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Dilemmas in Japan's Intellectual Culture

RUTH HAYHOE

CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITIES have an ambiguous role to play in the postmodern world. On the one hand, the very structures of the disciplines they teach, and the patterns of academic organisation that shape them, carry forward a persisting legacy of European Enlightenment thought, as well as vestiges of the medieval European university that survived the development of national higher education systems in Europe and North America, and the dissemination of Western models of higher education. On the other hand, new discoveries on the frontiers of various fields of science, and new understandings in the social sciences, challenge these foundations of modernity, and open doors into an intellectual world of increasing conceptual fluidity and intellectual diversity.[1]

In the West, there is an openness to alternative philosophies and conceptualisations that reflects postmodern fragmentation and the success of such new approaches as feminist scholarship in establishing credible alternative versions in many fields. Established verities of theory and concept in the social sciences are being relegated to the status of "metanarratives" by some postmodern scholars.[2] On a somewhat more restrained note, the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas has called for a "redemption" of modernity, a softening of its hard edges or even a reshaping of its structures, towards a more compassionate and inclusive phase of development.[3] At an even more practical level, the realist political scientist Samuel Huntington managed to gain a huge amount of attention by his warning to the West that, if we do not embrace the search for understanding of other civilisations, our very security may be threatened in a world increasingly torn by civilisational rather than ideological clashes.[4]

In this situation, an understanding of Japanese intellectual culture has a special fascination. Here is a country more than able to hold its own in international economic and political circles, yet relatively little known in terms of what its scholarship might bring to the international community. Regarded

[1] Hayhoe, R., "Universities and the 'Clash of Civilizations?'", *Ontario Journal of Higher Education* (1995), pp. 27–42.
[2] Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), esp. pp. 113–118.
[3] Habermas, Jürgen, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vols 1 and 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, 1987).
[4] Huntington, Samuel, "The Clash of Civilizations?", in *Foreign Affairs*, LXXII, 3 (Summer 1993); and *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

by Huntington as a definitive civilisation in its own right, and by others as a culture within the broader Confucian civilisation of East Asia,[5] its intellectual culture is rooted in sources quite distinct from that of Europe.

Why is Japan so little understood? Why has its contribution to international scholarship been so limited? Literature on Japanese intellectual culture sheds some light, while extensive interviews with professors in diverse Japanese universities—carried out during 1996 when a Japan Foundation fellowship enabled me to spend six months at Nagoya University—sketched current views on the international role and responsibility of Japanese scholarship. It seems evident that structural constraints in the university system, and in the wider national bureaucracy, have hampered intellectuals from reaching out more actively to the world community. However, recent trends in national policy suggest that these constraints are already being dissipated, opening up possibilities of a more vigorous international role for Japanese scholarship in future.

A Scholarship of Absorption

In his illuminating study of academic and scientific traditions, Shigeru Nakayama elucidates some of the fundamental differences between Chinese and Japanese approaches to scholarship and those of the West.[6] China's documentary tradition emphasised a careful recording of all knowledge in an orderly and cumulative way, and paid special attention to what was unusual, particularly astronomical phenomena. It was a tradition dependent on an abundant supply of paper from a relatively early period, which encouraged written records and the use of written examinations as evidence of the mastery of knowledge. "East Asian scholarship began with the assumption that mutability and change were the ways of the world, recognized the legitimacy of the extraordinary, as well as the normal, and sought within that framework to create a suitable place for any and everything."[7]

In contrast, the Graeco-Roman tradition was a rhetorical one, emphasising disputation and logic, taking an interest in the causes of things, and paying special attention to the laws which ordered the natural universe. It was a tradition which encouraged mobility, which flourished despite the absence of abundant supplies of paper, and which established various types of oral examination as demonstration of the mastery of knowledge.

The emergence of modern science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries resulted from two innovations, Nakayama suggests: the application of a mechanical metaphor to nature and the use of mathematics to test it, as well as the invention of purposeful experimentation. Both were closer in spirit

[5] De Bary, Theodore, *East Asian Civilization: A Dialogue in Five Stages* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988).

[6] Nakayama. Shigeru. *Academic and Scientific Traditions in China. Japan and the West*. trans. by Jerry Dusenberg (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1984).

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

to the Western tradition of scholarship than to the Chinese. Up to the nineteenth century, Japanese scholarship depended heavily upon Chinese sources, with the same classical texts furnishing its main substance, and with the intellectual language making extensive use of the *kanji*, or Chinese characters, which had been introduced from China in the seventh century. The written language had developed in its own way over time, with the *kanji* being supplemented by two syllabaries—*hiragana* and *katakana*—which were used to encompass the intricate tissues of an inflected language quite different from the Chinese language. Almost all basic concepts, nouns, verbs and adjectives, however, were derived from Chinese and expressed in *kanji*.

