

Is there Japanese / Latin American philosophy? :

A reflection on philosophy in university

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***Abstract:** In Japan as well as in Latin America, it has been repeatedly asked: “Is there a Japanese philosophy?” and “Is there a Latin American philosophy?” Both the questions and answers contain parallelism. Indeed, there are two major viewpoints with regard to the question; I call them “contextualism” and “universalism” here. The former insists that philosophy has to be rooted in a geographically and historically specific context; consequently, it tends to affirm that each region has its own philosophy. However, the latter highlights the universal validity of intellectual activities, such as examining arguments or grounds of beliefs. From this standpoint, it would not be worthwhile to persistently ask whether or not there is an original philosophy of a region. In this paper, I do not try to find a correct answer to the question. Rather, I am interested in examining Japanese and Latin American contexts in which this kind of question has been asked. I suggest that the question comes from a historical context wherein these two regions: 1) have imported philosophy from the Occidental countries; 2) have done so massively since the second half of the 19th century; 3) have asked this question as one of the subjects in the university system, which was established or redefined in the process of the formation of modern nation states. I further suggest that, on such a historical background, the philosophy researchers of both regions face the following three difficulties: i) isolation from society or lack of understanding on the part of the public; ii) an absence of dialogue or sincere criticism among colleague scholars; and iii) heteronomy of thinking. Finally, I would like to substitute the above-mentioned question with a new one in order to direct the focus of the problem toward autonomous thinking.*

Introduction

Although Japanese and Latin American philosophy have never had much direct contact, they have faced similar doubts which can be expressed as “Is there Japanese philosophy?” and “Is there Latin American philosophy?” Scholars of

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philosophy in both regions have repeatedly asked whether or not they have been working on their own philosophy in a genuine sense. In this paper, I first point out the very fact that Japanese and Latin American philosophy have often raised similar questions, though they have never been aware of each other's situation. Secondly, I suggest that the root of this question can be found in the similar historical backgrounds of the two regions, as both of them: 1) have imported philosophy from the Occidental countries; 2) have done so massively since the second half of the 19th century; and 3) have asked this question as one of the subjects in the university system, which was established or redefined in the process of the formation of modern nation states. In contrast to European philosophy, philosophy in these regions has been limited to the university system within the modern nation state regime. I further suggest that, on such a historical background, philosophical studies in both regions have the following three difficulties: i) isolation from society or lack of understanding on the part of the public; ii) an absence of dialogue or sincere criticism among colleague scholars; and iii) heteronomy of thinking. The last aim of this paper is to substitute the question with another one with the purpose of redefining the framework of discussion.

1. Parallelism between Japan and Latin America: “Is there ... Philosophy?”

It is striking to find that through the history of philosophical studies in Japan and Latin America scholars have repeatedly raised similar questions.

In Japan, in 1901, Chomin Nakae said that “in my country, Japan, there has been no philosophy from the ancient times till now”¹. It is clear that this implicitly constitutes a negative answer to the above-mentioned question. Since then, Japanese philosophical scholars have repeatedly raised a similar question and this trend has not declined up to the present day². In Latin America, this question and related discussions are more explicit. The works of Risieri Frondizi and Augusto Salazar Bondy, published in 1949 and 1968, respectively, had precisely similar questions as

¹ Chomin Nakae, *Ichinen Yu Han. Zoku Ichinen Yu Han*, Iwanami Bunko, 1995, 31.

² For example, Tomomi Asakura recently published an exciting book whose title means “Is it true that there is no philosophy in East Asia?”: “*Higashi Asia ni Tetsugaku ha Nai*” *noka?* Iwanami Gendai Zensho, 2014. The articles of Masakatsu Fujita and Megumi Sakabe in the following book are also informative on this point: Masakatsu Fujita (ed.), *Chi no Zahyojiku. Nihon ni okeru Tetsugaku no Keisei to sono Kanousei*, Koyo shobo, 2000.

their titles, and are now considered classics of Latin American philosophy³. Salazar Bondy refers to Juan Bautista Alberdi's article in 1842⁴ as one of the earliest precursors in this field. These Japanese and Latin American philosophers appear to have a common motivation that drives them to question the very existence of their own philosophy⁵.

