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Double Bias in Adopting Burke’s Aesthetics: The Meiji Constitution and its Influence

KUWAJIMA Hideki

Introduction

There was a double bias of Japanese people in adopting Edmund Burke (1729-1797)’s aesthetics in the modernizing era. One bias was caused by Germanization of Japanese institutions. The other was by underestimation of aesthetics in a Japanese historiography of ‘philosophy’. This double bias is supposed to be intricately and intrinsically related to the enactment of the Meiji Constitution (Dai-nippon-teikoku Kempo) at that time.

In drafting it, Kentaro KANEKO (1853-1942) introduced Burke as a western conservative thinker who was opposed to radical Rousseauism. Burke’s political thought was regarded as anti-liberal or anti-democratic. The Meiji Constitution was then established based on the Prussian one, reflecting a vindicative power for the Emperor (Ten’no). As a result almost all the Meiji institutions were Prussianized, or Germanized.

Many German specialists were invited to various academic fields of Japan, instead of British ones. And then British ethos, which had flourished since the Kuro-fune (“Black Ships” from the West) era, became but a ‘sub-standard’. Philosophy is no exception. In this field of Japan, for example, I. Kant (1724-1804), G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and A. Schopenhauer (1788-1860) were the principal persons of its historiography. More strictly speaking, the Hegelian historicism was considerably outstanding at that time of this country. Consequently the Burke’s
aesthetics has ever since been taken as pre-Kantian, pre-systematized and immature.

Throughout the course of this paper I will point out that the double bias had often interrupted a 'fairly' academic acceptance of the Burke's aesthetics, and that this bias against a study of Burke still remains left in Japan today. To make the bias against the Burke's thought clear is sure to be a cue to reconsider and rearrange a discipline dealing with the 'aesthetic'.

Study of Burke in Japan Today

In Japan today, particularly around the turn of this 21st century, several monographs and translations concerning Burke have been published. Additionally, in March of the millennium year, a symposium entitled "Edmund Burke" was held by the Japanese Society for British Philosophy at Kwansei Gakuin University, Kobe. This fact suggests that the groundwork of a 'fair' academic research into Burke has just been laid now.

Why have the research into Burke been often underestimated or ignored until today? This frequent underestimation of the study of Burke even in the political aspect probably derives from overestimation of the 'liberal' or 'democratic' in postwar Japan, as Yoshiyuki NAKANO, focusing on the historiography of political thought in Japan, pointed out in his book of the 1970's. Burke has been excluded from the academic field, being regarded as a hard 'conservative' politician.

Most Japanese people recognized Yukichi FUKUZAWA (1834-1901) as the "Father of Liberalism in Japan" and Chomin NAKAE (1847-1901) as the "Rousseau in the Orient". They, however, do not know who introduced Burke into Japan, although he is the "Father of Conservatism in political thought".
It is Kentaro KANEKO who introduced Burke into Japan. When he introduced him to this country, he was concerned with drafting the Meiji Constitution, or the first Imperial Constitution in the modernizing Japan. Steps of introducing the Burke's thought may make a strong impression on us. This impression is that his thought was closely related to the radical 'right-wing' political thought, which advocated the imperial militarism of the Meiji period (1868-1912). In fact during World War II Burke was exploited again by the advocates of the imperial state systems in the Showa period (1926-1989).

I think that this abuse of his thought helps to scatter some negative image of Burke about, which derived from the Meiji period. These kinds of abuses tortured the image of Burke more and more, and in consequence his thought has ever since been little appreciated until now.

Kentaro KANEKO's Seiji-ron-ryaku and its Problem: The First Bias

As we have seen above, the introduction of Burke into Japan was brought in the process of drafting the Meiji Constitution. In the Meiji period, that is to say, in the first modernizing days of Japan, an urgent business of the new government was to nullify an inequality existing in the commercial treaties with the great powers of the West. In order to execute this business, the young government of Japan was to promulgate the Constitution of the Emperor of Japan, or the Meiji Constitution in 1889, and immediately to convene the first session of the Imperial Diet in 1890.