When the Japanese rulers decided to embark on an ambitious modernisation programme, during the Meiji restoration period (1868–1912), the remarkable flexibility of this complex written language proved itself. In spite of insistent American suggestions that a Latinised writing system should be adopted, huge numbers of foreign words were introduced from Europe and North America, either through the invention of suitable *kanji* translations or through their simple transliteration into *katakana*. A careful assessment was made of advanced knowledge in all the major areas of science, medicine, engineering and the social sciences, and modern institutions were created to teach these subjects. Strategic choices were made among the countries most advanced in each field, and, in broad outline, Germany was selected for emulation in medicine, physical sciences and economics, France for mathematics, zoology and botany, Britain for engineering, and the United States for agriculture.[8]

Nakayama shows how this array of subject areas was absorbed into an efficient and purposely modern bureaucratic system, which gradually created universities within the purview of its own structures, and gave considerable autonomy to each specialised faculty—while still ensuring the knowledge could be directly applied to modern state-building. The Japanese *kanji* term used widely for science at this time, *kagaku*, simply means "classified learning" and connotes an array of specialist knowledge fields. It is quite different from the earlier term, *kyuri*, which suggested a search for underlying principles. Nakayama provides a compelling picture of how Japanese scholarship developed as a scholarship of absorption, both in relation to China and to the West, and therefore how difficult it has been for Japanese scholars to find territory that has not already been "taken", and to make a creative contribution beyond the application of theories or concepts developed elsewhere to Japan.[9]

This has been the case in the social sciences even more than the natural sciences, with Japan's modern social, economic and political development

[8] Nakayama, Shigeru, "Independence and Choice: Western Impacts on Japanese Higher Education", in Altbach, P. and Selvaratnam, V. (eds), *From Dependence to Autonomy. The Development of Asian Universities* (London: Kluwer, 1989), p. 100.

[9] Nakayama, S., *Academic and Scientific Traditions, op. cit.*, ch. 6.

being largely interpreted and explained by virtue of theories and concepts developed in Europe, whether those of Marxist thought—which have been particularly appealing to university scholars in Japan—or other European derived paradigms. A recent article by Tessa Morris-Suzuki on Japanese culture provides new insights into the history of anthropology in modern Japan. The basic framework of assumptions was drawn from nineteenth-century thought and assumed a notion of social evolution towards "superior" forms of culture. There was also a tendency to identify essences or core principles which could give an elegantly economic and coherent explanation of a culture.[10]

These assumptions, in turn, encouraged the "invention" of Japanese notions of a national culture, such as that exemplified in the work of the philosopher Nishida Kitaro. He depicted a specifically Japanese mode of consciousness, which was profoundly vertical and where subjectivity tended constantly to be dispersed into environment. At its core stood the abstract figure of the emperor, the transcendent locus uniting the contradictions of selfhood. Subsequently, anthropologists tended to search for integrating frameworks, rather than focusing on the local peculiarities and diverse patterns of different regions and groups in Japan.

The case of the distinguished folklorist, Yanagita Kunio, is a striking example. In his early years, he studied the differences between the people of the mountains and the people of the plains, and between various types of village structure. Later he turned his attention to Japanese national culture, and interpreted local differences as different evolutionary stages along the single line of national history. Another modern anthropologist, Ishida Eiichiro, was greatly influenced by Kröber, and utilised biological images to fulfil the Western-defined requirement of anthropology as a science. "He identified the unifying principle of Japanese culture with rice-based agriculture, which [he claimed] had produced a powerful sense of group loyalty, ethical responsibility and attachment to nature."[11]

While an interest in definitions of national culture continued in the postwar period, the shadow of the way in which national spirit or culture was used during the Pacific war has haunted the concept for writers and intellectuals. There is a sense of the need to look around the edges of such unifying intellectual concepts, and to recover contact with the diversity of regional cultures and patterns of being that make up the real Japan. A collection of essays published by the writer Oe Kenzaburo in 1995, including his speech when receiving the Nobel prize for literature, gives a writer's perspective on Japan's modern "scholarship of absorption". In his Nobel speech, "Japan, the Ambiguous and Myself", Oe describes Japan's "ambiguity" thus:

The modernization of Japan was oriented toward learning from and imitating the West, yet the country is situated in Asia and has firmly maintained its traditional

[10] Morris Suzuki, Tessa, "The Invention and Reinvention of 'Japanese Culture'", in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, LIV, 3 (August 1995), pp. 759–780.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 771.

culture. The ambiguous orientation of Japan drove the country into the position of an invader in Asia, and resulted in its isolation from other Asian nations, not only politically but also socially and culturally. And even in the West, to which its culture was supposedly quite open, it has long remained inscrutable or only partially understood.[12]

In an earlier essay, Oe wrote about the rapid introduction of cultural theories and theorists from the West—Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva—which were accepted and discharged from a kind of "conveyer belt", accompanied by neither advocacy nor critique. The sad result, he suggests, is that "With only a few exceptions, the Japanese were unable to establish a cultural theory of their own . . . and the theories imported from elsewhere essentially had nothing to do with Japan . . .".[13]

It is with considerable urgency that Oe calls upon Japanese writers and intellectuals to address this crisis of Japan's continuing inscrutability and see that a more accurate image of Japan and its people is put forward to the world. "What Europeans and Americans should clearly see is a Japan possessing a view of the world richly shaped by both traditional and foreign cultural elements, and a will to work as a cooperative member of the world community, to make an independent and distinctive contribution to the environment of our shared planet."[14]

Perhaps the most sustained and successful vehicle for the introduction of Japanese intellectual culture to the global community is *The Japan Foundation Newsletter*, which has been published four to six times a year since 1973, and reaches a large number of universities and intellectual communities. While the Japan Foundation remains smaller in the size and scope of its activities than such parallel organisations as the British Council, the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), its support for Japanese cultural and linguistic studies around the world and provision for visiting fellows and students to spend time in Japan has had a significant impact. The reading of this newsletter over four to five years before I went to Japan in 1996 was a valuable experience in intellectual orientation. Numerous articles in the newsletter were helpful in identifying where Japanese intellectual culture placed itself internationally.