It is equally striking to find that there are similar patterns among the answers to this question in both regions. There are two typical viewpoints in this respect, which can be tentatively called here "contextualism" and "universalism"⁶. Theoretically, each viewpoint can supply positive or negative answers to the question. However, we can seemingly observe the following general tendencies: those who support contextualism insist on the relevance of the question and are inclined to give a positive answer; whereas those who support universalism are not interested in whether there is an original philosophy in their own countries and

³ Risieri Frondizi, "Is There an Ibero-American Philosophy?", in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9 (3), 1949, 345-355; Augusto Salazar Bondy, *¿Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?*, Siglo XXI, 2ª, 1988 (1ª, 1968).

⁴ Juan Bautista Alberdi, "Ideas para presidir a la confección del curso de filosofía contemporánea", in: Zea, L. (comp.), *Fuentes de la cultura latinoamericana I*, México: FCE, 1993.

⁵ As my aim in this paper is to illuminate the parallelism between Japanese and Latin American philosophical studies, I cannot examine, and still less provide an answer to, questions such as what constitutes Japanese or Latin American philosophy; whether Buddhist, Confucianist, or Kokugaku studies in pre-modern Japan can be considered philosophical in the genuine sense; and whether Nahuatl philosophy existed. Here, I focus on Japanese and Latin American philosophical studies since the mid-19th century because, as I show below, their common historical context was formed then.

⁶ As for the Latin American context, although each author denominates the typical attitudes differently, the major division into two is widely accepted: Francisco Miró Quesada, *Despertar y proyecto del filosofar latinoamericano*, FCE, 1974, 12; Guillermo Hurtado, *El Búho y la Serpiente. Ensayos sobre la filosofía en México en el siglo XX*, UNAM, 2007, 20; Susana Nuccetelli, "Latin American Philosophy", in: Nuccetelli, Susana, Schutte, Ofelia, and Bueno, Otávio (eds.), *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 343-346. In Japan, the situation is not so clear-cut because there are not many explicit or public debates concerning this topic. However, I think basic attitudes correspond to the two mentioned above with regard to Latin America. In 2008 Akira Omine reported a debate about "philosophy of Japan" held in the annual meeting of the Kansai Philosophical Association in 1967. According to him, the debate was framed by the opposition between "an affirmation that the central stream of philosophy consists in Western philosophy which includes parts that deal with natural science" and another that "such a view is a prejudice and shortsighted": Akira Omine, "'Kimi Jishin ni Kaere' – Nihon no Tetsugaku no tameni", in: *Nihon no Tetsugaku* 9, 2008, 3. Roughly speaking, the former corresponds to universalism, the latter to contextualism.

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easily deny the existence of Japanese and Latin American philosophy. Of course this is a generalization and there could be variations and exceptions attached to these tendencies. However, the important thing is to understand the main grounds of each position. In this respect, the tradition of Latin America, especially in Mexico, is beneficial because scholars in philosophy have discussed this topic more publicly than those in Japan. I believe that the main points of this discussion can be applied to Japan as well. Therefore, I present below a brief summary of the main grounds of each attitude⁷.

Contextualism tends to demand that philosophy has some regional traits on the grounds that it is and should be based on the subject's particular circumstances. It affirms that Europeans as well as Mexicans start to think philosophically within a certain historical context. Indeed, European philosophers have reflected on the reality of their own society, religion, culture, etc. Equally, Latin American philosophers should not hesitate to discuss Latin American reality, for example, the problem of political, economic, cultural or intellectual dependence on Europe and the United States. Moreover, some scholars have argued that the reception of foreign philosophy is, in case it is internally motivated, inevitably its transformation. There is a thesis that Latin American reception of European philosophy is in reality a kind of creative interpretation. This process is itself an exercise of philosophy, in spite of the fact that foreign authors might consider its products as bad copies, in other words, wrong interpretations of the original thought. In addition, advocates of contextualism tend to tolerate fuzzier boundaries between philosophy and other subjects such as literature and "thought" ("Japanese premodern thought", "Mexican indigenous thought", "religious thought", etc.).

Some of them are criticized for making something national more desirable than the study of philosophy itself. In some cases, it is argued, works that are not philosophically sufficient for the international standard are celebrated as representatives of Latin American philosophy. In these cases the regional exotic traits are confusedly considered as conditions of philosophy.