In those days the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (Jiyu-minken Undo) was prevailing in Japan. At the early stage of drafting the 'modern' Constitution, therefore, many liberal and democratic plans were made by various private political groups. Most of them were in the manner of the Natural Rights theory
originated in France, or in the manner of the Party Cabinet System theory in Britain. Indeed KANEKO, the first introducer of the Burke’s thought, had also been one of the thinkers concerned in the People’s Rights Movement, with a background of great knowledge concerning British and U. S. laws. He had already learned them at Harvard University in his youth.

The Meiji Emperor (1852-1912), or rather, his governmental aides, felt fear for radicalization of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement. At that very moment, the pendulum of planning the Constitution swayed to the opposite side. The Party Cabinet Plan (OKUMA-sangi Kokkai-kaisetsu-sogi) submitted by Shigenobu OKUMA (1838-1922) and Ryukei YANO (1850-1931) was rejected, and then The Anti-OKUMA Creed (IWAKURA Kempo-dai-koryo) was declared by Tomomi IWAKURA (1825-1883) and Kowashi INOUE (1844-1895). This Creed was presented in consultation with a German jurist H. Roesler (1834-1894), who was invited to Japan as a foreign employee (O-yato) in 1878.

In these circumstances KANEKO was appointed as a bureaucrat of the Meiji government and inevitably forced to change his attitude from the people-oriented to the emperor-oriented. The following episode shows us a process of introducing the Burke’s thought in detail.

One day Takayuki SAKSAKI (1830-1919), one of the imperial aides, asked KANEKO whether there was a ‘conservative’ thought in the West or not. KANEKO took this opportunity to name Burke in public. KANEKO reportedly identified Burke with an anti-Rousseauist politician. A short time later, KANEKO was ordered to translate main concepts of the Burke’s thought(11), and soon he published Seiji-ron-ryaku (The Abridgement of Political Thought) in November of 1881. It was before the time when Min’yaku-yakuge, a Japanese translation of Rousseau’s writing, published in 1882. The Seiji-ron-ryaku was, however, only ‘abridged’ and put excessive accent on authority of the Emperor. We can not help judging it to be
ideologically modified.

The establishment of the modern institutions was inevitably connected with protecting the authority of the Emperor\(^{(12)}\). And it was necessary to remove a smell of the Natural Rights theory originated in France and a smell of the Party Cabinet System theory in Britain. These circumstances resulted in employing a Prussian model as a paradigm of the national fundamental laws, which gave the supreme reign to the Emperor. Then, in addition to Roesler, another German jurist A. Mosse (1846-1925) was invited as an O-yatoi in 1886.

In this way the adoption of the western thought in Japan was inclined towards promotion and development of the Prussian, or German thought. Although the Burke’s thought may, from a one-side view, have concurred with the Party Cabinet System theory and may have given a smell of British liberalism off, it was in reality adopted only as ‘conservative’ and emperor-oriented. The ethos of Britain was replaced with that of Prussia or Germany\(^{(13)}\).

Underestimation of Burke’s Aesthetics: The Second Bias

As we have seen above, the image of Burke formed in the Meiji period distorted the ‘true’ picture of the Burke’s thought\(^{(14)}\). What is worse, a second bias blurred our eyes in defining Burke as an ‘aesthete’. To look over the Burke’s career, we can recognize the young Burke before living his life of an actual politician to be a literary critic or aesthete. Through his whole life, he wrote just an aesthetical book entitled *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757 (2nd ed. published in 1759, with the long introduction entitled “Of Taste”). According to a general historiography of western aesthetics in Japan, the Burke’s treatise on the sublime was introduced by M. Mendelssohn (1729-1786) into the German academic world, and then it was to be
analyzed and systematized by Kant.

Almost all the Meiji institutions were Prussianized, or Germanized\(^{(15)}\). Many German specialists were also invited to Japan even in the field of philosophy. Aesthetics, which can be regarded as a branch of philosophy, is no exception. For example, Dr. Raphael von Koeber (1848-1923)\(^{(16)}\), a German philosopher was invited to Japan in 1893 soon after the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution. In adopting the ‘western philosophy’ (including aesthetics) in a broad sense of the word, there seemed to exist the firm basis encouraged by the ethos of the German ceaselessly. As a result, in the Meiji period Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer have frequently been promoted in this discipline ever since\(^{(17)}\).

