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Past, Present, and Future Research on Martin Buber in Japan

In place of the summary of the symposium

Hiroya Katsumura

On May 15, 2010, CISMOR of Doshisha University organized the Young Researchers' Symposium on the philosophy of Martin Buber (1878–1965) (co-hosted by the Kyoto Association of Jewish Thought and the Doshisha School of Theology), which, it seems to me, opened up a new dimension in research on Buber in Japan. In writing this paper, I review the significance of this symposium by looking back on the history of the research, referring also to my own humble experience and memories. While *Hyoden Martin Buber (A Life of Martin Buber)* Vol. 2 (Myrtos, 2000), written by Maurice Friedman and translated by Yoshio Kuronuma and Kazumitsu Kawai, lists the major works published by 2000 in Japan on pp. 400–3, it should be understood that I have not read all these works.

The plan to organize a symposium in Kyoto by inviting Prof. Kenichi Kida (a former President of Yamanashi Eiwa College), who has long studied the biblical hermeneutics of Buber, stemmed from the willingness of young researchers of Jewish thought—namely, graduate students and faculty members of Doshisha University and Kyoto University—to reconsider and redefine the philosophy of Buber in the context of the early 21st century. Needless to say, Buber's major work is, or to be more precise, has been considered to be, *I and Thou (Ich und Du)* (1923). This work was first translated into Japanese by Keisuke Noguchi and published under the title of *Kodoku to Ai (Solitude and Love)* in 1958 by Sobunsha, which was then followed by another translation by Shigeo Ueda. In 1967, a new translation by a scholar of German literature, Yoshihiro Taguchi, was published by Misuzu Shobo as part of the 10-volume collected works of Buber, and thus *I and Thou* captured a greater number of Japanese readers.

Generally, Prof. Seiichi Hatano (1877–1950) is credited with introducing the philosophy of Buber to the world of thought in Japan, but we have no way to ascertain this (it is likely that a theologian, Emil Brunner, played a certain role); while there is no doubt that the life of Buber and the entire outline of his philosophy were first introduced to Japan by Zenji Hiraishi, Professor of the Faculty of Letters of Doshisha University. We may say that research on Buber was in a dawning period up to 1966 when Hiraishi's masterpiece, *Hito to Shiso (Thinkers and Thoughts) Series: Buber* was published by the Board of Publications of the United Church of Christ in Japan, while the years that followed can be referred to as a development period. In

1965, I entered Kyoto University, and in my first year, I was most impressed with the “philosophy of religion” class given by Prof. Seisaku Yamamoto, who provided a detailed explanation about Buber’s *I and Thou* and *Eclipse of God (Gottesfinsternis)*. It is not the first time, however, when I encountered Buber. I remember having heard about his philosophy before entering the university—at church. I surely heard the name of Buber, along with Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from young ministers, a generation senior to me, who studied theology right after the war.

Throughout these dawning and development periods, I think that Japanese philosophers deepened in their understanding of the philosophy of Buber, based mainly on the interpretation of *I and Thou* and in association with the groups of existentialist philosophers emerging during the first half of the 20th century. Significantly, the title of Buber’s work translated by Keisuke Noguchi—*Kodoku to Ai (Solitude and Love)*—bears resemblance to the title of the Japanese translation of *Kodoku to Ai to Shakai (Solitude, Love and Society)* by Nikolay A. Berdyaev, who was introduced to Japan around the same time. A similarity is indicated between these two thinkers—the criticism of Berdyaev regarding “objectification” can be compared to the criticism of Buber regarding the “I-and-it relationship,” and they also share a common understanding of “evil” and “freedom.” What causes Buber to stand out from other existentialist philosophers, however, are his unique insights into philosophical anthropology, which are centered on the “dialogical principle.” Such uniqueness of Buber is partly attributable to the fact that Buber was among the leading Jewish thinkers in the German-speaking world and because his thought was strongly influenced by Hasidism—a folk movement that arose in Eastern Europe. It is also worth noting that Buber had much interest in and a deep understanding of the literature and thoughts of the Oriental world, especially India and China (Taoism).

