

Back to the Future with UNESCO

Rita R. Colwell and David Pramer

For reasons that are altruistic as well as self-serving, members of the U.S. scientific community must explore every avenue of communication with colleagues in other countries. The evolving new world order makes it imperative that U.S. scientists particularly help colleagues in less developed countries. The flow of information into many of these countries has been inadequate for their citizens to enjoy the beneficial effects of science and technology on human existence. These countries remain unable to meet the demands of their people for improved education, goods, and services, or to update their teaching and their practice of science and technology. There are many possible avenues of assistance for these countries, but none is better prepared or suited for the purpose than UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO has been network-building for many years, and, more than any other U.N. organization, currently is working on a global level in many areas consistent with U.S. interests, such as universal literacy, special education for women, environmental quality, and copyright protection. However, the United States is not currently a member of UNESCO. The United States withdrew from UNESCO in 1984, expressing concern that trends in policy, ideological emphasis, lack of budgetary constraints, and poor management diminished the organization's effectiveness and caused UNESCO to stray from the principles on which it was originally constituted. The United States' withdrawal in 1984 was followed in 1985 by the withdrawal of the United Kingdom and Singapore.

In an effort to reinterest lost members and to address its shortcomings, UNESCO elected a new Director-General in 1987, Dr. Federico Mayor. Mayor, a Spanish biochemist, has demonstrated leadership in reforming UNESCO. He has made major progress in solving problems of excessive politicalization and poor management. Furthermore, he has maintained an open, constructive, and frank dialogue with representatives of the U.S. Congress, the State Department, and the U.S. nongovernmental intellectual community. Since its withdrawal from UNESCO, the United States has sought to work with other countries who share the objective of structuring UNESCO

as a well-managed international organization with an effective program that is directed toward educational, scientific, and culture-substantive ventures. The United States has consistently refused to accept promises of future change in lieu of real reform, and has made clear that it will not consider reentry until such time as satisfactory reform of UNESCO has been achieved. This strategy has been constructive in promoting change in crucial aspects of UNESCO and UNESCO-related activities. Dr. Mayor has instituted important controls on UNESCO's budget, procedures for program approval, and methods of internal personnel appraisal. UNESCO's current programs are more practical and less political than previously, and the UNESCO payroll has been reduced from over 4000 to 2000 employees. In addition to these management reforms, UNESCO has modified programs developed to assist Third-World countries that often proved insensitive to the concerns of a free society. In the past, such programs failed to protect free enterprise, free press, or individual rights, and thus found little support in the United States.

After consulting with more than 50 nongovernmental organizations that had expressed support for reentry of the United States into UNESCO, the State Department carried out an interagency review of UNESCO programs in the summer of 1993. A recommendation was forwarded to the National Security Council proposing U. S. reentry into UNESCO as of fiscal year 1996. In Britain, a report has already been issued by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, which states, "The debate about UNESCO policy, budgetary and management problems has been settled in the Organization's favour," and urges the United Kingdom to rejoin. Thus, the conditions that caused the United States and the United Kingdom to withdraw from UNESCO for the most part have been appropriately redressed, and there has been a surge in opinion that both countries will soon return to UNESCO after almost a decade of absence. The sympathetic view of the Clinton Administration makes the prospect of a return by the United States to UNESCO highly favorable, and it is anticipated that many members of Congress will be in support of return. Action at the congressional level is desirable but in reality, only symbolic, because reentering UNESCO is an executive decision. In the United Kingdom, as in the United States,

educators, scientists, and legislators are increasingly convinced that UNESCO has made significant reforms, and pressure is building for the British Government to rejoin the organization. Reentry would be facilitated if it were a jointly supported action announced simultaneously by both governments.

