

# Knowledge from Outside: Knowledge for 'Divertissement' and Beyond

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## Introduction

I once heard a professor at Cambridge University referring to the mentality of Oxford professors as 'When they don't know a thing, they say it is not worth knowing.' Such mental attitude is called 'arrogant ignorance', which may be detestable. But, in a sense, ignorance can be allowed and sometimes needful, in particular, I dare to say, in our terrible so-called information society. King Oedipus should not have acquired knowledge about who he was, whom he killed, and whom he had married. The knowledge led to his fatal ruin. However, in reality, by nature we desire to know, as Aristotle put it (*Metaphysica*, 980a23).

We are required to judge what knowledge is worth knowing and what is not. Probably, we already know much which is not worth knowing.

The transfer of information and knowledge reflects power relationships between nations. In modern times and also still today, people of most countries have been obliged to learn something unfamiliar to them, mostly knowledge from more powerful countries in terms of politics, economy and military eminence through compulsory education. Knowledge from outside would be useful for personal advancement in the world and national enrichment with a strong army. But such knowledge is different in kind from self-cultivation and serves only as know-how.

## Knowledge from outside: the case of modern Japan

Let me take the case of modern Japan. In 1543, the Byzantine Empire collapsed, while the wreck of a Portuguese vessel brought a matchlock gun to the island of Tanegashima in Japan. Within a year, the gun was duplicated and used in a spec-

tacular way at the battle of Nagashino in 1575. It introduced a completely new tactics and strategy.

Not only the gun, called Tanegashima in Japanese, but also many other items, words and ideas were brought into Japan from the world outside. To the Japanese, foreigners from China, Korea and the West meant that they always brought something novel and in most cases useful. In the context of power politics in international affairs, people of developing countries respect language, knowledge and things which are used in more powerful countries.

As Okakura Tenshin (1862–1913) says:

The heaven of modern humanity is indeed shattered in the Cyclopean struggle for wealth and power. The world is groping in the shadow of egotism and vulgarity. Knowledge is bought through a bad conscience, benevolence practiced for the sake of utility. (Okakura, 1994: 209)

Since the Meiji Restoration in 1868 Japan has made every effort to follow and catch up with Western countries, including in the fields of economic power and military strength. The Reverend Nikolai (1836–1912), bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church said:

Thus far the Japanese have paid attention only to the surface of European civilization such as steamships, cannons, and the system of legal institutions, but as thousands of young people study European languages, they are sure to go forward beyond steamships and cannons. (Nikolai, 1999: 93)

As Bishop Nikolai predicted, the Japanese came to be more eagerly engaged in Western learning. However, Western philosophies were received as ‘only established, completed ones without a process of emerging and logical development’ (Shimomura, 1965: 13), which means that they were only the know-how required to study the Western humanities. Thus, the academic situation could have been described as if there were no historians but editors of historical materials, no philosophers but historians of philosophy, no educators but scholars on education, and no men of virtue but lecturers of moral teachings. The epoch-making events were the Sino–Japanese War (1894–5) and the Russo–Japanese War (1904–5) and in the period between these two wars the young generation of intellectuals experienced the critical phase of thought in terms of sustaining existential life. To tackle such critical consciousness, the first ideas to be introduced were British and Anglo-American ideas of liberty and independence, as well as the utilitarianism of Bentham, Mill and Spencer, and French ideas of civil rights. While so many varied forms of knowledge, learning, fine arts and literature were imported, ‘traditional morality and religious beliefs were destroyed and neglected, and many people were at a loss for ideas of good and bad, right and wrong’ (Inoue, 1965: 57). Such confusion seems inevitable.