In Japan, substantial research has been done on Buber’s philosophical anthropology and on its association with Oriental and Occidental mysticism. On the contrary, however, sufficient attention has not been paid to his social philosophy. In my view, the criticism of Buber’s anthropology results from indifference to or misunderstanding of his social philosophy. Yet, since early stages of research on Buber, the following has been known: he had his own unique social thought; he gave solid ideological foundation to the kibbutz, which can be seen as a new social experiment that started in the land of Palestine; and he was opposed to political Zionism and insisted on building a society where Jews could live peacefully with Arabs and Palestinians. In 1959, the Japanese translation of *Paths in Utopia (Pfade in Utopia)* by Susumu Hasegawa was published by Risosha under the title of *Mouhitotsu no Shakaishugi (Another Socialism)*. In this work, Buber re-evaluates the so-called “utopian” ideas embraced by one group of socialists, which Friedrich Engels referred to as “drafting off into pure phantasies,” and sharply criticizes the ideologies of Karl Marx and Wladimir I. Lenin as being centralist. According to Buber,

Marx departed from his original intention to build a socialist society, due to his pursuit of the political goal to achieve a revolution. The well-known doctrine of the “Death of the State,” which was believed to be brought on by a revolution, is one piece of evidence that displays Marx’s poor understanding of human society, even though this view was made up by Engels in a stricter sense. (The history of the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution and the present state of the People’s Republic of China clearly indicate that this doctrine is nothing more than a “phantasy.”) In Buber’s view, Marx was a thinker who hardly understood social thinking.

Incidentally, if the years surrounding 1970, when Misuzu Shobo published the collected works of Buber, are regarded as the development period of Buber research, the center of the research activities during this period was, definitely, Kyoto. As I mentioned earlier, Zenji Hiraishi was active as a professor at Doshisha University around that time, and Yoshihiro Taguchi, who translated *I and Thou*, was teaching at the Faculty of Arts of Kyoto University. Seisaku Yamamoto was also with Kyoto University, and authored *Martin Buber no Kenkyu (Research on Martin Buber)*, published by Risosha in 1969, and also undertook the translation of the writings on “Education and Politics” contained in the collected works of Buber. Furthermore, *Eclipse of God* was translated by Seisaku Yamamoto, jointly with Yoshinori Mitani and Wataru Mizugaki, who were both teaching at Kyoto Sangyo University. Mizugaki studied Christianity under Prof. Tetsutaro Ariga at the Faculty of Letters of Kyoto University, and later became a professor there. Masashi Takahashi, the translator of the *Prophetic Faith (Der Glaube der Propheten)*, was a professor of the School of Theology of Doshisha University. The breadth of the research on Buber in those days is well represented by *Research on Buber* contained in volume 10 of the collected works of Buber, which was translated by Yamamoto, Hiraishi, Mitani, Taguchi, and Takahashi, as well as Teruyoshi Takano, who also studied Christianity under Ariga at Kyoto University. There is no doubt that Kyoto was at the center of the research on Buber in those days.

Against the backdrop of what can be described as a Buber boom, *Paths in Utopia* was translated anew by Hasegawa and published under the title of *Utopia no Michi* by Heibunsha in 1969. Considering that a wave of student movements swept over Japan in my school days, many students of my generation must have read the works of Buber and been strongly influenced by his philosophy. However, there are few scholars in my generation who specialize in the study of Buber. Analyzing the reasons behind this is beyond my ability, but one possible reason is that readers of Buber in my generation were more interested in Bible study. Additionally, it is possible that his social thought appeared too moderate to the eyes of those who lived in the age when enthusiasm—or the implicit atmosphere—for change prevailed in society. As well, his social philosophy could be regarded as being simply idealistic and visional, vis-à-vis the severe realities of world politics, such as the intensification of the Vietnam War and the Israeli-

Palestinian Conflict.