Many recent contributions to the *Newsletter* reflect a sense that Japan is being called on to make a distinctive cultural and intellectual contribution at the present stage of world history. In one article, Japan's experience of internationalisation is depicted as having gone through three stages, the first borrowing from China, the second from European nations in the Meiji era, and the third from the United States in the postwar period. Japan "received a tremendous amount from outside . . . but offered very little to the rest of the

[12] Oe, Kenzaburo, *Japan, The Ambiguous and Myself: The Nobel Prize Speech and Other Lectures* (Tokyo, New York, London: Kodansha International, 1995), p. 117.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 96.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

world", and now there is a need for a "clearly defined ideal" if Japan is to "become a country that makes a contribution to world peace and culture and the welfare of all mankind".[15]

An article on globalisation and culture sees Japan's modern experience as one common to all nation states: first, the phase of "modern state formation", when national culture is defined, followed by a second phase of territorial or colonial expansion and assertions of cultural superiority. "Whenever Japanese discuss their culture, they always assume, implicitly or explicitly, that the polar opposite of the West is Asia. This imaginary relationship of the West and Japan was reproduced in an imaginary relationship between Japan and Asia, so that the superiority of Japanese culture became apparent in the distance portrayed between it and Asia." Third is the "phase when globalization begins to rock the nation, shaking the foundations of its culture". At this point, "the homogeneity of the nation state and its national culture is revealed to be an illusion". The author concludes by noting "how illusory the purity of one's own culture is, and how necessary it is to reconfirm the hybrid character of any culture".[16]

Others continue to make brave attempts to identify some of the basic characteristics of this illusory or hybrid culture. Ito Shuntaro demonstrates how "non-substantiality" or "process-oriented-ness", "each-other-ness" and "self-becoming-ness" were common features in the work of four distinguished Japanese scholars who have made original contributions to intellectual history. Ando Shoeki and Miura Baien were traditional Confucian scholars of the eighteenth century; Nishida Kitaro was Japan's most distinguished modern philosopher; and Yukawa Hideki is a Nobel prize-winning physicist.[17] In a parallel article, Sakamoto Hyakudai discusses the concepts of harmony (*wa*) and self-annihilation (*watakushi*) and links them to a monist philosophy within Buddhist thought, emphasising freedom from body and mind, which found its fullest modern expression in the work of the philosopher Nishida Kitaro.[18]

This brief selection of recent literature reveals certain concerns in the contemporary intellectual scene in Japan: a strong sense of the need to make a cultural and intellectual contribution to global society which somehow matches the country's economic and political weight; a recognition that this will require moving forward from the scholarship of absorption that has characterised the past; and, finally, a deep soul-searching over how to recover, build and communicate a modern cultural and intellectual identity in the face of profound historical and structural barriers.

[15] Saint-Jacques, Bernard, "The 'Internationalization' of Japan and Trade with Canada", in *The Japan Foundation Newsletter*, XVIII, 5–6 (1990), pp. 9–11.
[16] Iyotani, Toshio, "Globalization and Culture", in *ibid.*, XXIII, 3 (1995), pp. 2–5.
[17] Shuntaro, Ito, "Universality in Japanese Thought", in *ibid.*, XXI, 6 (1993), pp. 7, 8, 16.
[18] Sakamoto, Hyadukai, "Japanese Philosophical Thought", in *ibid.*, 2 (1993), pp. 11–16.

Dilemmas of Authenticity and Asian Identity

I will try to communicate some of the insights and understandings I gained in personal meetings with 25 senior professors in different regions of Japan, in which we explored what Japanese intellectual culture had to contribute to the international community, and the barriers that stood in its way. Twelve of the 25 were scholars of education, but all the other social sciences were represented, as well as engineering, agriculture and physics. There were seven women in the group, and it included professors from national, public and private universities. All were involved, in one way or another, in international activities.[19]

A primary and recurring theme was the difficulty of communicating core ideas of Japanese intellectual culture, since they were themselves still groping to clarify those ideas. Several expressed their conviction that the whole field of educational theory in Japan had to be reconstructed, in a way that could overcome the alienation of a century of theorising in concepts introduced from the West, and mediated through the *kanji* chosen to represent them. This project of reconstruction involved listening to the life histories of rural people in diverse regions of the country, and learning from these people an authentic indigenous vocabulary for the interpretation of human growth and development. It also involved the study of folk-tales and comic stories (*rakugo*). The language of women and children, and their empathy for nature and human relations, was given special emphasis in this approach. It was felt that alternative kinds of logic had to be understood and validated. One example given to illustrate how classroom teaching had suppressed divergent forms of logic was the question: "What happens when snow melts?" A child who was sensitive to the rhythms of nature replied "spring then comes" and was told "wrong!". The correct answer: "When snow melts, water is produced."[20]

A folk-tale provided an example of expression of the ideas of harmony and the full development of both individual and group in Japanese tradition, Ito's philosophical concept of each-other-ness. A shrine carpenter, named Nishioka, wished to build a temple, and to do so purchased a whole mountain. This enabled him to select all the different kinds of trees, growing in the sun or shadow on different slopes of the mountain, and to get to know each tree and use its particular strengths and unique qualities in constructing a temple that was alive with the natural and spontaneous contribution of each timber.[21]

Many of those interviewed saw a difficulty in the very character of Japanese traditional thought which pervaded the effort of reconstructing indigenous

[19] For a more detailed description of the design of the research project, which also included visits to 22 universities, and interviews at a range of national and local government agencies, see Hayhoe, R., "Barriers to the Internationalization of Japanese Universities", in Cummings, William and Hawkins, John (eds), *Japanese Educational Exchange* (New York: SUNY Press; Tokyo: Tamagawa University Press, forthcoming 1998).