In almost all the general or ‘common’ historiography of the western aesthetics in Japan, the Burke’s aesthetics has often been isolated and overshadowed, being regarded as pre-Kantian, pre-systematized and immature. This tendency may be true of other British aesthetical thinkers, such as A. A. C. Shaftesbury (1671-1713), F. Hutcheson (1696-1782) and D. Hume (1711-1776) as well.

In another discipline of the Meiji period, English Literature (Ei-bungaku), we can trace endeavors to adopt W. Shakespeare (1564-1616), J. Dryden (1631-1700) and W. Wordsworth (1770-1850)\(^{(18)}\), but we can not, as far as I can see, find very little research into the Burke’s treatise on the sublime in this field. We can point out that there was a disease of disconnection between disciplines: between ‘literature’ and ‘politics’, or between ‘literature’ and ‘philosophy’. In nature these disciplines must be closely associated with each other and should not be divided, of course nor in the Burke’s thought.

Among the men of letters in the Meiji period, at least Soseki NATSUME (1867-1916) as a student of English Literature was just a little interested in the Burke’s aesthetics\(^{(19)}\). And he was struggling with a difficult problem of what defines the idea of ‘literature’ in general. On coming back from London where Soseki
had studied as one of the first official overseas students, he immediately gave a series of lectures\(^{(20)}\) entitled "The General History of English Literature" and "English Literature in the 18\(^{th}\) Century" at the Imperial University of Tokyo. Besides, he wrote some novels which were in the manner of English ones of the 18\(^{th}\) century. These lectures and novels shows us that Soseki considered the 'literature' to be a pretty inclusive genre, which includes journals, political pamphlets, philosophical essays, speeches and dramatic plays.

Even Soseki eventually could not understand the whole picture of Burke’s aesthetics. No Burke’s philosophical book on the sublime is found in Soseki’s shelves now. Examining notes and memoranda\(^{(24)}\) of Soseki himself which are left in the Soseki-bunko (“Soseki Collection”) at Tohoku University Library, we can, however, guess that Soseki took Burke’s aesthetical theory not as a theory of the sublime, but as a theory of parallelism between poetry and painting, which was to be more sophisticated by G. E. Lessing (1729-1781) in his book *Laokoon* in 1766.

In my view Soseki learned the Burke’s aesthetics through two secondary sources written in English: *A History of Aesthetics* published in 1892 written by B. Bosanquet (1848-1923) and *The Analytic Psychology* published in 1896 by G. F. Stout (1860-1944). After all we can say that Soseki’s understanding of the Burke’s aesthetics is limited to a commonplace interpretation, and that Burke still remains underestimated in Soseki’s hands.

**Conclusion**

Burke as an aesthetician has been overshadowed by Lessing in the Japanese history of the western aesthetics, as it can be seen in Soseki’s criticism. And besides, he has been overshadowed by Kant in terms of the theory of the sublime. In addition to these circumstances, the most famous political book written by Burke
in his later days, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* published in 1790, was labeled unfairly as a 'hard' conservative manifest in Japan. This was a crucial and disappointed shock to the study of Burke. The study of him takes a cloth of the radical 'right-wing' on now. It is not going too far to say that the study of him have been suffering from the double bias that we have seen above.

I am afraid that this bias against the study of Burke is still rampant in Japan today, and probably prevailing in the global academic world of aesthetics. This is not a superficial and 'competitive' problem of which country or which language keep the ruling power in the field of aesthetics, but an essential problem of to what extent a discipline of 'aesthetics' can be applied. The idea of 'taste' in the young Burke's treatise on the sublime is supposed to associated with the significant ideas in his later political work about the French Revolution, such as 'tradition', 'history', 'custom and manners', 'prejudice', 'prudence' and 'moral imagination'.

To investigate the ideas mentioned above with attention to an aesthetical implication in his terminology, we can reexamine and redefine the idea of 'conservatism' not only in politics, but also in aesthetics. I am sure that the study of Burke can rearrange the discipline of the 'aesthetic', and bring us another history of aesthetics(22).

**Notes**

(1) This paper is based on my presentation on the 29th August, 2001 at the 15th International Congress of Aesthetics, 2001, in Japan (Makuhari, in the region of Tokyo, 27-31 August, 2001), and this research related to Edmund Burke is partially supported by the JSPS Research Fellowships for the Young Scientists. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the JSPS for their aid.