On the other hand, universalism insists that philosophy is different from literature, thought, and other subjects. Universalists emphasize that philosophy is a rigorous and critical examination of grounds and arguments for a thesis. Such intellectual activities do not depend on any specific regional context. Moreover,

⁷ The following is a brief summary of Hirotaka Nakano, "Practical Metaphilosophy: For inhabitants of two-storey houses", *Ochanomizu University studies in arts and culture* 12, 2015, 82-86.

according to them, there are universal topics which can be equally treated by everyone independently of their region, such as being, self, truth, time, etc. As long as philosophers dedicate themselves to these problems, it is irrelevant to ask where they live. From this point of view, it is a mere historical fact that philosophy in this sense was born in Ancient Greece and has been developed in Europe. If people in other regions want to practice philosophy, it is natural that they ought to learn it from Europe and make all efforts to attain the ability to create their own philosophy.

Against this type of universalism too, nevertheless, there are criticisms: so-called universal topics like “reason”, “humanity”, “self”, etc. can in reality be ideals which express a local worldview that reflects only the Western modern culture. If such universalities are then imposed on people of a different background, they can serve as a means of oppression. In fact, Latin American modern history is full of suppression and exploitation of indigenous people under the name of universal “reason” or “humanity”.

However, universalism does not always deny the need for confrontation with concrete circumstances of the place where a philosopher lives. There are some scholars who affirm that philosophy should be rooted in a subject’s own reality, but according to them this is not sufficient for authentic philosophy. They maintain that it is wrong to consider the relation to one’s own reality as a sufficient condition of philosophy. The main task consists in the critical and strict assessment of arguments. For this reason many scholars learn European philosophy as a necessary first step to realize their own, original philosophy someday.

However, there are not many philosophers who advance to the next step, in other words, to the creation of their original philosophy. The majority end up spending their entire philosophical life as researchers of a specific part of European philosophy. Since they study philosophical problems based on European reality and formed by that particular historical context, they have to learn the European context too. They often give preference to knowing European historical reality over confronting their own. They originally intended to reflect on their own circumstances and exercise rigorous examination of arguments with respect to it. However, they eventually only learn philosophy made by European philosophers in European reality.

Although this brief summary of the main points of contextualism and universalism is based on the discussion held among Latin American scholars, I believe that it is, *mutatis mutandis*, valid for the Japanese situation too. If it is

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correct, then there is parallelism in not only the questions but also the answers of these two regions. Such a parallelism is quite significant because Japanese and Latin American philosophy have never had direct contact with each other in significant magnitude until today. Unintentionally independent of each other, they have become interested in similar problems and have developed similar answers concerning them. It seems reasonable to interpret this parallelism as grounded on a structural necessity assigned to those who try to study philosophy culturally and geographically far from the center of philosophy. As a matter of fact, today, the center is located in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. Scholars outside these regions cannot usually separate the study of philosophy from the learning of a foreign language, foreign culture and the history of a foreign land. Philosophy exercised in that center is not originally a part of their own tradition and, therefore, they have to learn from outside what has been done up until now in the center. The purpose of this learning is to advance someday to the next step in which they may be able to create philosophy on their own account. That is why the question that concerns us in this paper is crucial and urgent for scholars working in philosophy in these regions.

Parallelism exists also in the sense that the question still remains actual and valid more than a century after it was first raised. At the end of the 20th century, Yoshimichi Nakajima noted that younger scholars tried less and less to create something original and focused more on studying a small area of Occidental philosophy⁸. It is certain that there are studies of philosophy in Japan, but it is not evident whether there is a Japanese philosophy⁹. In Latin America too, Francisco Miró Quesada provided a historical review of Latin American philosophy in 1974 and described a similar problem. According to him, philosophers of the younger generation were in doubt as to whether they had already achieved the philosophical creation which their teachers expected of them. Philosophers of previous generations received Western philosophy so that the younger generation could someday create its own original philosophy. However, the reality was that there were many young scholars devoted to the study of specific areas of Western philosophy without studying the real circumstances of Latin America¹⁰. This trend continues today, although Miró Quesada later gave a more positive evaluation of the situation of

⁸ Yoshimichi Nakajima, *Tetsugakusha toha Nanika*, Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 2000, 40.

⁹ Nakajima listed some Japanese names as “philosophers” such as Shozo Omori and Wataru Hiromatsu, considering them as “exceptional”: *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁰ Miró Quesada, *Despertar y proyecto*, 81-83.

