

Voices from a Site of International Understanding and Interdisciplinary Exchanges: Post-Conference Interviews with Two Japanese Graduate Students at the Institute of Education, University of London

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OVERVIEW

In order to collect views and ideas for reflecting and improving the International Colloquium between the Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University (Japan) and the Institute of Education, University of London (UK), I interviewed two Japanese students who are studying at the Institute of Education, University of London (hereafter abbreviated as IoE). Two interviews were held in the city of London on the weekend right after the conference and focused on two main topics: How do the students feel in attending the conference as IoE students, and what ideas, if any, do they have for the betterment of future conferences? Below is the brief record of our conversations.

INTERVIEWS

From a Viewpoint of Fresh Eyes and Ex-editor: Conversation with Ms. Kana Sato (September 25, 2009)

Ms. Kana Sato was just about to start her MA course at IoE, where she majors in Philosophy of Education. The reason she chose this course was that she is interested in the issues of morals and values in education. Ms. Sato describes IoE as being 'open', i.e., the institution has students of various backgrounds, not only from the UK but also outside the UK, including many developing countries. In addition, she heard that the faculty members are more eager to take care of students, compared with those who are in other universities. Let us hear the voice from Ms. Sato:

This is her first time attending an international academic conference. As for the overall theme of 'Dialogue between Philosophy, Psychology, and Comparative Education', it seemed to her that the emphasis was slightly tilted towards philosophy. It looks as if philosophy tries to initiate a dialogue with other fields, she says. As for the sessions, Judith Suissa's talk and Suzy Horton's joint session with three other presenters have an alluding atmosphere, in which Ms. Sato felt she was invited to be involved. Among the various topics that the conference has dealt with, she found the philosophy of Nishida to be especially valuable: philosophy classes in Western countries are under the strong influence of the Christian tradition, and there are few opportunities to take up philosophies outside of this tradition. The only exceptions are Chinese and Indian thought, at best. Thus, the odds that Japanese thought will garner

attention in a classroom are very slim, not to say a modern idea. In this regard, people from Kyoto created a precious time and place for those at IoE to take a look at some new viewpoints, either modern/contemporary Japanese thought or Indian education, Ms. Sato said. Of course, if you go into SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, whose building is next to IoE's), it is much easier to get in touch with Asian traditions and trends. Nevertheless, Ms. Sato insisted, here at IoE, the impact and importance of this project ought to be highly treasured. Actually, the conference made her recognize the difference between IoE and Kyoto, in terms of its style of research and education. If there is a fourth conference, she said she will definitely attend. Ms. Sato then suggested that if it is possible, it would be more convenient for participants if resumes or handouts were made available for download beforehand. Another thing she recommended was about formatting of the handouts. She used to work as an editor for an art magazine, and the experience made her aware of the structure of printed matters circulated at the conference. Minimum rules make a big difference on the audiences' impression: e.g., where the speaker's name and occupation are shown, or what kind and size of font should be used, or how much margin space shall be included. Ms. Sato concludes the interview by stating that she was so happy to attend this conference.

What Is at Stake in International and Interdisciplinary Dialogue: Conversation with Mr. Koichiro Misawa (September 26, 2009)

Mr. Koichiro Misawa is a Ph.D student at IoE, majoring in Philosophy of Education. When he was asked what he thinks of IoE, his reply was: the UK's best and biggest institution in the field of education. There are large numbers of students from abroad in IoE, but not so many Japanese. However he found many students from the Commonwealth of Nations. Here is Mr. Misawa's opinion on the conference:

First, as for the conference as a whole, he said he really enjoyed it, and found it stimulating. Living in London, it is hard to see and talk to Japanese researchers or students in his field: thus, he is grateful to Kyoto for providing him with precious opportunities to make such interaction happen. Since the conference has successfully drawn a large audience, it seems to him that using a larger hall would be a fair choice for the next conference. Second, he commented on the content of the conference. He said that he was a bit skeptical as to whether the argument took full advantage of its theme: Happiness and Personal Growth. Several days have passed since Mr. Misawa himself had a chance to talk as a respondent, and he came to think that his response should have been structured more closely in connection with the theme. He showed his gratitude that the conference had a session on Nishida Philosophy. He said it was a courageous venture, because the topic may not be of the kind that tends to draw large audiences at IoE, where Mr. Misawa himself reads mostly Western philosophers. Nishida's writing is often either unnoticed or introduced in line with Zen Buddhism, which sometimes ends up being regarded as comforting exoticism. After attending the session, Mr. Misawa came to believe that Nishida's text has the potential to help readers rethink the premises on which Western philosophical tradition is based but hardly ever questions. Thirdly and finally, he suggested several ideas for future conferences. One thing he hopes for most was that a psychological viewpoint will come to the forefront of a dialogue, as the conference title indicates: Dialogue between Philosophy, Psychology, and Comparative Education. In view of this, it is desirable for the philosophy side to make some efforts to reach out and involve other fields, both in IoE and in Kyoto. Mr. Misawa mentioned posting an announcement to

several mailing lists that psychologists were registered for. Another thing he wishes to see at the next conference is how the 'interdisciplinary' conversations evolve. For example, the same terminology is used in a totally different way in each academic field. How can people from different disciplines proceed to talk about that term or use it? Barriers abound and they are significant in such dialogues, but they are worth trying to overcome, he emphasized. He also suggested making time for everyone, including the audience, to introduce themselves so that no one in the conference leaves unspoken. In addition, it helps for presenters to have a clearer idea about what kind of background the audience members have and where their interests are. Besides the next conference, there is one thing Mr. Misawa is looking forward to seeing: the publication of the proceedings of this conference.

POST-INTERVIEW THOUGHTS

Looking back on the conversations with Ms. Sato and Mr. Misawa, I as an interviewer feel privileged: The two interviewees were very cooperative for the interviews and supportive of the project of the international conference itself. At the same time, however, their attendance and opinions are humbling for the people who organized and are going to organize the conference: the audiences and attendees have healthy, but crucial expectations for the dialogue, which creates a significant impact on each of us not only academically but also personally, if they are carried out properly and effectively. In fact, the successful aspects of this third conference are indebted to the fruits and lessons from the preceding first and second conferences: The Nishida seminar, which both Ms. Sato and Mr. Misawa highly evaluated, was hinted at by an idea that it might be interesting to see what would happen if the conference had one common assigned text. The cross-cultural and multi-angled exchanges in the conference, to which the two interviewees paid attention and tried to bring new light to, were enabled by the academic and personal relationships constructed from the time of the first conference held in March 2008. It is true that current technologies make long-distant communications easier, but such tendencies do not weaken the importance of the kind of dialogues that take place at the conference. Rather, an age of highly technological communication necessitates reclaiming an alternative path, in which deeper argument on more complicated issues could be possible. The personal engagement and continual academic efforts displayed in the three conferences have implications and resources for meeting such needs.