[20] Interview with Professor Ohta Takashi, Tokyo, 14 May, 1996.

[21] *Ibid.* The book containing this story is *Heart of the Tree, Life of the Tree (Ki no Kokoro, Ki no Inochi*, written as a dialogue and co-authored by Nishioka Tsunekazu and Ogawa Mitsuo).

knowledge and developing authentic theories. Zen Buddhism emphasises silence and direct perception; the aesthetic beauty of the tea ceremony, flower arranging and other classical arts constitutes a communication of ideas that eludes conceptual definition.[22] There is something antithetical to "normal" academic life and its preoccupations in this direct approach to knowing.

When asked which Japanese social philosopher or thinker should be introduced to graduate studies programmes around the world to complement the work of Western scholars such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim which are widely read at this level, the Buddhist philosopher Nishida Kitaro was suggested by a number of the professors. However, many went on to bemoan the fact that his work was little read and understood even in the social science programmes of Japan's own universities. The main focus of attention seems to have been on a kind of deconstruction of the history of modern scholarship, an attempt to understand critically the ways in which foreign theories and concepts have shaped their understanding, and identify some of the richness and diversity in Japanese society which has escaped the application of these theories. In a sense it is a kind of reversal of the process of developing a scientific anthropology in Japan described by Morris-Suzuki.[23] An interesting example is a paper analysing the interaction between the work of European educational theorists introduced to Japan over the twentieth century, and the internal struggles for greater democracy and participation in education within Japan.[24]

A second recurrent theme in many of these dialogues was the urgent need for the Japanese intellectual community to have a deeper knowledge of Asia. Japan's modernisation involved a profound Westernisation, including successful efforts to create and legitimate its own colonial empire on a Western model.[25] Most Japanese university scholars are deeply sensitive about the indignities visited upon other Asian peoples in this process; they are concerned about how scholarship and education might contribute to a righting of these historic wrongs, and a reconnecting of Japan to its East Asian heritage. Once again, a process of deconstruction seems necessary as a foundation for positive interaction.

This task has fallen heavily on the shoulders of scholars of education. One scholar's initiatives towards laying a foundation for rebuilding Japan's Asian identity may be illustrative. He involves undergraduate students in intensive studies of Japan's pre-war textbooks and newspapers in order to help them

[22] Interview with Professor Ito Kunio, Hiroshima University, 28 February, 1996.

[23] Morris-Suzuki, T., "The Invention and Reinvention of 'Japanese Culture'", *op. cit.*

[24] Horio, Teruhisa, "The Emergence and Development of Modern Japanese Educational Studies: From Pre and Post World War II to Present Japan", paper presented at the International Standing Conference for the History of Education, Berlin, 13–17 September, 1995.

[25] Nitobe, Inazo, *The Japanese Nation: Its Land, Its People and its Life. With special consideration to Its Relations with the United States* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's, 1912). This volume, written in beautiful English by a Japanese Christian scholar, provides an earnest justification for Japan's colonial empire in terms of efforts to emulate and improve upon the Western model.

understand the deep-seated prejudices against Korean people which were inculcated in their parents and grandparents, and which undergirded Japan's colonial rule of Korea. He also participates actively in a national committee for the study of history textbooks in other Asian countries. This has resulted in translations of passages depicting the Pacific war from textbooks in Chinese, Korean, Thai and other Asian languages, so that Japanese young people can read for themselves how Japan's war-time aggression is taught to young people in these neighbouring countries. A third initiative has been unearthing and publicising stories of Japanese citizens who chose a divergent role during the war. A striking case is that of a Japanese consul-general in Lithuania who issued 4,000 visas for Jewish people to cross Japan and reach Shanghai; he was expelled from Japan's diplomatic service as a result.[26]

On the positive side, several scholars expressed the hope that some day they could write a history of East Asia with Korean and Chinese scholars, and that this would be widely used in classrooms throughout East Asia. The hope remains elusive, because of the deep differences in perceptions of recent history among scholars from these countries. However, there are other signs of *rapprochement*: for example, many Japanese universities are opening programmes in contemporary Chinese, Korean and other Asian languages in response to a demand from students which reflects the economic dynamism of the region. Student exchanges within Asia are beginning to flourish. A recent initiative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MESC), which has stimulated mutually beneficient exchanges, are one-year "peace and friendship" scholarships, established in 1995 in memory of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Pacific war; 1,000 students come to Japan each year from countries around the Asia Pacific, the only precondition being that their universities must have partner universities in Japan, and be prepared to accept a Japanese student in return.

At a deeper level, the question for scholarship in the social sciences is how the rebuilding of these bridges can lead to the healthy development of concepts and theories in the social sciences which are rooted in East Asian realities, rather than simply reflecting, in a mirror-like way, the trends and patterns of the West. This brings us back to the issue of whether Japan is a civilisation unto itself, or a culture situated within a wider East Asian civilisation. A majority of the Japanese professors interviewed inclined to the view that Japan is a culture whose self-knowledge must be integrated within a broader self-understanding of East Asian civilisation. The project of contributing in a positive and proactive way to the international scholarly community is complex and long term, requiring a patient building of networks within the region. Both Buddhism and Confucianism provide a deep undergirding for Japan's scholarly culture, and both are shared with other East Asian societies.

