



An Age of Practical Wisdom: Social Science and the Revitalization of Japan

- A two-minute summary

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Natural Sciences and Society

Natural science has made great achievements. These have been both objectively good and for the most part universal. It is a popular assumption that a science by definition pursues universality and generality, and that therefore social science, which is not based on universal laws, cannot be called a science.

“... scientists are no longer so eager as they used to be to talk about the laws of nature.” (*What Is History?* by E. H. Carr, 1962).

Even the laws of physics can be “refracted” by various incidents and obstacles in the real world, in nature or human society. Science needs something more than scientific logic alone.

The social evils identified by Gandhi in his “seven social sins” warn us of the danger of ignoring social norms. What, then, is missing? I would say it is the practical wisdom contained in social science and other humanities-related areas.

Knowledge and Practical Wisdom

Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* outlines the five virtues of thought which can disclose truth, and two of these are knowledge (“episteme”) and practical wisdom or practical judgment (“phronesis”). Knowledge deals with universal and logical subjects, while practical wisdom attacks the complex and often obscure problems of human society.

Practical wisdom cannot be acquired solely through passive experience. It requires conversion of one's experiences into general and universal knowledge. A study that qualifies for the name of social science can be founded when these achievements have been attained.

What is general in the unique

E. H. Carr says “The historian is not really interested in the unique, but in what is general in the unique”(op. cit., p.57). Referring to the clash between the English King James I and the courts, Sir Edward Coke claimed: “His Majesty was not learned in the laws of his realm of England and causes which concern the life or inheritance or goods or fortunes of his subjects; they are not to be decided by natural reason, but by the artificial reason and judgment of law, which law is an act which requires long

study and experience before that a man can attain to the cognizance of it ...” Societies and nations would be endangered if practical or artificial wisdom did not exist.

An Age of Practical Wisdom

“Philosophical pacifism is a wonderful thing. However, it is the ability to make coolheaded, comprehensive measurements and comparisons that keep a nation from taking perilous steps. That is the quality desired in politicians and members of the fourth estate. Unfortunately, however, I have never seen anyone like that.” (*Kaido Wo Yuku 42: Miura Hantou Ki* by Ryotaro Shiba. Asahi Bunko, p.243)

Human society, with its unique and complex features, cannot be examined or described easily; nor can universal laws or principles be established for it. However, it is possible to keep asking “why”, identify complicated social phenomena and pursue reasonable solutions based on experiential data, materials and constructive wisdom. All of the sciences have the potential to resonate with each other.

In view of the recent territorial disputes in East Asia and at national borders in Europe and Asia, the ability to create a grand design, “to make coolheaded, comprehensive measurements and comparisons”, persistence in solving problems flexibly and appropriately, and consideration of international laws—in other words, practical wisdom—is desperately needed.

Professor Susumu Yamauchi

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Professor Yamauchi was born in Otaru, Hokkaido, Japan, in 1949. He graduated from Hitotsubashi University Faculty of Law in 1972 and completed his PhD in Law at the Graduate School of Law in 1977. After becoming a professor at Hitotsubashi University he held such positions as Dean of Students, Dean of the Faculty of Law, and Board Member. In 2004 he became leader of Hitotsubashi University’s COE program, “Center for New European Research: Conflict and Settlement,” a national project sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. He also administered the EU Institute in Japan and the EU Studies Institute in Tokyo. He became Executive Vice President for Finance and Social Outreach at Hitotsubashi University in 2006, and President of Hitotsubashi University in December 2010. His areas of specialization are legal history, medieval European legal history, and the history of legal culture. His publications include *A History of the Legal Conception of Looting: Man, War and Law in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1993; a co-edited volume with Makoto Ikema, Yoshio Inoue and Tamotsu Nishizawa, *Hitotsubashi University 1875-2000*, Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000; and another with Aritsune Katsuta and Seiichi Mori, *Introduction to European Legal History*, Minerva Press, 2004. He received the Suntory Academic Award for *Crusades to the North*, Kodansha, 1997.

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