Latin American philosophy¹¹. Indeed, other scholars continue to notice similar problems¹². In short, the doubt concerning the existence of Japanese and Latin American philosophy has not only remained unsolved but has increased over the course of time.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, one of my purposes in this paper is to point out the parallelism between Japanese and Latin American philosophy. It seems important for us to know that there are others in a similar situation, raising similar questions and answering them in a similar way. Otherwise, scholars working on Occidental philosophy are liable to fall (and sometimes have fallen) into a simplistic self-estimation which results from a dichotomy between Western and Eastern cultures, or between Europe and Latin America¹³. They tend to compare their own activities only with that of Europe or the United States, and as a result every characteristic that differs from the European or the North American context appears to be unique for them. It is true that every culture is particular and unique, but scholars sometimes forget the fact that their own culture is not the only exception, but one of many unique cultures. They sometimes ignore other countries outside of the Occidental or Western culture, as if only it and their own culture existed for them, even though there are other marginal cultures that share similar problems. The consequence is that they fail to grasp the universal and structural aspect of their own situation: the question “is there a ... philosophy?” is common for those who share a certain historical background concerning philosophy. Now we turn to the next section to examine this point in more detail.

2. Philosophy in the Modern University

Although Japan and Latin America are geographically and culturally distinct, they have a similar historical context with respect to philosophy. The second purpose of this paper is to suggest, though not prove, that this common philosophical context is a ground which has bred a similar question in these regions. There are three

¹¹ Francisco Miró Quesada, “Posibilidad y límites de una filosofía latinoamericana”, in: *Revista de Filosofía de la Universidad de Costa Rica* XVI(43), 1978, 75-82.

¹² Hurtado, *El Búho y la Serpiente*, 23-26; Carlos Pereda, *La filosofía en México en el siglo XX. Apuntes de un participante*, CONACULTA, 2013, 42-43.

¹³ As Kohsaka points out, Japanese scholars in the first stage of the reception of philosophy assigned themselves to realize an assimilation of the Orient and Occident: Shiro Kohsaka, “Touyou to Seiyou no Tougou”, in: *Nihon no Tetsugaku* 8, 2007.

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points to discuss here: Philosophy in these regions was imported 1) from outside, in other words, the Occidental world; 2) mainly in the 19th century while countries were rebuilt as modern nation states; and 3) as a subject of the university education system. Of course, the two regions have various differences even in terms of philosophy and the history of its reception. However, in this paper I focus on the similar background which necessitated a common question.

The first point is almost self-evident, but fundamental. Before Japan and Latin America imported philosophy from the Occidental world, they did not have anything precisely corresponding to it. It is true that there had been intellectual activities in its tradition. Japan had a long and rich tradition of intellectual inquiry in areas including Buddhism, Confucianism, and studies of Japanese classical literature (*Kokugaku*). Equally, Latin America has some great Pre-Hispanic civilizations which included rich intellectual activities that can sometimes be interpreted as philosophy¹⁴. However, it is at least controversial to identify these traditional forms of intellectual activity with philosophy. Everyone who dares to do so has a responsibility for justifying it and explaining the sense in which he/she uses the term “philosophy”. This fact already shows that philosophy in the strict sense was originally absent in these regions and imported from abroad at a certain point of their national history.

As for the second point, it is widely accepted that the reception of philosophy in Japan substantially started in the second half of the 19th century. It is true that there had been various comments and reports made by the Japanese concerning philosophy in Western Europe before this time. However, such references to philosophy were rather isolated and partial, and not systematic. The Japanese term “Tetsugaku” was coined by Amane Nishi in 1874 in his *Hyakuichi Shinron*. Ernest Fenollosa started to teach philosophy in Tokyo University in 1878. These were the initial signs of a systematic Japanese reception of philosophy as a united subject.

While this second point is not controversial in relation to Japan, it may be objected that in Latin America philosophy was already introduced in the colonial period. In fact, colonial rulers founded universities in Mexico, Lima, and Santo Domingo in the 16th century, which offered higher education modeled on traditional Liberal Arts¹⁵. Therefore, students knew Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas,

¹⁴ Miguel León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes*, UNAM, 1956.

¹⁵ Luis Fernando Restrepo, “Colonial Thought” in: Nuccetelli, Schutte, and Bueno (eds.), *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, 37.