The women scholars interviewed brought insights of their own. A small minority within the Japanese professoriate, they viewed themselves as more

[26] Interview with Professor Igasaki Akio, Toyama University of International Studies, Toyama, 1 June, 1996.

internationalised than their male colleagues, and less bound by disciplinary and group loyalties. They are unable to benefit from the "old-boy network" of the established faculties, but by the same token they experience fewer constraints. Still, they had many parallel concerns. Several expressed the view that feminist theories were largely a foreign implant, applied rather artificially to Japanese social structures, and limited in their impact to a small intellectual coterie. One reason given for the fact that they gained little resonance in the wider society was that Japanese women give more attention to the pursuit of happiness than to the pursuit of power implicit in much Western feminism.[27]

Women scholars have to grapple with Confucianism and Buddhism—the latter has probably been the more friendly to women[28]—and the mixed legacy they have left them. Women were excluded from serious scholarly roles in most traditional East Asian institutions, yet basic features of traditional thought, such as concepts of process, self-becoming and each-other-ness, meld well with women's ways of knowing.[29] Iwao Sumiko noted this contradiction in her recent book on Japanese women. She discusses how easily Japanese women fit into the culture of cooperation and social harmony of Japanese corporations, and by the same token, how they have failed to gain the appreciation for a distinctive feminist approach to business relations won by some of their Western sisters in a different corporate climate.[30]

Women historians are also grappling in parallel ways to men with some of the historical legacies of Japanese imperialism. However, their female identity gives them a somewhat different place in this struggle. A distinguished woman historian of East Asia discussed the close links between historical research and practical activism. She was involved in an Asian women's resource centre belonging to a non-governmental organisation which had worked hard to press the Japanese government to provide recompense to the Asian "comfort women" used by the Japanese army during the war, and which was also active in fighting prostitution in contemporary Asia. She felt such linking of theory and practice came naturally to women, and that this kind of activism positioned them for the collaborative writing of East Asian history which still eludes male scholars.[31] The very fact of underrepresentation within male-dominated university structures may give Japanese women some advantages in building relations with the rest of East Asia, as well as in making their own contribution to international scholarship. However, there is still much to be done in the area of exploring links between some of the feminine qualities of

[27] Interview with Professor Iwao Sumiko, Tokyo, 27 May, 1996.

[28] See, e.g., Tsai, Kathryn, "The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women: The First Two Centuries", in Guisso, R. and Johannesen, S. (eds), *Women in China. Current Directions in Historical Scholarship* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982).

[29] Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N. and Tarule, J., *Women's Ways of Knowing* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

[30] Iwao, Sumiko, *Japanese Women. Traditional Image and Changing Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1993), p. 201.

[31] Interview with Professor Michiko Nakahara, Waseda University, Tokyo, 13 May, 1996.

East Asian philosophy and the critique of facets of Enlightenment science and philosophy developed by scholars such as Carolyn Merchant, Sandra Harding and Nancy Tuana in the West.[32]

Two main points stand out in these reflections on Japanese intellectual culture. The first is the sense of a need felt by Japanese scholars to explore their own cultural roots, and to probe the realities beneath the conceptual overlay from China and Europe which has dominated their intellectual discourse. It is a search for authenticity. The second is a desire to reconnect in substantive ways to the East Asian community, to work with colleagues in China, Korea, Vietnam and Southeast Asian countries, and to develop explanatory theories rooted in the region's experience of development. This Asianisation may be an even longer-term project than the quest for authenticity, but it should result in a substantive regional contribution to international scholarly circles.

Structural Barriers

Certain structural barriers exist—both within the university itself, and in the national political establishment—which contribute to the difficulty of Japanese intellectuals in making a noticeable imprint on international scholarship. At the same time, new avenues are opening up that may change this situation.

Nakayama noted how the very term adopted for science in Japanese, *kagaku*, implied an array of specialised fields, rather than an integrated quest for understanding of the natural and social worlds. The specialised fields of knowledge identified by the ninteenth-century bureaucrats, which essentially reflected European views at the time, succeeded in gaining status as faculties within the major imperial universities—law, medicine, engineering, agriculture, basic sciences, letters, economics, and later education. Each faculty recruits students according to standards it sets and is governed by an all-powerful faculty council. The faculty council has been a key institution in the protection of academic freedom, and has allowed generations of politically active professors, many of them deeply influenced by Marxism, to give relatively free expression to their criticisms of the establishment.[33]

National universities could be described as federations of independent faculties, with their presidents and central administration having symbolic importance and a refereeing role, in terms of academic life. The disciplinary boundaries around each faculty are firm, and there is little tolerance of interdisciplinary collaboration. In terms of administrative identity, national

[32] Harding, Sandra, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1986); Merchant, Carolyn, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Tuana, Nancy, *Women and the History of Philosophy* (New York: Paragon House, 1992).

[33] On the political activism of both faculty members and students in modern Japanese history, see esp. Marshall, Byron, *Academic Freedom and the Japanese Imperial University, 1868–1939* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1992); and De Witt Smith II, Henry, *Japan's First Student Radicals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

universities are an arm of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Career administrators belonging to the ministry move from one national university to another as they rise within the system. Individual institutions do not have the identity of legal persons, and at present have no possibility, either at faculty or university level, of negotiating contracts with other governmental agencies or with international agencies such as the World Bank.

The positive side of this lack of administrative autonomy lies in the fact that universities are fully funded through the national treasury, and their members are assured equal status with civil servants in other parts of the bureaucracy. The negative side is that they are unable to respond to opportunities in the national or international arena on their own initiative. Here the contrast with Chinese universities is striking. University faculty members in China have a far lower level of academic freedom, because of the constraints of the political system, but universities gained recognised status as legal persons in the comprehensive educational law passed in 1995.[34] This confirmed earlier policy guidelines that have enabled Chinese academics to take remarkable initiatives in consulting, international project development and fund-raising, and plan for their own future academic development.