The cost for the United States to return to UNESCO is expected to be about \$65 million in annual dues and to be \$15 million for the United Kingdom. Therefore, reentry by these two nations would result in a significant increase in funding for UNESCO and an enhancement of its programs, provided that these additional payments or dues are an add-on to the current budget. Examples of cost-effective, value-for-money programs are the activities in plant and aquatic biotechnologies and the UNESCO network of Microbial Resources Centres (MIRCENS). The MIRCENS have benefited from the guidance of Dr. Edgar DaSilva at UNESCO. These programs—and others such as Man and the Biosphere, Interplanetary Geographical Program, etc.—are activities that facilitate the exchange and acquisition of new scientific knowledge. Reentry and active participation by scientists in the United Kingdom and the United States would reinforce the intellectual resources of UNESCO at precisely the time the organization requires strengthening in areas such as biodiversity and biotechnology to play a leadership role in enacting the recommendations of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Reentry also would put an end to the criticism by others of efforts of U.K. and U.S. scientists, who on invitation have continued individually to participate in UNESCO's global programs.

The point of the U.S. withdrawal has been made, and its primary objectives have been achieved. Further reform at UNESCO and enhancement of its programs are likely to occur only upon return of the United States to membership. UNESCO is a forum in which the United States could exercise leadership and promote international cooperation in education and science to benefit others throughout the world. The end of the cold war and the woeful increase in the number and complexity of cultural and ethnic conflicts, as well as the demands of environmental and health problems worldwide, make it imperative that the United States participate fully in UNESCO's actions and activities. UNESCO's mandate includes education, science, culture, and communication. Its programs are broader than those of other U.N. organizations such as the World Health Organization, Food and Agricultural Organization, and United Nations Industrial Development Organization. Moreover, UNESCO already has well-

R. R. Colwell is with the University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute, Office of the President, 4321 Hartwick Road, Suite 500, College Park, MD 20740, USA. D. Pramer is with Research Policy and Administration, Rutgers University, Administrative Services Building, Annex II, Piscataway, NJ 08855, USA.

established global communication networks that, with the addition of faxes, modems, and new computer technology, can rapidly be upgraded to a communication superhighway for education and science worldwide. Frank Press, immediate past-president of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, has argued that "if UNESCO didn't exist, we would have in-

vented it today" because the many pressing educational and scientific problems that confront the United States are global in nature. UNESCO programs are vital and important for all U.S. citizens, and the time is right for the educational and scientific communities of the United States to join in advocating a return by this country to UNESCO.

Birth Control in Japan: Realities and Prognosis

Mariko Jitsukawa and Carl Djerassi

Why does Japan not legalize the use of steroid oral contraceptives (OCs)? In early 1992 (1), *Koseisho* (the Ministry of Health and Welfare) indefinitely postponed approval of the internationally used low-dose OCs (consisting of a synthetic progestin and the estrogen 17 α -ethynylestradiol) despite the positive recommendation in 1986 of its own medical advisory committee and the completion of the requisite clinical studies (2) among some 5000 Japanese volunteers, which replicated earlier findings accumulated among millions of women abroad.

The continuing ban has been attributed to concern that legalization of OCs would degrade sexual mores and to the medical community's fear of losing several hundred million dollars derived from performing abortions (3)—income that is frequently undisclosed to tax authorities by evasion of legally required reports of abortions to *Koseisho*. Yet 0.5 to 0.8 million Japanese women are estimated to use high-dose therapeutic Pills (approved for menstrual disorders) for contraceptive purposes (4). Because of the ban on low-dose contraceptive Pills, these women are risking negative side effects (particularly in the cardiovascular system) that could be minimized with the legalization of the low-dose formulation (5). Worse, no package inserts on the consequences of long-term consumption are furnished, because manufacturers are legally prohibited from providing such information about unauthorized (that is, contraceptive) use (6).