In short, as Natsume Soseki (1867–1926), one of the greatest novelists in modern Japan, deplored:

Civilization in the West has been spontaneous and from inside, and that of Japan in the Meiji era is from outside. . . . Western civilization is like floating clouds and running water, functioning naturally, while Japan’s civilization today after the Restoration and resuming

the contacts with foreign countries differs in character. . . . Japanese people have been forced without any reservation and obliged to follow the trend which Western countries develop, losing the power of spontaneity and self-centeredness in spite of the fact that Japan up to the Meiji era had made its civilization of their own way and from inside. (Natsume, 1994: 26–7)

What was corrupted by knowledge from outside? It was a mental attitude and national pride that were vitiated.

As foreigners argue for such and such things, the Japanese also argue, following them. Especially in the early Meiji era, the Japanese conformed blindly with what Westerners told them, and pretending that foreigners' remarks were theirs, such Japanese boasted of their knowledge, though far from their own and not appropriated. The knowledge they owned was no more than borrowed clothes, thus they always felt uneasy. (Natsume, 1994: 112–13)

Raphael Koeber (1848–1923), the guest professor of philosophy at Tokyo University, censured:

The things that hurt and make ugly Japanese people's mentality and character are vanity, lack of self-awareness, and still more lack of critical ability. These defects of mind and morality are particularly striking among those who know something about Western arts and sciences. That is, among those called 'scholars' and 'leaders'. (Koeber, 1980: 87)

Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) showed sympathy with Japanese people who suffered from compulsory Western learning.

The idea of forcing upon Oriental students a course of study above the average capacity of Western students; the idea of making English the language, or at least one of the languages, of the country; and the idea of changing ancestral modes of feeling and thinking for the better by such training, were wild extravagances. Japan must develop her own soul: she cannot borrow another. A dear friend whose life has been devoted to philology once said to me while commenting upon the deterioration of manners among the students of Japan: '*Why, the English language itself has been a demoralizing influence!*' . . . . Perhaps Japan will remember her foreign teachers more kindly in the twentieth century. But she will never feel toward the Occident, as she felt toward China before the Meiji era, the reverential respect due by ancient custom to a beloved instructor; for the wisdom of China was voluntarily sought, while that of the West was thrust upon her by violence. She will have some Christian sects of her own; but she will not remember our American and English missionaries as she remembers even now those great Chinese priests who once educated her youth. And she will not preserve relics of our sojourn, carefully wrapped in septuple coverings of silk, and packed away in dainty whitewood boxes, because we had no new lesson of beauty to teach her – nothing by which to appeal to her emotions. (Hearn, 1895: 152, 154)

In spite of Hearn's anxiety, Japanese people became more and more curious about things Western, and eventually forged a useless, meaningless knowledge of which they had no need.

### Challenge for knowledge from inside

Is it possible for peoples in developing countries to cultivate and get knowledge from within?

I shall use three methods to explore knowledge from within: (1) penetration of the world of private intimacy; (2) focusing exclusively on the national, local or vernacular viewpoint; (3) evaluating biological interest which is concerned with organic growth from inside to outside. Here I should like to emphasize (2) and (3) and mention two Japanese female thinkers.

Against followers of the model devised by Western sociology, a Japanese female sociologist, Kazuko Tsurumi (1918– ) conceived an idea of endogenous development. She started her academic career in the 1960s in the USA, focusing on the theory of modernization. At that time she believed that Japanese modernization should follow the model of industrial, civilized society in Europe and the USA. According to American sociology then, modernization should be considered in terms of four elements: (1) economic modernization, which promotes capitalism on the basis of modern administrative organization and economic growth; (2) political modernization, which consists of legal and governable development under modern bureaucracy and through it democratization; (3) social modernization, which deconstructs *Gemeinschaft*, the soil-related and blood-related society, and then organizes *Gesellschaft*, functionally oriented society by self-interest, realizing free and equal civil society; (4) cultural modernization, which liberates restraints through tradition and customs (magic restraints) and then establishes rationalization in the field of ideas and way of life (Tominaga, 1998: 27–8).

