

BOOK REVIEW

TOKUTOMI SOHŌ'S INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY REVISITED

Tokutomi Sohō, *The Future of Japan*, trans. and ed. Vinh Sinh. Edmonton, Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 1989, xxxviii, 222pp.

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I

This excellent translation of Tokutomi Sohō's classic was rendered by Professor Vinh Sinh of the University of Alberta in Canada. Professor Vinh Sinh was born in Vietnam and came to Japan in the early 1960s to study at such institutions as International Christian University and the University of Tokyo; he then went to the University of Alberta to earn his Ph.D. in the field of Japanese intellectual history. On July 1st, 1991 I had the chance to meet Professor Sinh at the newly built YWCA hall in Ochanomizu; then I heard his moving and thoughtful meditations concerning his life, research, and the role of Japan in Asia. This is the reason why the present writer, despite the fact that his professional training lies not in the field of Japanese thought but rather in the field of the history of Western political thought, became interested in undertaking a short review of the book.

Just as Tokutomi Sohō's *Shorai no Nihon* (*The Future of Japan*, 1886) itself was profoundly a by-product of international collaboration in the sense that he drew a number of important insights and analyses, which established the core theses of the book, from Japanese, Chinese and Western sources available in those days, so this translation was, as the editor/translator himself indicates it, also the fruit of the "transnational co-operation." (p. x.) It was so not only because the co-editors, Professor Matsuzawa Hiroaki of Hokkaido University as well as Professor Nicholas Wickenden of the University of Alberta, made

substantial contributions to the content and the literary style of the translation, but also because generous assistance was given to the editor/translator by numerous scholars, friends, and institutes on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

II

Professor Vinh Sinh's "Introduction" (pp. xiii-xxxviii) is both a comprehensive introduction to the book and a succinct and yet careful treatment of Sohō's life and thought. One can find in "Introduction" helpful and necessary information on Sohō's life and the book: the reason for the phenomenal success of the book, the idea of *heiminshugi* (democracy or populism), the sources of the book such as Herbert Spencer, the Manchester School, Adam Smith, Sohō's later change of thought and position from industrial democracy to a kind of militaristic imperialism, the style of writing, and so forth.

Though Sohō's book itself was renowned for its excellence in literary style, I have been impressed with the translator's endeavor to represent the refined literary qualities of the book as well. The translation has succeeded in conveying elegance and vivacity, force and vitality present in the literary style of the original book. The following is nothing but one example of how the original picturesque literary qualities have been skillfully represented in the translation:

Japanese original:

ソレ黒雲日光ヲ蔽フトモ太陽ハ依然トシテ雲間ニ存スルナリ。然ラハ則チ亦タ焉ソ其全勝ノ近キニアルヲ疑ハンヤ。吾人ハ之ヲ信ス。第十九世紀社會ノ大烈風ハ既ニ彼ノ上古ニ於テ垂天ノ雲ノ如キ鬱々蔥々タル貴族的ノ大木ヲ抜き去レリ。既ニ抜き去レリ。縱令暫時ハ其綠色ヲ變セサルモ是レ既ニ死セル材木ナリ。生ケル林樹ニアラサルナリ。實ニ然リ。ソレ豈ニ久敷ヲ保タン哉。⁽¹⁾

English translation: "Just as the sun is still there as usual even when overspread with dark clouds, so, in spite of temporary obstructions, how can one not be sure that the complete victory is approaching? I believe that the great hurricane of the nineteenth-century world has

rooted up the towering aristocratic tree, which in olden times, like gloomy clouds, used hang(sic) over the sky. As the tree has been rooted up, even if its green leaves have not changed colour, it is already dead wood, and no longer a living tree. How long can it last?" (p. 109.)

The editor/translator's "Notes" (pp. 185-213.) are fraught with valuable information and facts; they are related to many historical celebrities, thinkers and writers both in the West and in the East, books, literary sources, historical background, geography, Japanese works of art, poetry and musical instruments, Japanese special concepts and expressions, and so forth. To illustrate this, it is helpful for the reader that sources are identified, for instance, with regard to the following aphorism which Sohō used: "A gradual sequence of minor events will eventually lead to a great change." (p. 53. Japanese original reads: 霜ヲ履シテ堅氷至ル). According to Note 106, this aphorism is "found in the *I Ching*, "Ch'ien Kua." (p. 196.) Another example is the identification of the source of Sohō's rather lengthy quotation from the report on the Fourth Congress of the International Arbitration and Peace Association in 1884. (pp. 110-12.) Note 208 reads the following:

"An extensive report of this meeting is given in the *International Arbitration and Peace Association Monthly Journal*, vol. I, no. 3-4 (September-October 1884), p. 23. Sohō evidently quoted from a Japanese source which differed in some details from this report (e.g. Madame Fischer was from Berlin, not London; von Bühler had recruited forty new members for the Association, rather than members in the Reichstag, etc.)." (p. 204.)