AIDS and Oral Contraceptives

Despite convincingly satisfactory clinical tests (2), the anticipated approval of OCs was suspended because of the Japanese government's alarmed response to *Koseisho*'s

AIDS Surveillance Committee's report (7) of 238 new HIV-positive cases in 1991. The government concluded that legalization of OCs would discourage condom use, in spite of data (8) that unexpectedly showed that many Japanese do not use condoms in a way that would prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. In May of 1993, in response to appeals by several medical organizations, Health and Welfare Minister Yuuya Niwa concurred that there was no direct relationship between AIDS and OCs (9). However, his promise to resolve the stalemate was lost in the political turmoil of July 1993, when the Liberal Democratic Party lost power.

Some Japanese critics of *Koseisho*'s decision to table indefinitely the anticipated OC approval cite as the real reason "a mood in the government that any contraceptives should be blocked because of worries regarding the aging of the Japanese population" (9). Other recent examples (10) strongly support the idea that Japan's present policies on reproduction overwhelmingly focus on procreation rather than contraception, in spite of the fact that there is no industrialized country where the introduction of OCs per se significantly reduced birthrates when abortion was also widely practiced. Given the powerful motives of Japanese citizens to limit fertility, which have accompanied Japan's development toward an industrialized, urbanized, and egalitarian society, the claim that OCs will reduce Japan's birthrate is without merit. In our opinion, suppressing more efficacious contraceptives makes the Japanese government look as if it desired an increase of unwanted pregnancies, hoping that women would not terminate them.

Political and Cultural Background

Before World War II, all birth control methods other than condoms, which were distributed for hygienic purposes to soldiers sent overseas, were prohibited by the Japa-

nese government. As a result, illegal abortions with their dire consequences were rampant, which prompted the Diet to pass the Eugenic Protection Law (EPL, 1948), giving legal grounds for abortion (11)—"economic hardship" being added in 1949, although Chapter 29 of the Penal Code (1907), defining abortion as a crime, remained formally intact.

For the first dozen years following the implementation of the EPL, the drop in annual births mirrored the rise in annual abortions (Fig. 1) (12). In the 1960s, the direct cause-and-effect relation became less clear, presumably because of increasing use of contraceptive methods, primarily condoms and the Ogino calendar rhythm method (the name is that of a Japanese physician) or a combination thereof (13–15). Another consequence of the prewar government policy was the suppression of IUD research in Japan (16) until the postwar government established new regulations for contraceptives in 1952 (17). The 4-year time lag between the availability of legal abortion (1948) and the approval of contraceptive marketing (1952) proved to be critical in Japanese acceptance of abortion as a key component of birth control.

There have been two major attempts (1972 to 73 and 1982 to 83) to eliminate the economic hardship justification of the EPL. A nationalistic religious organization, *Seicho no Ie*, claimed that this provision gave "irresponsible" women free access to abortion. With its strong political clout, the organization almost got its amendment passed on the second try, but the bill collapsed in chaos after many members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party signed petitions both for and against the amendment (18).

Women's Attitudes Toward the Pill

Seicho no Ie's challenge prompted Japanese feminists to enter public debate on reproductive rights. Their emphasis on abortion

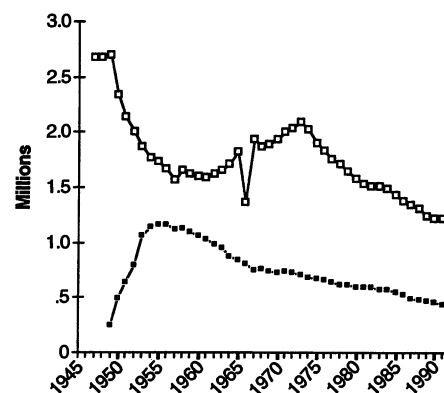


Fig. 1. Trends of births and abortions in the postwar period (15, 35). Births are indicated by open boxes; reported cases of abortions are indicated by filled boxes.

M. Jitsukawa (Department of Anthropology) and C. Djerassi (Department of Chemistry) are members of the Asia/Pacific Research Center, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6055, USA.