Private universities in Japan do have the status of legal persons, and some of them have been able to take significant initiatives through contracts with Japanese development assistance agencies such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF), and international agencies such as the World Bank. However, most are constrained by the pressure of large student bodies and heavy teaching loads. The structure of their academic faculties also tends to mirror those of the national universities, with relatively little interdisciplinary cooperation, and thus little impetus to respond to broad challenges in the international arena.

Japan's wider governmental system is also highly compartmentalised. Universities have been expected to function purely as institutions for teaching and research, and the main responsibilities assigned to them in terms of Japan's rising international role has been to absorb an ever larger number of international students. Prime Minister Nakasone set a goal of 100,000 in 1984, and actual numbers have risen from 10,243 in 1983 to 53,847 in 1995.[35] Over 90 per cent come from other Asian countries, a fact which meshes well with the call to foster a stronger sense of Asian identity. In terms of research, organisations such as the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, have provided generous support for international cooperation, and in recent years have offered particular incentives to encourage collaborative research with other Asian countries.[36]

[34] Hayhoe, R. and Zhong, N., "Universities and Civil Society", in Brook, T. and Frolic, B.M. (eds), *China and Civil Society* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).
[35] *The Japan Times*, 7 March, 1996.
[36] Interview with Mr Yoshio Keisuke, MESC, Tokyo, 9 May, 1996.

The other national agency which has been very important to universities in terms of opportunities for international scholarly collaboration is the Japan Foundation. Established in 1972 as the cultural arm of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), it has fostered studies in Japanese language, literature and a range of social science fields around the world, and has provided many opportunities for university professors to travel and teach abroad. However, it treats them largely as individuals, and does little to facilitate the collective participation of universities in international cultural and academic work. The Japan International Cooperation Agency, established in 1974 under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has also made increasing use of university faculty members in its extensive development projects abroad, but again always as individuals.

Several of the professors interviewed had taken part in international work under the Japan Foundation or JICA. They saw both agencies as important channels through which their intellectual culture could be projected abroad, and felt the huge expansion in Japanese development assistance in Asia and elsewhere was significant in opening up new opportunities. However, they were also deeply frustrated by constraints experienced when working abroad under these auspices.

A professor of agriculture had done extensive work in both Bolivia and Sudan, and felt that in its overseas development programme Japan should be projecting human intelligence, applied in a comprehensive way to socio-economic development, rather than focusing on technological infrastructures —such as dams, bridges and harbour facilities—that largely lacked a human presence. However, he found his university had had little understanding of or support for his development work abroad, since this kind of work was not regarded as part of its mission.[37]

A professor of engineering, who was extremely active in a comprehensive urban transport project in Thailand, lamented the fact that he could have only minimal influence as an individual consultant. He could not draw on the rich resources of his university's engineering faculty—which had recently restructured itself along interdisciplinary lines—to design the general approach being adopted. From his perspective, the project reflected outdated mechanistic planning techniques of the 1950s, when the bureaucrats in charge had been educated.[38]

A professor of economics had spent six months lecturing at a new management institute in India under the auspices of JICA, and been very active in working with economic research institutes in Southeast Asia established by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. However, the narrow view of the faculty of economics at his university meant that this work

[37] Interview with Professor Takeoka, Faculty of Agriculture, Nagoya University, 16 February, 1996.

[38] Interview with Professor Hayashi, Faculty of Engineering, Nagoya University, 15 February, 1996.

was simply tolerated, rather than valued for the possibilities for collaborative research and lively relations with South and Southeast Asia.[39]

New Avenues

These structural constraints are real, yet significant changes are under way, in national policy and in the national bureaucratic climate, which are likely to have a mitigating effect in future. One is the new orientation of the Japanese development assistance programme; a second is the move towards decentralisation in the national bureaucracy, and the increasingly active role of local governments.

In 1989 Japanese disbursements for overseas development assistance exceeded those of the United States for the first time, and consistently in each year since 1991 have constituted the single largest national contribution.[40] For much of its history, the focus of Japanese ODA programmes had been on large infrastructural projects, beneficial to Japanese industry, with policy-making dominated by the various economic and industrial ministries and bureaus of the government.[41] By definition, this type of project involved loans, grants and equipment on a much larger scale than individual interaction—a situation which was convenient for bureaucrats struggling with the war-time legacy in Asia.

The most notable change since the early 1990s has been brought about by the emergence of a range of new priorities in Japanese policy on overseas development assistance, including the environment, economic liberalisation and political democratisation, population and Aids, and women in development and education.[42] By definition, these areas require extensive human involvement and direct contributions from the education and social sectors. There is also a new awareness of the need for personnel who are specially trained in development work, rather than old-style bureaucrats who have little idea of how to manage this type of aid programme. From the perspective of intellectual culture, the new funding directed towards these "soft" areas provides an excellent opportunity to project abroad elements of the social and intellectual expertise that have made Japan such an intelligent society. (One of my greatest pleasures of living in Japan over a six-month period was seeing how intelligence was applied with exquisite detail to creating a harmonious and well-functioning environment for a large population living within relatively constrained spatial conditions.)

[39] Interview with Professor Takeuchi, Department of Economics, Hiroshima University, 28 February, 1996.