However, this does not mean that research on Buber was entirely suspended. In fact, pupils of Hiraishi steadily continued research by holding study meetings to read Buber's works, while Kenichi Kida and other researchers of the Hebrew Bible remained committed to the serious study of the biblical hermeneutics of Buber. In this light, the period up to the publication of the Japanese translation of the three-volume *Collected Works of Martin Buber on the Bible (Schriften zur Bibel)* by the Board of Publications of the United Church of Christ in Japan may be called the incubation period during which researchers on Buber prepared themselves for advancing to the next stage. One of the pieces of work published during this period that deserves special attention is *Buber no Ningengaku (Anthropology of Buber)* (Kyobunkwan, 1987), authored by Shuichi Inamura, who was born in 1944 and is of the same generation as I. Inamura compares and analyzes the Japanese translations of Buber's works by our predecessors in detail, which, by itself, is worthy of high praise. However, more importantly, he presents at least two insights that are entirely new to research on Buber in Japan. First, he discusses Buber in terms of the arts (remember that Buber also had outstanding talent as a dramatist). Even more noteworthy is that he sheds light on Buber's concept of evil as shown in *Right and Wrong (Recht und Unrecht)* (1950), in which Buber discusses his interpretation of five psalms. In this work, Buber clearly states his support for Hebraism, which holds that the opposite of truth is falsehood, and condemns any politician of this "godless" age who utters false words. In doing so, Buber sends sharp criticism to the State of Israel. It is interesting to note that Inamura, in the final part of his above-mentioned work, indicates the lack of attention among researchers to Buber's major works regarding the Bible, including *The Kingdom of God (Königtum Gottes)*, and suggests the necessity for more in-depth study on these works.

In 2002, after this long incubation period, the Japanese translation of *Moses* was published, in which Buber's philosophy reaches the point of perfection in a sense; it is also significant that *A Life of Martin Buber* was translated into Japanese just before the publication of *Moses*. Here, let me recall an incident that happened in connection with the translation of *Moses* (in volume 1 of the three-volume *Collected Works of Martin Buber on the Bible*), and in which I played a certain role. The task of translating this very difficult work was undertaken by my colleague and a biblical scholar, Prof. Shozo Arai, who served as president of Kobe Shoin Women's University at that time. When the translation was almost ready for publication, however, a problem arose: it turned out that Reiko Saotome and Kuniko Yamamoto, female researchers who had long studied Buber under Hiraishi, had also engaged in translating *Moses* independently from Arai, and almost completed the translation. While Arai and these female researchers were unacquainted with each other, I had known Saotome for many years, so Arai asked me to act as a go-between for them. Consequently, both translations were coordinated and edited in a

manner not to disgrace anyone, and *Moses* was eventually published with all the three scholars named as co-translators. This incident was truly the embodiment of the thought of Buber expressed in his work, *I and Thou*. Following *Moses, The Kingdom of God*, translated by Kenichi Kida and Hiroshi Kita, and *The Anointed One (Der Gesalbte)*, translated by Kenichi Kida and Yoshihiko Kanai, were published in 2003 and 2010, respectively, and thus all the major works of Buber on the Bible were made available in Japanese. These works had huge influence on young researchers, as I will discuss below.

While Buber's philosophical anthropology and social thought had already been introduced to Japan during the dawning period, the way in which they could be associated with each other was hardly understood. Accordingly, there was a skeptic view that his thought could be too idealistic to be compatible with today's society, which, however, is entirely opposite to Buber's intent. The Hebrew Bible, which is called the Old Testament by Christians, is not a religious piece of literature in the sense we think of today. Instead, in some aspects, it was highly political in nature. (Regrettably, few biblical scholars are fully aware of this fact.) The biblical hermeneutics of Buber is one attempt to shed light on the ideological message contained in the Bible itself in a modern context. Though the Bible is political literature, it goes without saying that a profound understanding of human nature is behind its message. For this reason, we may say that the biblical hermeneutics of Buber is a key bridge between his anthropology and his social and political philosophy.

