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Japanese philosophies**

Masahiro OKU

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(This paper was originally read at a symposium on "The Future of Australia -Japan Relationship" held at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Osaka University, 4th July 1986.)

After a preliminary visit at Christmas of 1984, I stayed at the Department of Philosophy, University of Melbourne as a visitor from June to August 1985. My routine there was like the one of my previous stay at University College London, but perhaps more active. I have many things to tell, but as time is limited today, I confine myself to two specific questions, firstly, on the comparison between Australian and Japanese philosophies, and secondly, with regard to the future interchange between the two.

The first question is not an easy one. First of all, the concepts "Australian philosophy" and "Japanese philosophy" are ambiguous, and this ambiguity is due to the character of philosophy itself. In certain respects philosophy depends on its own culture but not so strongly as literature and art do. In other respects philosophy is general, but not so general as mathematics. As my whole report will make this ambiguity apparent, I will not scrutinize it for the moment.

Australian philosophy and Japanese philosophy, both are little known mutually. Today, many Japanese philosophers have been abroad, but they usually go to American and European countries. I counted only three who had been to Australia, I am probably the fourth, and moreover, probably only the second who stayed there for a while.

Of course, many books and papers by Australian philosophers are well read in Japan. But those books and periodicals are mainly published in Britain or U.S.A., and we usually take those philosophers to be Anglo-Saxons who happen to live down there, or, perhaps I should say 'up there'. Australian materialism in the mind-body problem is the only one Australian speciality well known here.

For Australians, Japanese philosophy is less known. As examples, I would like to refer to two episodes from my experience. One day a professor told me his hope that Japanese philosophy should make a great contribution towards environmental philosophy.

I said, "If Japanese philosophy were so strong, Japan would have remained a garden state as Victoria and had no pollution." Another day a student asked me "How is Japanese philosophy today?" I answered, "In a sense Japanese philosophy is dead as we lost the last war." He said, "It's a pity. I hope you can recover your national identity", and I replied, "If Japanese philosophy becomes nationalistic again rather than cosmopolitan, our neighbours will be worried." So far, there is a mutual lack of knowledge.

We often use historical methods for the characterization of philosophy. This is effective in some cases, for example, for the description of American or British philosophy. We need only to select several philosophical figures and describe their work as if they formed a string of thoughts from the beginning up until today. But in the case of Australian philosophy, with my feeble knowledge, I found it difficult to characterize Australian *nationwide* philosophy historically in this way.

As regards Japanese philosophy, the situation is more complicated. If we take the history of Japanese philosophy for Japanese intellectual history, it surely has its long history. On the other hand, the Japanese word 'tetsugaku' is itself a coinage, created in the last Edo era, in order to translate the European word 'philosophy' into Japanese. Since then we have analogically called counterparts in Asian thoughts 'tetsugaku' also. Until the last war, of the philosophy teachers in universities and other tertiary institutions, some studied European philosophy, some Chinese philosophy and Confucism, some Indian philosophy and Buddhism and some Japanese national philosophy. After that, the situation has changed greatly. Generally speaking, preacher-like philosophers have diminished, and only the European style of scholarship has remained as philosophy. Other philosophies are nowadays little more than regional studies.

I have rather emphasized the historical incommensurability between the two philosophies, but, nevertheless, in current activities there is something in common. For all the diversity of philosophy departments in Australian universities, we can say they are generally within the framework of the modern analytic trend. Therefore, Japanese philosophers who study analytic philosophy, including myself, can do research in Australia as well as in Britain. Of course, this does not mean that everything is alike. I had a lot of impressive experiences in Australia. Of these, I would like to mention some which seem to me due to social or institutional differences.

The concept of philosophy in Japanese universities has a much narrower sense than the one in British universities. Of course, the field of philosophers cannot be demarcated so sharply, nevertheless, if we say 'philosophy pure', it implies the exclusion not only of social and political philosophy but also of ethics and aesthetics. Compared with this, the

Australian concept of philosophy is very wide.

In Australia, philosophy and theology are not demarcated clearly. Those problems which are treated in the theology departments in Britain and Continental countries are treated in the philosophy departments in Australia. Their style of discussion on these topics, frankly speaking, is overt and straightforward rather than sophisticated and deliberate.

Another conspicuous phenomenon is philosophers' great concern over social problems. They speak of 'environmental philosophy' and 'the philosophy of feminism'. These subjects are taught in the course of philosophy, and the department requires full-time staff for these. If a stubborn Japanese philosopher hears of this, he will take it for a joke.

I don't have any intent to assert that these problems are of little importance. But we generally feel that they are outside of our professional business and that someone else will take care of them. In Australian society philosophers have to, and are willing to, take care of these problems.

This is only a rough impression of a temporary visitor, and is to be elaborated and amended with growing knowledge by further interchange. My reply to the second question is of course: the interchange is possible and recommended at every level, but in certain respects, programmes should be carefully discussed in advance.

For our part, problems and conditions we encounter in going to Australia are generally similar to those of our going to Britain, although we need to choose the place to stay more carefully as Australia is vast and their philosophy departments are of wide variety. Incidentally, for me the University of Melbourne was the best place.

For Australian philosophers, if they make a brief visit to Japan as many American and British philosophers do, there is no problem. But if they want to stay longer or to spend their sabbatical here instead of going to U.S.A. or Britain, there are some problems to be seriously considered. First of all, the language problem. Moreover, there is the delicate and subtle difference of the style in philosophical activities. To take an example, Japanese philosophers usually prefer exegetical work to discussion. Therefore, of Australian philosophers, those of exegetical rather than doctrinal type and scholars in well formalized fields such as logic, have more background in common with us and will be more successful in their longer stay.

Last of all, I would like to mention an issue on which we, Japanese philosophers, could profit with good suggestions from Australian scholars. In the last one hundred and twenty years the place and role of philosophy in Japanese society has been changing

remarkably. In fact, this raises some grave issues; and if we can expect comments about it from abroad, I believe, one of the best objective, friendly and straightforward comments will surely come from Australia. If we frankly represent our history of philosophy to Australian scholars in philosophy or Japanese studies, we shall then receive from them many valuable comments worthy of reflection.