[40] Interview with Mr Hidemori Sobijima, Technical Cooperation Division, Economic Cooperation Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 May, 1996.

[41] The MESC was the one ministry which had seen little reason to establish connections with the ODA establishment. For two excellent general studies of Japanese ODA policy, see Orr Jr, Robert M., *The Emergence of Japan's Foreign Aid Power* (New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1991); and Rix, John, *Japan's Foreign Aid Challenge: Policy Reform and Aid Leadership* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

[42] Interview with Mr Hidemori Sobijima, 9 May, 1996, *op. cit.*

In adopting these new priorities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognised the need for involving the universities. The first idea was to establish an international development university, under its own auspices, to train professionals and carry out appropriate research.[43] By this time, however, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture had awakened to the opportunities stronger links to the ODA programme would afford, and made a counter-proposal: the establishment of new faculties of international development at major national universities. These would be interdisciplinary faculties and involve professors of economics, political science, law, education, and other cultural fields.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to set up and fund, at arm's length, the Foundation for Advanced Studies in International Development to support research on development issues and facilitate the involvement of academics in international projects. One of its significant projects has been an inter-Asian study of the role of manufacturing companies in economic development, which involves researchers from seven ASEAN countries and is intended as an explanatory response to the World Bank's macro-study of Asian economic development.[44]

In terms of the ministry's initiative, six new interdisciplinary faculties have been established in national universities—at Nagoya, Tsukuba, Saitama, Hiroshima, Kobe and Yokohama. Each has a somewhat different name, but all are oriented towards teaching and research on international developmental and cultural issues. I interviewed professors who had been involved in establishing three of these faculties, and all spoke of the striking breakthrough that had resulted, in terms of unprecedented collaboration in teaching and research across the disciplines and traditional faculties.

Tsukuba University, established in 1972 without a traditional faculty structure, seems to have the greatest facility for reaching out to the international community. Five of the 30 professors in the College of International Studies at the time of my visit were non-Japanese, from international backgrounds, and seven were women—both remarkably high percentages for a government institution. Their honorary adviser was the distinguished Japanese woman diplomat and head of the United Nations Commission for Refugees, Dr Ogata. One of the important initiatives the college had taken was to launch the *Journal of International Political Economy*, published in English and with an international board of advisers. It is strictly refereed, unlike many Japanese university journals which have traditionally published the writings of their own faculty members. This journal constitutes a promising vehicle for introducing Japanese and Asian theories in the social sciences to a wider international audience.[45]

[43] Interview with Mr Masakazu Toshikage, Foundation For Advanced Studies in International Development (FASID), Tokyo, 14 May, 1996.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] Visit to the College of International Studies, Tsukuba University, 28 May, 1996.

Some of Japan's leading private universities are also becoming active in international work. Two examples illustrate the important role they can play in communicating Japanese intellectual culture. A distinguished law professor, originally from Nagoya University and now teaching at the private Sophia University in Tokyo, received funding from the Japan Foundation to offer lectures and advice in the area of civil law in Vietnam. These activities inspired so much interest that his ideas were reflected in Vietnam's new civil law code. A little later a large project was initiated for cooperation in the field of civil and commercial laws, involving Sophia University's law faculty as well as colleagues from Nagoya. It was supported through a contract with JICA. I was informed about the project by a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who was proud of this example of development aid being used to support democratisation.[46]

The second example involves Ritsumeikan University, a well-known private university in Kyoto, which is developing a sister institution in the city of Beppu, Oita prefecture, in the southern island of Kyushu, where both city and prefectural authorities are providing land and other forms of support. The mandate of this new Asia Pacific university is "spreading information from Asia throughout the world, training personnel to be active in Asia and the world, and operating as a centre of excellence for Asia Pacific research".[47] Fully half of its students are to be recruited from other Asian countries, and those responsible for the project hope for substantive support from the national budget for overseas development assistance.[48]

Not to be outdone by such initiatives by private universities, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is actively rethinking its own approach to higher education and international development. A commission established in 1995 to study the role of the national education system in international development work recommended that the ministry increase its representatives in major government ODA agencies and in missions abroad, and take an active role in coordinating the participation of university and school personnel in such work through a central office; educational cooperation and assistance should be included in the mandate of the university, along with teaching, scientific research and social service.[49]

We may therefore expect greater support for faculty members of national universities who wish to involve themselves in international development work. This will also mean strengthening the links between Japanese universities and other Asian countries, since about 60 per cent of the loans and grants in Japan's development assistance budget go to Asia.[50] This is a positive

[46] Interview with Mr Hidemori Sobijima, 9 May, 1996, *op cit.*

[47] *The Ritsumeikan Blueprint: 1995.* Brochure jointly promulgated by The Ritsumeikan Trust, Oita Prefecture and Beppu City.

[48] Interview with Professor Ken'ichi Nakagami, Ritsumeikan University, 19 April, 1996.

[49] Interview with Mr Yoshio Keisuke, 9 May, 1996, *op. cit.*

[50] MOFA, *Japan's Official Development Assistance Annual Report 1994* (Tokyo: Association for Promotion of International Cooperation, 1995), p. 108.

factor for the development of a Japanese scholarship that is firmly rooted in its wider East Asian heritage, but it brings to the fore the difficult issues of the legacy of the Second World War. From this perspective, a second recent development at the national level in Japan may be significant: a trend towards decentralisation, and increasingly proactive local and prefectural governments and communities.

