

Japanese Philosophy as World Philosophy:

from Andō Shōeki to “deep ecology”

パシユカ・ロマン(秋田大学)

There is an enormous amount of evidence that humankind is currently facing an almost irreversible environmental crisis. Scientists from different disciplines and fields - from chemistry to biology, and from meteorology to physics - are trying to find solutions to this crisis, to trace its development and to propose sensible ways of dealing with its consequences. Philosophers have also begun reflecting on the environmental crisis in an attempt to understand its *enjeu* and its consequences for the way in which we as human beings *are* in the world. There are actually voices who have started calling this an *existential* crisis. I share these concerns, and this is in fact the starting point for my current research.

Over the last few decades, philosophers, researchers, and scholars all over the world have been trying to look for hints and clues about our relationship to nature. Two main trends can be identified here:

- a reexamination of Western philosophy in an attempt to find the main philosophical tenets that can explain our understanding of nature. This trend deals with concepts such as “ecoculture”, “Anthropocene”, “biodiversity” or “human-environment systems”, starting from the premise that in order to re-learn our relationship with nature we need to rebuild the connection between nature and culture. Simplifying for the sake of clarity, this is, at its core, an *anthropocentric* view. Studies such as Pilgrim and Pretty’s *Nature and Culture* (Routledge 2013) or Lovelock’s *The Revenge of Gaia* (Allen Lane, 2005) can be cited in this category;

- a reexamination of Asian and other philosophies in an attempt to overcome the anthropocentric view and to bring forth new perspectives based on concepts and notions from different intellectual traditions, from Buddhism and Daoism to Shintoism and Confucianism. This is, essentially, a *non-anthropocentric* view. Books such as Tucker and Williams’ *Buddhism and Ecology* (Harvard, 1997) or Callicott and MacRae’s *Japanese Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford, 2018) can be given as examples here.

However, one of the biggest problems is that until now these trends have existed *separate* of each other, with very little - if any - dialogue between them. Western philosophy has continued to uphold its dominant role, dismissing, or simply ignoring other intellectual traditions as “nonphilosophical”. But this *has to* change. In order to deal with the current environmental crisis, we need to challenge the hegemony of Western ideas, and start to examine the issue from as many perspectives as possible. This is precisely what I aim to do through my project.

My approach fits within the second trend I mentioned above. Specifically, I plan to investigate how creating a dialogue between different philosophical traditions within the frame of environmental ethics can contribute to advancing the field, broadening its scope and creating new perspectives. This project will most likely be a pilot one, but the ultimate goal is to identify the fundamental premises for a new ethics of the environment.

My presentation will be structured in three parts, as follows. In the first part, I will discuss several key concepts put forth by Edo

period philosopher Andō Shōeki, with a particular focus on the way he describes the relation between self and nature. I will examine concepts such as *hito* (男女), *shizen* (自然), *gosei* (互性) and *nibetsu naki* (二別ナキ), re-interpreting them within the conceptual framework of environmental ethics.

In the second part, I will briefly look into the most recent trends and developments in environmental ethics in Western philosophy, starting with Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic” and Rachel Carson’s *The Silent Spring*, and continuing with Arne Naess’s “deep ecology”. I plan to take a historical approach for this step in order to investigate the emergence, current state and consequences of these trends, and to reflect on their shortcomings and their failure to provide an adequate resolution for the current crisis.

In the third part, I will open up the dialogue I mentioned above, in an attempt to identify areas, concepts and notions from Japanese philosophy that can contribute towards a renewal of our understanding of environmental ethics. To give just one example, I will show that the way in which Andō Shōeki describes the relation between self and nature is indeed very close to what Arne Naess calls “ecosophy”, i.e. a way of thinking that views the human being not in control of nature, but as an integral part of it.

My conclusion is twofold: firstly, if we truly want to identify (and deal with) the shortcomings and limits of Western philosophy with regard to offering a resolution to the global environmental / existential crisis, then we need to acknowledge the contribution that *all* philosophical traditions - *other* than the Western one - might have on this issue. This includes, of course, Japanese philosophy, but it also extends to Latin-American philosophy, African philosophy etc..

Secondly, in the sillage of the first conclusion above, I argue that it is high time we should re-assess our very understanding of philosophy itself. I propose that “philosophy” (whether 哲学 or 思想) should not be understood in a narrow sense (e.g., the Graeco-European tradition of rational argumentation), but broadly as the practice of thinking about the world. In other words, we need to expand the understanding of “philosophy” *beyond* the practices that are coextensive with the term, and start making it more open and inclusive. In this sense, we should also re-assess our perception of “Japanese philosophy” and start considering it “world philosophy”.