One young researcher, Toshihiro Horikawa, has continued in-depth study of the German Bible translated by Buber and Fr. Rosenzweig. His paper "Ideological Significance of Direct Rule of God in M. Buber: from the Interpretation of the Book of Judges in *The Kingdom of God* and Utopian Social Thought" is contained in this journal. Horikawa has substantial interest in the social thought of Buber as well. In the above paper, he attempts to make clear the concept of *Theokratie* (theocracy) shown in the interpretation of the Book of Judges by Buber, and discusses how the anti-monarchist view that originates in the Bible is associated with Buber's view of a utopian socialist society, which works with "cooperative" as a unit. Considering that Buber discusses his concept of *Theokratie* also in his works on prophets, comparison with these works will be necessary. Historically, his idea of "union" or "federation" should be influenced by the social experiment of French workers at the Paris Commune in 1871, but it seems that Buber left few comments on the Paris Commune. In this sense, we will have to clarify how Buber's view of union is associated with the thought of P-J. Proudhon (1809–1865) and G. Landauer (1870–1919), whom Buber held in high esteem.

Like Horikawa, Kotaro Hiraoka discusses Buber's concept of *Theokratie* in his paper, "The Bible and Political Philosophy in Modern Jewish Thought—Martin Buber's Theocracy and its

Reception in Israeli Context,” but his approach to this theme is largely different from that of Horikawa. Hiraoka places emphasis on the role of the Bible in the history of Western political philosophy, and discusses how Buber’s political philosophy is recognized by modern Jewish political philosophers in this context. I am especially interested in the criticism of Buber by Moshe Halbertal, which, from the viewpoint of biblical study, may be summarized as representing the view of the editors of the Books of Samuel. While Kenichi Kida repeatedly mentioned the sociology of religion founded by Max Weber in his public lecture, Hiraoka discusses how Weber and Buber are philosophically associated with each other in his paper, which is unsurprising but still of much significance. Hiraoka refrains from using a Japanese word for “anarchism,” which is commonly translated as “*museifushugi (non-governmentism)*.” This term is not appropriate for use, at least when discussing Buber, as it carries some nuance of criticism from the outside, just like the term “utopia socialism”; but for the anarchists themselves, it does not necessarily have a negative meaning. Politically, the term “anarchism” refers to “anti-authoritarian thought” that regards the centralized government system as an abuse of authority. The criticism of anarchism as being “disorderly” has always come from those who do not have a correct understanding of the concepts of “control” and “union.” (If these critics are right, the European Union can be “anarchic” and thus inferior to today’s Russia and China in terms of political systems, which, clearly, is not the case.)

The paper of Fumio Ono, titled “Morphology of the Voice in the Hermeneutics of Martin Buber: Inquiry into the Form of the Unformed” is an ambitious work that focuses on the relationship between the thought of Buber and Germanistik, a theme that has drawn little attention from researchers so far. As Ono points out, it is evident from the foreword to *The Kingdom of God* and a great number of annotations contained in this work that Buber was a first-class biblical scholar. In my view, modern Bible study has been established through the process of conflict and the integration of two major streams—one stemming from the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and the other from the romanticism founded by J. G. Herder. In the days of Buber, the former stream led by J. Wellhausen was dominant in the world of Bible study, while H. Gunkel, though strongly influenced by Wellhausen against that backdrop, had romantic inclinations and introduced achievements in the research of myths and folktales to biblical hermeneutics. Buber’s sharp criticism was directed exclusively at modernist Bible study backed by the philosophy of the Enlightenment—he did not deny Bible study itself. It is worthy of attention that Buber held in high esteem biblical scholars, such as Johs Pedersen, who had a profound understanding of the spirituality of ancient people. Ono’s paper deserves special mention for its in-depth consideration of the concept of “memory (Erinnerung),” which meant a great deal to German romanticists as one clue for deepening the understanding of the philosophy of Buber. The Hebrew word for “memory” is זכרון, a word derived from the root זכר/zkr (remember), which is generally translated as “rememberance” (please note that Hebrew

word *zeker* means “mention of a name” or “the mentioning of God”). Having a quick look at how the verb *√zkr* is used in the Bible will be sufficient enough to understand the sheer importance of this word. The point raised by Ono is so significant that it urges us, as biblical scholars, to redefine our conventional concepts of “tradition (Überlieferung)” and the “history of tradition (Überlieferungsgeschichte).”

Due to limited space, I can only refer to papers by Horikawa, Hiraoka, and Ono, but I am confident that this symposium was extremely meaningful to all participants, and, with all the valuable insights it has offered, will give great momentum to the advancement of the research of Jewish thought.