A law passed in 1995 specifies the devolution of some powers to the local level, if certain conditions are met, while confirming central responsibility for diplomacy, defence, currency and legislation, justice enforcement, labour regulation and welfare.[51] The fact that this law does not specify education as a responsibility of the central government is an interesting point, and it has led to questions about the future role of national universities.[52] Generally, there is much criticism of the central bureaucracy, arising from recent scandals around the Aum cult, housing loans and tainted blood supplies, and strong popular pressures towards decentralisation.[53]

The National Land Agency (Kokudo Cho) operates like a ministry of internal affairs with a coordinating role among the other ministries; its members are among the few central bureaucrats positively working towards a decentralisation of powers. In the area of higher education, it has a bureau which receives plans and requests from localities for new initiatives. Over 80 new campuses have been approved over the past 15 years, out of 501 applications; most were for new private universities. The main consideration in these decisions has been to encourage stronger connections between higher education and local communities, to facilitate rational geographic planning, and to prevent an over-concentration of higher institutions in major cities. In terms of national institutions, this agency was responsible for the planning of Tsukuba University and Tsukuba Science City in a rural area, a two hour bus-ride northwest of Tokyo, in the 1970s. It is now involved in plans for the Kansai Science City, between Osaka, Kyoto and Nara, in collaboration with three prefectural governments.[54] The relocation of two national universities—Hiroshima and Kyushu—to new campuses outside the large conurbations where they were originally sited has also been overseen by the National Land Agency.

This movement towards strengthening the links of higher education with local communities is also reflected, to some degree, in national ODA policy and planning. With projects in priority areas such as environment, education, population and women in development coming to the fore, it is clear that prefectural-level institutions of research and higher education have the

[51] Nitta, Teruo, "Chiho bunken suishin ho" (The law on decentralisation of power to the local level), unpublished paper, Nagoya Meitoku tanki daigaku, 1995.

[52] Interview with Professor Teruo Nitta, Nagoya, 30 April, 1996.

[53] Makino, Atsushi, "The Collapse of the Framework: Theoretical Problems of Recent Educational Reform in Japan", unpublished paper, Higher Education Group, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, 1995.

[54] Interview with Mr Yamamoto Kenichi, National Land Agency, 27 May, 1996.

expertise that may be needed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has given lip-service, in recent policy statements, to the importance of involving local government and other local agencies in the aid programme, and some JICA training centres have been located under prefectural-level authorities.[55] However, the actual level of budgetary support remains low, as have the allocations for non-governmental organisations, most of which are active at the prefectural level.[56]

What became clear in the process of my research was that the empowerment of local governments and local higher learning institutions might diffuse some of the anxieties over Japan's war-time legacy. Vigorous local involvement, based on the diversity of regional cultures, would complement the intellectual agenda of deconstructing the myth of a unified Japanese spirit or culture. Geographical diversity is already resulting in different kinds of relations at a local level, in the Japan Sea area with Korea, Russia and Northeast China, and in the southern island of Kyushu with such Southeast Asian communities as Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

These ties build on historical and personal relations established over a long period. Many of the Japanese who lived in Northeast China before the Pacific war are active in local people's organisations for supporting Chinese schools and students in the region. Likewise, Southeast Asians who studied in Hiroshima and Kyushu before and during the Second World War retain warm ties with friends and classmates of that period. For example, ten students from various Southeast Asian countries, who were all at Hiroshima University in August 1945, returned for the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and dedicated themselves to strengthening relations between Hiroshima and their regions. All were in significant cultural and political positions in their respective countries.[57] Such ties can soften national obsessions over the legacy of war and reparations.

Higher institutions at prefectural level are often relatively small, and many are actively developing new interdisciplinary programmes related to the environment, to cultural and social sciences, and to new areas such as information science. The enrolment of women students tends to be high, and there is also a higher percentage of women faculty than in national universities.[58] An example from the southern city of Kitakyushu, in Fukuoka Prefecture, a large industrial city and centre of the steel industry, may serve to illustrate this potential. There an Asian women's forum, situated in a women's centre built with a combination of municipal and business support, had succeeded in winning several JICA contracts for short-term training of Asian women in leadership, management and environmental policy. This work was

[55] MOFA, *Japan's Official Development Assistance Annual Report 1994, op. cit.*, pp. 229–231.

[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 227–229.

[57] Interview with Mr Tadahiro Fuku, International Academic Affairs Division, Hiroshima University, 26 February, 1996.

[58] Four public universities at the prefectural or municipal level were visited in the course of the research, as well as five local level private universities.

solidly based in the experience of the women of the city, who had initiated a protest movement against heavy industrial pollution in the early 1960s, doing research on pollution control and pioneering important environmental protection policies and practices. The project was led by a professor of family sociology from a local private university, and so had links with higher education.[59]

Conclusion

Decentralisation and the greater involvement of local institutions in international activities and overseas development work is an emerging trend which may have considerable importance for the ways in which Japanese scholarship is projected to the world. In particular, it is significant for rebuilding the ties to Asia which are essential for the re-Asianisation of Japan's intellectual culture, after a century of Westernisation. This is one of the primary dilemmas that has been identified in this paper.

It may also have special relevance for the other dilemma facing the scholarly community: the recovery of indigenous patterns of thought and verbal expression, as vehicles for theorising about human development, society and culture. Oe Kenzaburo has expressed this through his interest in the people of Okinawa and their development of a conscious regional identity. Educational scholars and social theorists are showing it as they turn their attention to the diverse local communities that maintain a vital connection with the past.

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[59] Interview with Professor Masami Shinozaki, Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women, Kitakyushu, 2 March, 1996.