(2) JSPS Fellow (the fiscal year 2001-) at Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University.

(3) This inclination was mainly concerned with the general stream of the legal systems
founded by the Meiji government. There were some exceptions, such as education systems of some missionary schools in North-American fashion.

(4) At the earlier time of the Civilization and Enlightenment in the late Edo period (1603-1867), Dutch was the ruling foreign language. After the Kuro-fune age, Dutch gave her position to English.


(6) This symposium was held on the 26th March, included in the 24th Annual Congress of the Japanese Society for British Philosophy. The commentators were Yoshiyuki NAKANO and Hiroshi KISHIMOTO, and the presentators were Masami MAJIMA (majoring in politics), Nobuhiko NAKAZAWA (economics) and Hideki KUWAJIMA (aesthetics).


(8) KANEKO was born in Fukuoka as a son of *Samurai* warrior who belonged to the Fukuoka feudal clan and went abroad to study at Harvard University, economically supported by the feudal clan. Afterwards he was to be the first principal of *Nihon Horitsu Gakko* (at present Nihon University, Tokyo) in 1890.

(9) Typical study of this sort is Mataji UEDA, *Edmund Burke-kenkyu* (with introduction by Kiyoshi HIRAIZUMI), Shibun-do, 1937. HIRAIZUMI was a keen advocate of the imperialistic historiography.

(10) The examples were Genro-in plan (1876-80), Kyozon-doshu plan (c. 1879), Omei-sha plan (c. 1879-80), Kojun-sha plan (1881), Emori UEKI plan (1881), Rissi-sha plan (1881), Azusa ONO plan (1883). KANEKO was said to be closely related to the Kyozon-doshu and the Omei-sha.

(12) High exaltation of the Meiji Emperor around the 1880’s is also marked by ‘Go-shin’ei’ (The Portrait of the Emperor) as a ideal image of the monarch made in 1888. This Go-shin ‘ei was originally drawn by an Italian O-yatoi painter, Edoardo Chiossone (1832-1898), who was invited in 1875 as a designer of the new governmental banknotes. Concerning the history of the portrait of the Emperor, see Koji TAGI, *Ten’no no Shozo*, Iwanami shoten (Gendai-bunko), 2002.

(13) I am trying to show that Burke’s ‘conservatism’ was tortured in its adoption. This first bias has long caused the underestimation and ignorance of Burke.

(14) There may be another bias in the expression of ‘the true picture of Burke’s thought’. This keen criticism was brought by Mr. Masahiro HAMASHITA to my paper in Japane-ese. I would like readers to understand that the word ‘true’ in this phrase means ‘fair’ and ‘revised’.

(15) This kind of Germanization has continued through the *Taisho period* (1912-1926) at least to the early Showa period. Concerning the ethos related to the ‘German’ in academic fields at that time, especially the ethos among the ‘cultured’ elite-students in the Taisho period, see Rieko TAKADA, *Bungaku-bu wo-meguru Yamai*, Shorai-sha, 2001.

(16) Dr. Koeber was a Russian-German and studied the idea of die ‘Erlösung’ in
Schopenhauer’s philosophy. The attitude toward Schopenhauer was formed in virtue of the trend of the Russian academy of ‘philosophy’ in the Koeber’s days. See the following paper printed recently: Fuminori AKIBA, “<Bigaku> no Teichaku to Seido-ka”, *Geijutsu / Katto no Genba : Kindai Nippon Geijutsu-shiso no Context*, Ken’ichi IWAKI (ed.), Koyo shobo, 2002, pp. 49-66.


(20) These lectures were soon compiled and published under the following titles: *Bungaku-ron* (Okura shoten, 1907) and *Bungaku-hyoron* (Shun’yo-do, 1909).


(22) At the first oral presentation of this paper in Makuhari (the 15th International Congress of Aesthetics, 2001, in Japan) Dr. Wolfgang Welsch agreed with my argument and made its point clearer making some questions, and brought it into broader and more

This is an English version of my paper in Japanese, which has recently printed in Osaka University Bigaku-kenkyu-kai (ed.), *Bi to Geijutsu no Symposium*, Keiso shobo, 2002, pp. 94-104.