The third example is concerned with the editor's correction of the misinformation given by Sohō. For instance, Sohō was mistaken, when he wrote in Chapter 11 that "if Magellan was the first person who sailed across the Pacific (1520), then Hasekura must have been the second one." (p. 128.) The editor has corrected this in Note 233 to the

effect that Sohō here neglects "the circumnavigations of Drake and others, as well as the Spanish establishment of the eastward galleon route between Manila and Acapulco almost half a century before Hasekura's voyage." (p. 206.) The last instance is related to the following sentence: "How can this force be held back, even if one had the great physical power of Meng Pen and Wu Huo?" (p. 143.) According to Note 257, these two men of ancient China were known for their great physical power: "Meng Hen served the state of Ch'i, and Wu Huo the state of Ch'in." (p. 208). These are some examples of the editor's helpful notes which cannot help facilitating immensely the reader's understanding of the text.

III

In the concluding section of the review, I would like to make a couple of observations concerning some of the themes in *The Future of Japan*. First of all, I find very attractive the style or the nature of the political discourse in which Sohō intended to engage in this book. This book is not simply meant to be a book either for prediction or for advocacy but rather it is meant to be a unique combination of historical analysis and reflection. It is important to note that Sohō does not only want to draw from historical analysis of the past and present a picture of the future. On the basis of the historical analysis his intent is to shed light on the future course that Japan should set out for in the present. In other words, he is not only interested in the question of what Japan's future will be, but rather in the question of what is to be done for the future of Japan. (p. 20.) Sohō here unwittingly follows the method of Alexis de Tocqueville's book which he did *not* read: *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. In *The Future of Japan*, Sohō is trying to do something similar to what Tocqueville intended to do in *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, i.e., forging out a future direction for the country out of the precise analyses of the past predicament and present uncertainties. In my understanding this style of political discourse has provided *The Future of Japan* with credence and merit as one of the classics of Meiji Japan.

Secondly, I find arresting and refreshing the perspective of the young Tokutomi's *heiminshugi* (democracy or populism), i.e., the viewpoint of "those who dwell in the cottage" (p. 5.), upheld throughout the book. It is a well-known fact that Sohō in the stage of *The Future of Japan* opposed Fukuzawa Yukichi's policy of "Wealthy Nation, Strong Army." (p. 174.) Moreover, even though Sohō received inspiration and encouragement from the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement headed by Itagaki Taisuke, the position of his industrial democracy was not perfectly in accord with those who had stood in the Movement. (p. 172.) It is important to remember that Sohō represented a younger generation of Meiji Japan than Fukuzawa and Itagaki; he often compared their generation which he called "the youth of Meiji" with "the old folks of Tenpō" to which Fukuzawa and Itagaki belonged. It implied Sohō's criticism that the mentality of the older generation was still confined under the elitist, aristocratic and authoritarian consciousness of the warrior class of the old regime in Japan.⁽²⁾ It also showed his conviction that the spirit of the modern age had won "the youth of Meiji" over to its side. At any rate, Sohō's industrial democracy was an alternative position to the modernization from above which the Meiji government began to pursue as its central policy, since it laid great stress on the common world of the Japanese people and on their productive power.

Sohō was again very much like Tocqueville, when he presented his thesis that democracy would emerge as a victor out of the historical struggle in the modern age between aristocracy and democracy: two competing principles of history or historical forces. (pp. 95-117, 126, 138-43, 181-84.) Here one can rightly point out the influence of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* which he undoubtedly read. For his thesis of democracy's eventual victory over aristocracy was presented as an unmistakable trend in modern history. Sohō saw in the gradual penetration of democracy an inevitable historical trend in modern history. And it is well-known that Tocqueville understood the gradual development of the democratic principle of equality as "a providential fact," that is, as "universal," "lasting" and irreversible.⁽³⁾

The only difference is that Sohō's thesis was backed up by the Spencerian notion of evolutionary history, whereas Tocqueville's had nothing to do with the notion of historical evolutionism.

One of the most attractive theses in *The Future of Japan* was Sohō's trinitarian understanding of industrialism, democracy, and pacifism. According to his penetrating insight into the historical actualities of his age, industry and trade vis-à-vis the military by and large symbolized peace and prosperity, harmony and co-operation. Though one can detect here a kind of youthful optimism on the part of Sohō, his thesis was to a great degree compatible with the historical reality of the age, as shown in his own argument of *The Future of Japan*. (pp. 31-40, 75-91.) Indeed, one might almost say that his advocacy that the New Japan should be "a commercial nation" has come true in the historical present after World War II. (pp. 117, 126, 167-68, 176.) Today, however, the thesis that industry symbolizes peace and harmony is untenable in the light of the historical reality of the international political economy. Surely one of the important tasks of democratic theory today consists in uncovering and criticizing the hidden structural complicity between economy and violence both in the late capitalist society and in the world. Ecological crises as well as the so-called South-North problems seem to attest to the deeper dimension of the current injustice of the international political economy.

Notes

- (1) Uete Michiari, ed., *Tokutomi Sohō Shū* [The Collected Works of Tokutomi Sohō] (Meiji Bungaku Zenshū 34, Chikuma Shobō, 1974), p. 86.
- (2) Cf., Irokawa Daikichi, *Meiji Seishinshi* [A Spiritual History of Meiji], enlarged ed. (Tokyo: Kōga Shobō, 1968), pp. 39, 220-21, 241-49. Matsumoto Sannosuke, *Meiji Seishin no Kōzō* [The Structure of the Meiji Spirit] (Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai Shuppansha, 1981), pp. 103-106, 114-18.
- (3) Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, ed. Phillip Bradley (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), p. 6.