

TOWARDS A RECONSTITUTION OF CLASSICAL STUDIES.

Intercultural Review and Prospects for Classical Studies *

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1 Organization of the Project.

1.1 Organization.

- a. Head investigator:
H. Nakatani (Kobegakuin Univ.)
- b. Consulting Committee:
S. Ueyama (Prof. emeritus of Kyoto Univ.),
C. Nakane (Member of the Academy),
N. Fujisawa (Prof. emeritus of Kyoto Univ.),
J. Takasaki (President of Tsurumi Univ.)
- c. Executing committee:
H. Nakatani (chairman; Indian Buddhism),
T. Ikeda (Chinese philosophy),
S. Sekine (Biblical Studies),
M. Tokunaga (Indian philosophy),
K. Uchiyama (Greek philosophy),
Y. Ejima (Indian Buddhism),
A. Kida (Japanese literature),
H. Nakagawa (French literature),
H. Marui (Indian philosophy),
M. Saito (Chinese literature).
- d. Research groups:
About ninety scholars from Japanese, Chinese,
Tibetan, Korean, Biblical, Islamic, Indian, Iranian,
Greek and Latin studies.

1.2 Term.

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2 The Necessity of the Project.

2.1 The Value of the Classics as an Ever New Catalyzing Factor

Human civilization is the totality of the knowledge and artistic creation of the human race. Therefore the Classical texts are of crucial importance as the reservoir of the artistic creation or essence of refined knowledge concerning human beings and the world surrounding them.

The noble character of a hero or the lofty thoughts of a sage, lucid insight into human beings or the strict logic of a philosopher etc., as described in the Classics, have been, from time to time, the object of admiration or even of worship, the norm to learn from or the model to follow. Deep emotion or wishes expressed in them have been sources of comfort or healing.

However, the reading of Classics is not limited to such passive actions. As they constantly engage us, the Classics lead us to a higher understanding of the human world. They dissolve our fixed understanding of the state of things, show us a new range of vision and give us new prospects as ever new catalyzers for the one who engages them. Dialogue with the Classics leads, therefore, to the discovery of new meanings of the world and a recreation of one's self. It is through these functions that, for ages, the Classics have been maintaining the framework of the various civilizations, forming the backbone of the sensitivity and the thinking of individuals and people.

Classical studies assure the role of collecting, preserving and investigating the distinguished spiritual activities

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of human beings, as preserved by the various traditions. The project “Towards a Reconstitution of Classical Studies” proposes that the scholars of the various fields of Classical studies engaged in such important activities should cooperate for the first time in history in order to reconstitute the realm of Classical studies.

2. 2 Problems facing the Classical Studies of Today.

Modern philological studies in the Classics were established in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century for Greek and Latin texts. The methodology was soon imported into Islamic, Biblical, Indian, Iranian, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese Studies. In this way, modern philology was established in the various fields.

It was imported into Japan at the end of the 19th century. Nowadays Classical studies in Japan are part, due to their high level, of international scholarly activity. Firmly established in our country, Classical studies now face the following three major problems. The new project reacts to them.

1. Summing up the advances in research of the past half century and through it, the establishment of a new methodology.
2. Exchange of research results in the various fields involved.
3. The loss of manuscripts.
4. Future prospects for the Classics and for Classical studies with regard to modern Society.

2. 2. 1 Summing up of the Advances and Reflexions on Methodology.

a. Summing up of the advances.

During the past half century, studies and editions of a large amount of manuscripts and of local prints have been carried out. However, the summing up and the evaluation of such research have not been executed well. This is due to the fact that Classical scholars are preoccupied with the study of the individual texts. However, in order to decide the direction of Classical studies and to develop them in a

sound way, such evaluation is necessary. The new project aims at ensuring regular and systematic summing up and evaluation through the cooperation of the various fields involved.

b. Reflections on methodology.

Due to recent developments the methodology of Classical studies has to be reexamined in two respects: 1. Methodology of interpretation, 2. Electronic processing of texts.

Through these reflections, the present project aims a new methodology that is proper for each field of Classical studies, a type of scholarship that began, two centuries ago, with one and the same method.

1) As Classical texts have been transmitted orally or in manuscript form in all civilizations concerned, a comparative study of the techniques of transmission has to be carried out, that does not concern merely the text under investigation. Rather it must ensure that a general science of manuscriptology and of the various types of oral transmission will be developed. Further, the methods used in the various fields of Classical studies are often based on modern western views, such as the predominance of rationality, domination of nature through technology, the pursuit of technical efficiency, or the disregard of non-Christian views. In the interpretation of texts we must be cautious with regard to these items in order to understand the innate logic of each civilization. For example we must interpret Indian Buddhist texts in the context of Indian civilization; in studying them, we must avoid the notions underlying the Chinese technical terms that are used in Chinese and Japanese Buddhist scholarship. This includes an understanding of the original intent of a text and its subsequent interpretations within the culture and its effect outside its cultural setting.

2) The diffusion of personal computers during the past fifteen years has drastically changed the methods used in Classical studies and has brought about a qualitative change. However, these new techniques are not known to all scholars and therefore substantial differences exist in each field. In view of the efficacy of the new techniques, the employment of the computer is the key for the development of Classical studies. As for the use of the computer in the Humanities, a joint project of the Ministry of Education, called “Use of Computers for Humanities” is

well in progress. The present project builds on its results and aims, through cooperation of the various fields of Classical studies, at the establishment of standards, such as character codes, methods of text processing or of text analysis. We will see to the diffusion of such standards and methods.

2. 2. 2 Exchange of Results.