Duns Scotus, Francisco Suárez, etc. Later, Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Galileo were also introduced. However, according to Salazar Bondy, philosophical reflections during this period were made from the Spanish perspective¹⁶. In other words, the people who studied philosophy did not understand themselves as Latin American, but instead as Spanish. Moreover, Miró Quesada observed that this tradition was not passed on to the younger generations during the time of Independence¹⁷. It was in the middle or the second half of the 19th century that each country rearranged university education and began to import subjects including philosophy. This time emphasis was placed on modern philosophy, especially positivism. On the other hand, Risieri Frondizi affirms that it was after overcoming positivism during the 19th century that philosophy in this region became independent, in other words, it was studied for its own sake, rather than for the sake of political change¹⁸. In Latin America, in contrast to Japan, it is surely impossible to determine a starting point of continuous philosophical development up to the present time. Nevertheless, it is not meaningless to consider that the post-Independence period was the time when Latin America accepted European philosophy on its own initiative.

The third point is closely connected with the previous one. In fact, the massive and systematic reception of philosophy has been realized both in Japan and Latin America as a part of the development of the university education system. Such a development was inevitable for every rising nation during the second half of the 19th century. In Japan, the first university was founded in 1877 and education in philosophy started immediately after. From this moment, the development of philosophical studies was inseparable from the university system¹⁹. There are only a few exceptions among Japanese philosophers or scholars in philosophy up until now who have been independent of the university system.

On the other hand, in Latin America, the university system had already been established in the 16th century. However, the leading universities of today were founded or reestablished by the independent nations from the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th. For example, Universidad Nacional de Colombia was founded in 1867; Universidad de Chile was reestablished in 1842 as the leader of the entire education system in the nation; Universidad Nacional

¹⁶ Salazar Bondy, *¿Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?*, 12.

¹⁷ Miró Quesada, *Despertar y proyecto*, 25-27, 38.

¹⁸ Frondizi, "Is There an Ibero-American Philosophy?", 349.

¹⁹ Takayuki Shibata, "Tetsugakushi no Juyo kara Mierumono", in: Fujita (ed.), *Chi no Zaiyokujiku*, 63-83.

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Autónoma de México was founded in 1910 on the basis of the proposal of Justo Sierra in 1881²⁰. Justo Sierra, secretary in charge of culture and education at that time, referred to the special role of philosophy as having the capacity to synthesize the modern sciences²¹. It is important to note that by “philosophy”, Sierra meant the modern philosophy of the time, especially positivism, vitalism, and pragmatism. This fact illuminates that the reception of philosophy in Mexico was oriented toward the future progress of the country. Learning the Occidental world’s philosophical traditions formed a part of the national project of catching up with the advanced Western countries²². Such a characteristic “project” determined philosophy in Latin America in the 20th century, as is described by Miró Quesada in detail²³.

So, to sum up, in these regions, philosophy began as a project within the modern university system in the process of building modern nation states. This project considered European countries, such as the U.K., France, Germany, as well as the U.S. as models to follow. Philosophy, too, was mainly understood as English, French, German, or U.S. philosophy. It is natural that, in Japan as well as in Latin America, reception of philosophy was almost entirely concentrated toward modern philosophy for a long time. It was only after some decades that ancient and medieval philosophies were seen as serious areas to study. It was necessary for the first stage of reception to start with modern philosophy because it was part of the project of catching up with those central countries.

Such a feature does not exist in Europe, where the life of philosophy is not limited to within the university. On the contrary, it is philosophy that has determined schools such as the Academy, the Lyceum, and medieval universities. Philosophy has a longer history than the regime of modern nation states’, and it is philosophy that has designed or described the form of modern nations (Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, etc.). In Europe, philosophy has been able to exist independent of any system and institution. It is true that in the 20th century almost all professional philosophers belong to universities, and in this sense, European philosophy is not different from philosophy in Japan and Latin America. However,

²⁰ To be exact, the UNAM started as Universidad Nacional de México. The qualification “autonomous” was given in 1929.

²¹ Justo Sierra, “Discurso en la inauguración de la Universidad Nacional”, in: José Luis Martínez (selección, introducción y notas), *El ensayo mexicano moderno I*. 3^a., FCE, 2001, 76-78.

²² Cf. Leopoldo Zea, *La filosofía americana como filosofía sin más*, Siglo XXI, 1969, 19.

²³ Miró Quesada, *Despertar y proyecto*, primera parte.

there seems to be a common understanding in European culture that this is a temporary phenomenon and that, if necessary, philosophy can and will stand on its own feet. It is precisely such a common understanding that Japan and Latin America do not have.

