different understandings of how to interpret the Islamic sources. He also does not distinguish between traditional Islamic education and Islamic education within the discussion of Islamization of education. This might be because the literature he refers to is written mainly by Islamists with a humanistic or Islamic educational background (i.e., S. M. al Naguib al Attas and Sayyid 'Alī Ashraf) and with few references to literature on Islamic education by Islamist social scientists (i.e., 'Abd al Raḥmān Šāliḥ 'Abd Allāh and al Majīd Kīlānī). In addition, he has relied mainly on English-language sources and those translated from English into Japanese, thereby depriving himself of all relevant Arabic-language literature. Moreover, he has given a primarily theoretical picture of Islamic education and few indications of how it could actually be applied. However, this is not so much a criticism of the author as it is of the discussants in general, who have kept their work overwhelmingly theoretical.

In the third part, Kitaji compares the educational systems. He depicts the objective of Islamic education as "to bring up an Islamic man through a process of encouraging him to obtain knowledge" and of modern west-

ern education as "building up members of the nation-state and in the process cultivating the concept of national identity into them" (p. 60). He further distinguishes between the concept of knowledge in Islamic education (i.e., "the essentials of God, the universe, the community and man himself, and the relationship between them" [p. 60]) and in modern western education (i.e., "knowledge itself is basically practical because the aim is to bring about profit and practical progress" [pp. 60-1]). Although his latter statement is probably true, it is also true that western education, idealistically, focusses upon pupils' personal growth.

This third part is perhaps the best part, as the author has kept the two systems on the same level: ideology. He gives an outline of the development of the concept of knowledge in the western world in view of the Islamic concept of knowledge. Kitaji opines that Islamic education could be a remedy for the western world. However, in this matter he speaks strictly in terms of education and explicitly leaves out Islamic ideology.

The author makes an important point about modern education:

They [the ruling class and the newly generated industrial bourgeoisie] felt that it was dangerous to leave the masses ignorant but, in their view, it was equally dangerous to educate them too much because educated labor would sooner or later become a problem to the industrial bourgeoisie as workers sought improvement of labor conditions. Therefore, there was an emphasis on moral and religious education. It was felt that kind of education would be effective in cultivating a spirit of obedience and submission to the rulers of the state and church in pupils. (p.76)

Although he places this in a western context, it is highly relevant in an historical and contemporary Islamic context. In particular, it is a potential danger for a state-controlled Islamic educational system, as it deals with who should interpret and in whose interest the interpretation should be.

In the fourth part, Kitaji analyses western influence on Islamic education. He says that "in most *Islamic* countries, there exist two educational systems: Islamic education and Western education' (p. 84, my italics). This statement indicates the confusion of terms used in the research. First he speaks of Islamic countries, thus equating Islam with Muslims. Another point is the lack of distinction between Islamic education and Islamic teaching. In the educational systems of most Muslim states, there is no integration of curriculum to bring about a teaching of academic disciplines from an Islamic view. Adding Islamic lessons to the academic curriculum does not "Islamize" teaching. One must be aware of this distinction in order to avoid a confusion of concepts.

In this last part, Kitaji actually operates with the two terms "Islamic education" and "traditional Islamic education." He uses them interchangeably to denote Islamic teaching, the traditional *madrassah* system, and Islamic education in the sense of an Islamic integrated system. This becomes obvious when he cites contemporary Saudi Arabia and Egypt in his investigation of western influences on Islamic education. There, he gives an account of how many hours a week Islamic subjects are taught in comparison with academic subjects. It should be apparent that this has little to do with what Islamist social scientists depict as Islamic education.

The overall view of Kitaji's research of Islamic versus modern western education is that he has been too ambitious in his aims. To describe modern western education in only twenty-nine pages of course leads to overgeneralization. His description of Islamic education also suffers from a lack of references to Islamist social scientists and thus makes this description too broad.

Kitaji's research gives an idea of Japanese educational problems, and it would have been valuable if this aspect had been more emphasized, rather than western education in general. The confusion of concepts also creates a problem for the reader, as it makes it difficult to separate between Kitaji's levels of research. Although he seems aware of the difference between Islam and Muslims, as he speaks in terms of "the idealized community of Umma" (p. 58), he does not clarify this position elsewhere. In my view, in some parts of his book Kitaji tends to make comparisons that are unfair, for he compares the ideal of the Islamic educational system with the actual application of modern western systems. Generally speaking, as it is difficult to bring about a harmonization between theory and practice in all systems and institutional works, one should observe this conflict also in one's own ideological sphere. The comparison between one's own ideology and another culture's or ideology's actual practice is actually what has happened in much western research on foreign cultures in general and on Islam and Muslims in particular. As political, sociological, and anthropological investigations of Muslim phenomena have tended to generalize them and put them into an Islamic rather than a Muslim frame, much of what is only Muslim practice has been depicted as Islamic in an ideological sense of the word. Islamist researchers should not fall in the same trap, but should view structures realistically rather than idealistically, as practical outcomes depend upon realistic research.

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