The new project envisions the exchange of the results of studies in the various fields involved. So far, this has been done only very rarely. Classical studies must be based on exact interpretation of the texts, including collection and edition of manuscripts, linguistic examination, study of words, and study of the history of ideas. Specialists are well aware of the fact that logical systems differ from each other in the various civilizations. In order to understand them, a long period of training and a great amount of knowledge are necessary. That is why scholars limit themselves to their own specialization and rarely transgress it. However, Classical studies have many themes in common, and it is therefore fruitful to collect and examine the results of the individual fields of study, while being well aware of the difficulties involved in such comparisons.

The topics selected for the present project include “studies of manuscripts and local prints”, “textual criticism and interpretation”, “world view in Classical literatures”, “transmission and adaptation of the Classics in a country or in foreign countries”, etc. Scholars in the various fields will communicate directly about each of these topics.

2. 2. 3 The Loss of Manuscripts.

With regard to MSS and old printed texts it must be noted that due to social change, development and increasing exploitation of the land, many manuscripts and local prints are being lost in various regions of the world. We will promptly investigate such cases and, after a thorough evaluation of the situation in the context of the totality of Classical studies, will aid preservation activities as far as possible within the framework of this project.

2. 2. 4 Future Prospects.

We will examine the meaning of Classical studies, and we will re-examine the role of Classical literature in the past and in today's world. We will try to establish which traits of Classical culture have been adopted by the Japanese from Chinese culture, Indian Buddhism and European and American culture, and we will also try to evaluate which traits the Japanese should emulate from other cultures in the future. So far such investigations have been carried out mostly by sociologists, political scientists, economists, and historians. However, in the present project, scholars of the Classics themselves are engaged in such research. As soon as the role of the Classics in society has been established, the role of the Classical studies for the future can be envisioned. Various fields of the Classics will cooperate in assuring the future role of Classics and the continuing education of young scholars. We will investigate the establishment of a research institution which will promote and pursue continuous cooperation.

In addition, we will contemplate the addition of texts outside our traditional Canons, that is the Classics of other peoples not mentioned in the definition given above. This would include oral epics such as the Kirgiz 'Manas', W. African oral histories such as the 'Tales of the Kingdom of Segu', or the Ainu Epic. We will also think about a representative selection of important myths of cultures that have no written traditions, as these reflect, often in connection with rituals, their world view and ethics. Given the abundance of the material, a careful but representative selection will have to be made. We may include such well known texts as the Popol Vuh of the Mayas, Australian myths of the Dream Time, or the creation myths of the Yoruba in Nigeria.

Finally, when contemplating on the direction Japanese culture may take in the next century, some comparative study of the concepts of constant self-education as in traditional Confucianism or in German culture ("Bildung") will be included.

2.3 Characteristic of the Project.

2.3.1 Cooperation.

Creation of avenues of communication between scholars of the various fields of Classical studies. Until now scholars were reluctant in doing so because they were aware of the difficulties involved. In fact, comparison without an understanding of the complete system of a culture, or understanding of just one of its aspects is of little significance.

However, it is rather natural for scholars to communicate because they deal with Classical literatures which have many topics in common. The exchange of the results of their researches will bring about new points of view and will lead to a rejuvenation of Classical studies. That is to say, an individual field of Classical studies will, as it were, open to the various other fields and will take note of the others' methodology. We will try to establish continuous cooperation in an organized manner.

2.3.2 Presentation of the new Classics.

a. Presentation of scientific results.

It is indispensable for the communication between scholars of various fields to speak in a language comprehensible to others. This is necessary not only for communication with Classical scholars but also with the general public. Especially, we would like to publish our appreciation of the Classics and our discussion about the future of Classical studies. This will be carried out not only in scientific journals but it will be disseminated through the mass media, including newspapers, journals, television, the internet, and through international symposia.

b. Japanese translation of Classical literature.

Modern Japanese has been created and refined from the Meiji Period (1868-1912) onwards. While language changes continuously not so many Classical texts have been translated into a form of Japanese that is suitable for modern readers. Classical scholars of various fields must come forward in order to present precise and attractive translations. We plan to publish a selection of such translations called "Selections from the Classics".

2.4 Meaning of the Project

Contribution to Japanese Society : Establishment of a New Classical Culture

Half a century after the World War II, today's Japanese live in a period of great change. While traditional Japanese morale is losing its basis in society, the humanistic morale propagated since the Meiji period has only limited acceptance. Nowadays people vaguely feel that there is no precise prospect of the future society, and increasingly so, for the individual's role in it, while they receive a flood of information.

It is precisely in this situation that we must read Classical literature in order to understand the thoughts and sensibilities of the various peoples of the world since these texts and thoughts have shaped much of their present outlook. While understanding, in this way, Japan and the rest of world from a wider point of view, and in superseding the traditional framework, a better way of life should emerge. This is only possible through profound knowledge and insight based on the reading of Classical literature; it will lead to the formation of a new philosophical and emotional background of the modern Japanese.

It is one of the obligations of classical scholars to contribute to the formation of the new Classical culture of the young Japanese who will create the Japan of the 21st century. Overcoming the reluctant attitude of most scholars we will have to carry out the important task of reconstituting the philosophical and emotional backbone of the Japanese. These activities, in the long term, will lead Japan to a higher level of culture, just as it has been done before, when Japan adapted Chinese culture a millennium ago.

As we need some compelling framework to feel "at home" in the culture and the world we live in, we will deliberate on the question of which texts to include in our selections. One may think about texts that stress a cosmopolitan point of view, so necessary for the next centuries to come, and we may offer a wide selection of texts that expose the readers to multiple choices from which they can make their own selection.