Doubting this idea of modernization on the occasion of field work on Minamata disease, the mercury poisoning tragedy, Tsurumi concluded that Minamata disease was an outcome of modernization, i.e. the fate of the economy, industry and technology of modern civilization, which destroyed not only the mind and body of the victims, but also human relationships of parents and children, brothers and sisters, and village communities. She realized that such aspects could not be explained by the theory of modernization (Tsurumi, 1996: 120–94). From the outset, this theory disregards the connection of people and nature and the problem around life.

Tsurumi wondered what was wrong with modernization theory. She thought the Minamata tragedy was caused by immature knowledge about technology: namely, people falsely believed that they could throw mercury used by the nitrogen industry factory into the sea, thinking the sea would absorb and water it down. On the contrary, the fish in the sea ate the mercury and, furthermore, it was concentrated in the body system of fish because it could not be discharged. Finally, human beings at the top of the food chain ate the fish. Thus people suffered Minamata disease.

Modernization has brought economic prosperity and political stability, while destroying ecological systems and traditional customs.

Modernization is evaluated by the degree of growth of the economy, while from the viewpoint of endogenous development the degree of self-realization is what matters. While linear development defines modernization, endogenous development ensures that the variety of the living world is the condition for an individual to grow.

In Tsurumi's view, social Darwinism is at the back of modernization and globalization, and endogenous development requires evolution theory.

Japan has imported much Western knowledge and skill, ranging from military technology, international law and the parliamentary system, to the Western way of life according to the national interest. The problem is that Japanese people have not necessarily become cleverer and wiser because of that appropriation. Modern civilization came to Japan from outside; inside, the Japanese have suffered physically and mentally on account of public nuisances and the corruption of traditional culture and mentality.

Tsurumi challenges the basics of modernization of Japan adopting the model of Western civilization and society, and seeks knowledge from within the national identity, proposing a theory of endogenous development.

The other thinker I refer to is a biologist. Keiko Nakamura began by researching molecular biology, then extended her interest to life science, environmental science, and recently biohistory. Nakamura says in 'Biohistory – New Perspectives on the Relationship between Science and Society':

There are two ways by which one can examine the history of life and the relationships of living creatures through genome analysis. One is to elucidate the process of evolution and the other is to examine the process of development. To examine the history of living organisms [evolution] and the process of development is to see living organisms in their entirety and to pay attention to their diversity. . . . We named this field of research into the history of living creatures, 'biohistory'. Although biohistory relies on modern biological techniques such as DNA analysis, it is not restricted to 'science' in a narrow sense. (Nakamura, undated)

Nakamura is critical about modern science in that it treats an object from 'exo' (outside); instead, she maintains that scientific attitudes required in the 21st century should be research from 'endo' (inside), approaching an object immanently from inside. The concept of biohistory consists of natural history plus biology with a view to understanding 'what is life' in its entirety to ensure quality of life, solving problems such as environment, population, food, medicine, education, etc. Thus, she is convinced that 'biohistory has the potential to unite science and humanities' (Nakamura, undated).

What is common to these two thinkers? First of all, both are female researchers. Second, both show an interest in life and all organic beings, especially with regard to the relationship of society, life and science. Three, both have in mind the possibility of efficiency of science in society.

Still, I am sceptical about Tsurumi's argument in that it wants further proof, not material but logical, of how endogenous development is possible without the least stimulus from a powerful exterior. Though I admit that her theory is worthwhile as an alternative to the concept of modernization, how does it perform in relation to premodernity? Against Nakamura's suggestion for universalism on the basis of biology, I suspect to what extent genes or genomes can explain culture.

### Hybrid way of knowing

There are merits in knowing from outside. It will keep us modest, as obedient students who are sincerely eager for knowledge. It will make it possible to reflect on knowledge from the inside only. The problem is that it will confuse the identity of mentality. To most Japanese, it is one thing to get knowledge from outside, and quite another to change their habits and customs according to knowledge thus acquired. They never think of uniting the two in one body. Knowledge from outside generally serves as know-how for utilitarian purposes, its background and basic ideas being disregarded.

