BERICHTE

Recent Trends in Japanese Research on the Philosophy of Science

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Summary

In Japan, the demand for the philosophy of science has recently increased, and in the last decade many changes have been brought about, among which the most remarkable is the rise of analytic philosophy.

But such a tendency is not the one and only; other philosophical trends are important as well. Materialistic approaches to the matter may not be neglected, either.

In addition, mathematicians and natural scientists (especially physicists and biologists) are also devoting considerable efforts to contribute to the philosophy of science.

1. THE CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

The general state of discussion respecting the philosophy of science in Japan was once surveyed by the present writer. Since then fourteen years have passed by, and our philosophical situation has considerably changed. Until towards the end of World War II, our philosophers had paid no special attention to science in general, and even after the War there were but few signs of improvement in the following decade. But today, it seems to me that things are, to an appreciable extent, different from what they used to be.

In Western Europe, mathematics and science have had an inseparable connection with philosophy, and the philosophy of science particularly has been considered, I believe, even as indispensable to philosophy itself. In addition, philosophy in turn has played an integral part in the actual discovery of scientific theories. Therefore, even if this close interrelationship between science and philosophy became somewhat or largely weakened late in the nineteenth century, it may be relevantly said that the philosophy of science did not cease retaining its cogent reason for science as well as for philosophy. Such being the case, it might be said that, in Europe almost every philosopher could not help taking interest in the philosophy of science.

Matters are quite different with Japan. Modern science which was originally born in Western Europe has indeed a history of its development over a few centuries. But this history was largely neglected by us Japanese. Thus modern science was also not only introduced, divorced from

1 'Some Aspects of the Philosophy of Science in Japan,' Annals of the Japan Association for Philosophy of Science, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1856.
its own philosophy, into our country, but welcomed for its practical utility; we accepted modern science as a means calculated to enrich and strengthen our nation. On this account, the technological by-products of science have been undoubtedly more valued here than its philosophical significance. I think that it is especially important to stress this point, because the indifference of many of our philosophers to the philosophy of science in the past may be considered to be ascribed mainly to such a background of our mental attitude toward modern science. For this reason, in spite of the fact that some of our classical thinkers such as Kitaro Nishida (1870–1945) and Hajime Tanabe (1885–1962) made much account of science in their philosophical activities, the results, all things considered, fell short of our expectations, and so it might be even a matter of course that other philosophers were unwittingly occupied only with introducing many existing or ready-made Western philosophies classical, medieval and modern into their own country to accord special attention to the intricate problems in dispute, which the philosophy of science inevitably encounters. In brief, they scarcely showed any active attitude to the philosophy of science. Such was certainly the reason, I suppose, why science, which should be regarded as an unavoidable question for the real activity of philosophy, escaped their notice.

Fortunate enough, however, the circumstances began to change from the time when the Japan Association for Philosophy of Science was established in 1954, which included mathematicians, scientists and philosophers. Those members are now about 300 in number, and have been cooperating with each other to promote our philosophy of science. On the other hand, it is worth noting that, already in the prewar period, there existed a small number of philosophers who had a peculiar interest in modern logic or the philosophy of science. But they were hardly esteemed by the authorities concerned with our major universities. But, nowadays the situation has changed; those philosophers have increased in number in the last decade and their activity has become well known among us as analytic philosophy. In this way the present state of our philosophy of science has been much changed by the ceaseless efforts of those analytic philosophers, who have brought forth the annual publication of their collected works on the philosophy of science.3 Philosophy of Science

2 The association has issued 34 numbers (9 Vols.) of Journal of the Japan Association for Philosophy of Science (J, Kagaku Kisoron Kenkyu) and 14 numbers of Ann. Japan Ass. Phil. Sci. — In the following, J, stands for in Japanese, E, in English and G, in German.

3 This circle of analytic philosophers is named Philosophy of Science Society, Japan (J, Nihon Kagaku Tetsugaku Kai). Here Tetsugaku means 'philosophy,' and Kisoron (in 2.), 'foundation.' There exists a subtle difference between Kagaku (science) Tetsugaku and Kagaku Kisoron; the former is closer to philosophy, while the latter is closer to science. Therefore the Japan Ass. Phil. Sci. (J, Nihon Kagaku Kisoron Gakukai) has many mathematician-scientist members besides its philosophers. In contrast with that Phil. Sci. Soc. Japan is largely composed of professional philosophers of science. Of course, the executives of the former are also representatives of the latter.