Serial Event: Towards the Construction of a Philosophy of Coexistence: A Dialogue with Iran–Islam

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As the event of the third unit, which aims to explore new possibilities for building a philosophy of coexistence through dialog with the philosophical and religious circles in Iran, the first symposium was held at Toyo University on November 6, 2012, and the second one was held at the Academy of Sciences of Iran (Teheran) on November 4, 2013. Both symposiums proved fruitful.

The aim of the first symposium was to discuss the philosophy of coexistence between five philosophers and religious leaders invited from Iran and Japanese researchers at Toyo University. The religions and philosophies in Iran, which were not widely known in Japan, were established through a long history of coexistence of diverse religious and philosophical traditions, including Zoroastrianism, Islam, Greek philosophy, and European philosophies from the Middle Ages to modern times. On the other hand, the coexistence within Islam between Shiite and Sunni Muslims and the coexistence of Islam with developed countries in the West have become serious political and religious issues worldwide. First, Iran has historically played an important role in facilitating interaction among different cultures because it was located halfway between the West and the East. Today, where cultural and religious coexistence has become an urgent global issue, the viewpoint of Iran, which we Japanese lack as we have always turned our attention to the West, constitutes an essential perspective that can suggest many things to us.

At the symposium in 2012, presentations and discussions involved the issue of coexistence by both Iranian and Japanese participants in line with the themes of comparative religion between Islam and Shinto; Islamic law and theology; Sufism from the coexistence of different traditions; the ideas of Henry Corbin and Toshihiko Izutsu, which have a profound influence over Iranian philosophers; and contemporary European philosophy as the first step in a dialog with Muslims in Iran. The symposium was meaningful as the beginning of joint efforts between the two countries that should be developed on an ongoing basis for the future through the third unit. The achievements made at the symposium were summarized and published as the third special issue of the Journal of International Philosophy in June 2013.

However, the symposium in 2012 was strongly characterized as the first meeting and an attempt for joint research between Iran and Japan, and while there were certain achievements, it also proved insufficient in terms of both detailed discussions of the themes and any deepening of mutual understanding for reasons that included the language barrier. These issues should be addressed in the future. Moreover, the Japanese participants took the initiative in organizing the first symposium, which inevitably set the tone for the symposium. In light of these issues, the second symposium in 2013 was held under the leadership of the Iranian party with the aim of deepening discussions and achieving greater success than the previous symposium.

The major theme for the second symposium was to discuss "what the West (philosophy) is" in relation to the issue of the East and philosophy, which is, "what the East is" and to explore, based on a shared understanding from the discussions, new possibilities for creative coexistence. It was an attempt to reconstruct the ques-
tion of the East and the West, which seems to have become an obsolete motto and which has lost philosophical effectiveness in Japan, as a more vigilant question by learning the issues of the East and philosophy unique to Iran. The second symposium began with a brief introduction of recent philosophical research in Iran by Dr. Davari, director of the Academy, followed by a presentation by Professor Avani who attempted to open new possibilities for Eastern philosophy by tracing the history of traditional Iranian philosophy, and then a presentation by Dr. Gavahi, who discussed mutual understanding among the different cultures by using the relationship between Iran and Japan as a model. From the Japanese participants, Professor Nagai, IRCP Researcher, gave a presentation where he strived to redefine the philosophy of Nishida Kitaro anew as an "Eastern philosophy" with a focus on the deeper logic of experience, which was followed by a presentation by Dr. Horiuchi, IRCP Research Associate, who explored the sutras of early Buddhism for its unique co-existential thought. Active discussions were conducted throughout the symposium. Noteworthy achievements of the second symposium included deeper discussions in smaller groups and the participation of Shiite Ayatollah Damad, who could not participate in the first symposium.
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