Presumably by necessity, Japanese have composed a dual structure of traditional habits and knowledge from outside. It might be their wisdom for survival. Such attitudes looked curious to foreigners. One guest professor was surprised at the double standard in Japanese intellectuals' mentality. Karl Löwith (1897–1973), former student of Heidegger and visiting professor at Tohoku Imperial University, is reported to have said:

It seems as if Japanese scholars on philosophy live in a two-storied house. On the ground floor, they feel and think in a Japanese way, and on the first floor so many European books from Plato to Heidegger are shown extensively. I wonder where is the ladder that connects the ground floor and the first. (Hirakawa, 1985: 9)

As early as the end of the Edo period, Sakuma Shozan (1811–64), pioneer of Western learning in Japan, claimed that we should make use of morality from the East and technology from the West (Sakuma, 1970: 25) He meant that the base of our mind is on the side of the East and knowledge from the West is for the sake of utility to elaborate the Eastern spirit.

Since my childhood I have found Japanese culture interesting, as it shows without any reservations on one hand traditional customs such as the ceremonies of New Year's Day and seasonal festivals in the community, and on the other hand, every kind of foreign culture adopted from China, Korea and Western countries. Japan has experienced strain and discord caused by the clash between different cultures, and, outstripping other nations, tried to blend them.

Then, I may not be right in dividing types of knowledge into that from outside and that from inside. It may be only a matter of degree.

Leaving nationalism and national pride apart, every nation and people has historically imported knowledge from outside and, after appropriating it, created one culture after another as its own. The influence of knowledge from outside must not be confused with political subordination. Indeed, as Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975) put it, every culture is an effect of stimulus from outside and response from inside. No indigenous culture will exist as it is, being isolated from other cultures.

## Conclusion

The problem must be linked to the power relationship in terms of knowledge. For example, the diffusion of a particular language represents a force, like all other forces, political, economic and military. Antagonism between the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the large and the small, the greater and the lesser leads to hegemony over knowledge and information by the former. Richer and more powerful media such as CNN control information. The administration and control of knowledge are then in the hands of a limited number of the powerful.

Revolutionaries in smaller, weaker and developing countries will seek for knowledge of know-how as a tool to assist their uprising, and thus acquire a self-colonizing mentality. In that case, the flow of knowledge will be in one direction. Those who are in power may show no interest in others or the opposites except when they are motivated only by their curiosity for exoticism. This betrays 'arrogant ignorance'.

In both cases, knowledge from outside means it is for *divertissement* in Pascal's sense.

By contrast, for the purpose of creating hybrid knowledge, knowledge from outside is indispensable. It will prompt reflection on knowledge from inside, furthering the quality of knowledge.

Acquisition of knowledge must not be through political, military or mental colonization. Rather, we should reflect on effective ways to reach and acquire worthwhile knowledge. Following Thomas Aquinas, 'Cognito enim contingit secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente; cognitum autem est in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis' [A thing is known by being present in the knower; how it is present is determined by the way of being of the knower] (Aquinas, 1963: 14).

To conclude, let me refer to Nishi Amane (1829–97) who was one of several distinguished scholars and thinkers at the time of violent change in Japan's history. He devised many translated terms in Chinese characters (Kanji) for Western scholarship, most of which, in turn, were exported to China and Korea. Interestingly enough, he was optimistic about creative research work by Japanese scholars.

Westerners and Japanese differ little from each other, their difference comes from history and tradition. The former inherited Greek and Roman arts and sciences, while the latter imported things Chinese in ancient times . . . It is so short a time since we imported Western arts and sciences that we have not yet produced original research works in the field of Western learning. That is why Western arts and sciences may be considered useless. To improve the quality of our arts and sciences and prevent copying, it is necessary to deepen and extend the research interest and field by judging the national interest of Japan and carrying research through to the end. (Nishi, 1981: 570, 571–2)

Nishi suggested that acquisition and appropriation of genuine knowledge should require strong discipline and we should have acquired that before know-how.

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