Now I suggest that such a historical circumstances sketched out above in my three points form the background which has bred the question: “Is there ... philosophy?” This can be interpreted as an expression of concern regarding the authenticity which philosophy in the region is expected to reach in the process of its evolution. In fact, in the U.K., France, or Germany, scholars do not ask “Is there English/French/German philosophy?” It appears to be obvious that there are such philosophies. The fact that no one asks means that philosophy in these countries is not a project assigned in universities within the framework of modern nation states. It is true that there are certain national traits. For example, Kantian or Hegelian philosophy could not have been born in England. However, it is not an aim or intention of these philosophers to create philosophy with some national traits; this was merely an unintended consequence.

As I said earlier, the question still persists in the present day, which means that the concern expressed in the question remains. On the basis of such an observation, I can point out at least three difficulties which philosophy in Japan and Latin America actually confront.

i) Philosophy in these regions is isolated from the rest of society, or its achievements are not understood satisfactorily by society. In Japan, dissatisfaction on the part of society is often manifested in various media. A good example is a report published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan in 2009. The report evaluates the past and actual achievement of philosophical studies in Japan and asserts that ‘it is not “philosophy’, though it might be, so to speak, ‘studies about philosophy’”²⁴. Indeed, according to the report, Japanese philosophical studies have made a great effort to “understand precisely” the history of Occidental philosophy. It expresses dissatisfaction that scholars do not commit themselves to their actual circumstance, but are only engaged in philological reconstruction of the history of thought and in the interpretation of Western philosophers. In education, the report continues, they concentrate on the education of specialists without imparting philosophical

²⁴ Subdivision on science, Council for science and technology, “Report on the promotion of humanities and social sciences: a way to the formulation of cultural framework based on dialogue and substantiations”, accessed August 29, 2016. http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/gijyutu/gijyutu4/toushin/1246351.htm

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thinking to the entirety of society. The isolation of philosophy from society as a whole or a lack of understanding on the part of society has also been pointed out in relation to Latin American philosophy²⁵.

ii) On the other hand, scholars are not always satisfied with their activities and products. They admit that they only import foreign products and have not arrived at the stage at which they create their original philosophy. To be sure, there have been works which are philosophically creative and original. However, since scholars are busy following up on the latest situation in Europe or the U.S., they do not pay attention to those works made by their colleagues in the same region. As a result, there is no direct discussion, debate, or dialogue among scholars in philosophy, a worry recently raised by Mexican scholars²⁶.

iii) Moreover, sometimes it is not those who study philosophy in these regions that determine themes, methodologies, and styles. Pedro Stepanenko, director of the Instituto de las Investigaciones Filosóficas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, assured me in an Interview held in February, 2015 that the national evaluation system of philosophers in Mexico conducts scholars to publish their work more in the English language in established journals of Europe or the U.S. than in the local media. In order to publish their works in those journals, scholars have to survey the latest debates in those countries, choose relevant topics and methodologies, and express arguments in an acceptable style. The problem is that such procedures are sometimes discordant with what they, as sincere philosophers, should and want to do. Such a mode of philosophical research can be called heteronomy. To worsen matters, this tendency is increasing in scale in recent decades because of the globalization of evaluation criteria of academic institutions.

3. Change the direction of the question

As already seen, the question “Is there ... philosophy” in Japan and Latin America comes from the historical context in which these regions accepted philosophy from Western Europe and the U.S. from the 19th century as a subject in the university system of the modern nation state. Both regions have not accommodated

²⁵ Salazar Bondy, *¿Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?*, 31.

²⁶ Pereda, *La filosofía en México en el siglo XX*, 47; Hurtado, *El Búho y la Serpiente*, 32-36.

philosophy into society at large satisfactorily as yet. Philosophy depends on the university system, and since this is modeled on foreign institutes, it does not always coincide with the actual circumstances of the region.

Answers given by scholars are roughly grouped into two: contextualism suggests that philosophy needs to be based on a particular, cultural, and historical context of the region where a philosopher lives. Universalism is rather indifferent with regard to such a regional character and finds a critical examination of arguments to be essential for the philosophy conducted in any place.

However, in Japan as well as in Latin America, there has not been direct, fruitful debate between these two standpoints because each is based on a firm belief about what philosophy should be. In some cases, the problem is reduced to the matter of the meaning of the word “philosophy”. In a typical case, contextualism affirms that, although it is true that there is no philosophy in the European sense, there are certain kinds of great thoughts in pre-modern Japan/Latin America, which can also be called “philosophy” in another sense. Such an affirmation is nonsense for those universalists who limit “philosophy” to critical intellectual activities of examining beliefs, arguments, or their grounds. In this sense, it is obvious that, as a matter of fact, philosophy was born in ancient Greece, developed in Europe, and is learnt and practiced all throughout the world today. If the problem only concerns the meaning of the word, it is not important to answer positively or negatively, it depends solely on arbitrary choice.

It is sure that debates between the two positions sometimes occur, but it is rare that they are developed in a fruitful manner. Each philosopher has a belief concerning what philosophy is, but at the same time is very conscious of the existence of different opinions. The range of this difference is so wide that philosophy according to one opinion is not philosophy at all from another perspective. Such a situation itself is not specific to Japan and Latin America, but extends to Europe and the U.S. Thus, it seems difficult to reach a conclusion which can be accepted by all philosophers in the near future. In addition, the problem concerning what philosophy is and is not cannot be of central concern to many scholars.

If this is correct, then ought we to conclude that the question “is there ... philosophy?” is irrelevant for Japan and Latin America? There are scholars who say yes, but in my opinion they fail to recognize the significance of the question. In contrast, I suggest that the question is motivated by real problems in Japan and Latin America that are worth reflecting on. However, although rooted in real

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problems, the question does not focus on them in a correct manner. As I mentioned in the previous section, there are real difficulties such as i) isolation from society; ii) lack of mutual dialogue; and iii) heteronomy. These difficulties can be seen as consequences of the historical context through which these regions received philosophy. Philosophy was received 1) from the Occidental countries; 2) massively so since the second half of the 19th century; and 3) as one of the subjects in the university system established or redefined in the process of the formation of modern nation states. After one and a half centuries of reception of philosophy, the question remains real even today and this means that the difficulties have not been overcome. Here I suggest that, although the question “is there ... philosophy?” is originally motivated by real difficulties worth thinking about, it fails to be formulated in a manner that would enable scholars to solve the problem.

That is why I propose to reformulate the question in a form oriented to overcoming these difficulties. My question is: “Is philosophy necessary for Japan/Latin America?” I intend to change a dependent, heteronomous formulation into an independent, autonomous one.

The old formulation “Is there ... philosophy?” is no doubt motivated by real difficulties, but it is, as a question, already heteronomous. It presupposes the philosophy of the Occidental countries as a model or norm, and asks whether one’s own country already has it. Regardless of whether scholars and society really need it or not, philosophy is *a priori* considered as something that must be done. Before giving answers, at the moment of raising the question, those who make the question already accept foreign authority. Then, regardless of whether they answer positively or negatively, the heteronomy of thinking already prevails, and this is precisely what should be overcome.

In contrast, from the perspective of the new formulation “Is philosophy necessary for ...?”, whether the foreign authority recognizes products of a region as “philosophy” is not relevant. It is true that it still focuses on philosophy, but this time the initiative of evaluation and choice is in the hands of thinkers of each region. The problem is whether and how it is possible to realize autonomous thinking with mutual dialogue in one’s own society. In other words, the new question expresses the need to seek the proper form of thinking for people in the region. The main issue is whether thinkers in the region can realize intellectual activities adequately for themselves, independently of whether or not it is called “philosophy”. It is not essential that this form of thinking be called “philosophy”, but whether thinkers in each region can think what they should think in a proper

way for themselves. It is possible that philosophy is the best way, but it is also possible that what they need is not “philosophy”, but something which does not have any name in the present time yet.

Needless to say, I am not proposing to abandon all of what Japanese and Latin American scholars have learned from Occidental philosophy for more than one and a half centuries. Nor do I affirm that it is hopeful or possible to block the influence of Occidental philosophy or that these nations should stop studying it. Japan and Latin America will continue receiving Occidental philosophy because it is at least one of the most forceful and productive forms of thinking which human beings have ever created. However, the most important point of the new formulation of the question is its focus on the question of “for the sake of whom” thinkers think. Of course they exercise intellectual activities for themselves and for their own society, not for the purpose that foreign authority recognizes them as genuine philosophers. Thus, scholars in a region should try to find the best form of realizing such activities in their own cultural, historical context.