

Asian Community and Theory on “Sudoku”: The Construction of Knowledge in the Edo Era

The First Semester 2018
Courses on Asian Community, One Asia Foundation
Translated by Wenting Yang

For our 8th lecture, the Dean of College of Foreign Languages and Literature Hsing-Ching Hsu invited Professor Masashi Tsujimoto, Vice President of Chubu University (Japan) and Emeritus Professor at Kyoto University, to be our guest speaker. Professor Tsujimoto is a distinguished scholar in the field of education history and history of Japanese thought. His work included 近世教育思想史の研究 [*The Studies on the History of Modern Education Thought*] (思文閣出版 [Shibunkaku Publishing], 1990), 「學び」の復権 [*Restoration of “Learning”*] (岩波現代文庫 [Iwanami modern Paperback], Reissued in 2012), 教育を「江戸」から考える～學び・身體・メディア [*Think about Education from the “Edo Era”: Learning, Body, and Media*] (日本放送出版協會 [Japan Broadcast Publishing], 2009), and 思想と教育のメディア史—近世日本の知の伝達 [*Media History on Thought and Education: Conveying Knowledge in Modern Japan*] (ぺりかん社 [Perikansha Publishing], 2011). All of these books are the most distinguished academic achievements in the field of history of Japanese thought.

Thus, the theme of Professor Masashi Tsujimoto's lecture is “Asian Community and Theory on “Sudoku”: The Construction of Knowledge in the Edo Era.” Based on his profound academic achievement, he explained how the Japanese intellectuals in the Edo Era learned Chinese classics and what was the knowledge form of the Edo Confucianism which was constructed by “Sudoku” (reading aloud without deeply understanding). The summary of the lecture is as below:

In cultural aspect, the “Circle of Chinese Character” was constructed in East Asia. East Asian Countries like Japan, Korea, and Vietnam shared the texts of Chinese classics. The methodology of how to read the texts of Chinese classics reflected the historical development of academia and thought. In Japan, the so-called Chinese classics refer to “四書五經 *The Four Books and Five Classics*.” The Confucianism refers to the studies on reading the “*The Four Books and Five Classics*.” Confucius was a Chinese philosopher in the Spring and Autumn period (2500 years from now). His thoughts was recorded in Chinese classics and still known by people nowadays. The later generation may have dialogues with Confucius through reading these classics. Thus, in the Edo Era, three hundred years from now, Japanese also learned Confucius' thoughts through reading his classics. However, how to overcome the difficulties of learning Chinese texts in Japan? Professor Tsujimoto explained the learning methods of the Edo Confucianism and the characteristics of “knowledge” at that time.

They adopted a method that they transformed Chinese classics, which they could not read, into “Japanese reading of Chinese characters” with Japanese grammar. Children had started to learn these classics since 7 years' old and they read aloud the texts of Chinese classics written 2000 years ago with Japanese reading of Chinese characters. “Sodoku,” reading aloud the Chinese classics, in the childhood is the basic training to get familiar with “Japanese reading of Chinese characters.” Here comes to the question that why Children must learn Chinese classics in the Edo Era? The reason was that the Children who accepted elite education at that time all started from recitation and the reading aloud the Chinese classics. If an academic paper was not written in Chinese text, it would be considered not academic at all. Let us take examples of Takuji Ogawa who was Professor of Geography at Kyoto University and his two brothers. The family member of Professor Ogawa were professors in Tokyo University and Kyoto University and they learned “Sodoku” since Childhood. Professor Hideki Yukawa, who received the Nobel Prize in Physics, was Professor Ogawa's real brother and he also learned “Sodoku” since Childhood. According to Professor Yukawa, “Sodoku” probably had strong influence on him. That is to say, “Sodoku” was a premise for all kind of studies in the Edo Japan and the basis of “Knowledge” in the Edo Era was based on the learning of “Sodoku.” On the contrary, “the modern knowledge,” on which the modern science in Europe was based, started from reading and writing words and the learning of school education nowadays still based on this. In the current school, most people reject the learning method “Sodoku,” reciting the classics without knowing what it means.

Then Professor Tsujimoto explained the way of learning Chinese texts in the Edo Era. The learning of “Sodoku” actually started from the beginning of 17th century. At that time, Japan depended on so-called “舶載書 (books transported by ship),” textbooks imported from Ming and Ching Empire and Korea. However, there were few textbooks that can be read without punctuation mark. The quantities of these books were limited and the price of these books were very expensive; hence, only privileged intellectuals can afford them. Textbooks published at that time were mainly the textbooks on the studies of Chu Hsi (朱子学, also as the Cheng-Chu School) and these books were designed for imperial examination in China. Chu Hsi wrote *Variorum of the Four Books* for understanding *Four Books* correctly. That is to say, Japanese intellectuals in the beginning of 17th century understood the studies of Chu Hsi from *Variorum* books (the studies of *Four Books*) in Ming Dynasty. In other words, learning the studies of Chu Hsi was learning *Four Books* through Chu Hsi's footnotes. In addition, scholars in 17th century translated Chinese texts to books that were easier to read. Second generation changed textbooks to those book which adopted Japanese reading with marks on Chinese texts and published these books in Japan. Contrast with “舶載書,” people called those books published in Japan “和刻本 (Japan-printed Chinese book).” Professor Tsujimoto provided a unique viewpoint that there was a “media revolution” (words and publishing) in 17th century in Japan, though he did not elaborate this viewpoint into detail due to limited time frame of the lecture.

“Sodoku” was a theory of learning offered by Ekiken Kaibara (1630-1714). Professor Tsujimoto smiled and said that Ekiken is his best friend in the Edo Era. “When one is young and has good memory, he/she should read *The Four Books and Five Classics* frequently and read as many times as he/she can so that he/she can recite them.” (excerpted from

Ekiken 和俗童子訓 [Precepts on Japanese customs for children] Volume III). Kaibara argued that “one should read one hundred words in *Four Books* every day and recite and write them without looking at them.” He thought that “If one can recite *Four Books* without looking at them, one can master the meaning and reason and can read various kinds of books without any effort,” “It also help one's writing. Thus, as long as one learns and memorizes *Four Books*, one already completes half process of basic learning (as above).” Take example of *Four Books*. There are 52,804 words. If one learns 100 words every day, it needs 528 days. It takes 1 year and half or at most two years to learn and memorize all of them.

The texts of “Sodoku” are the classics of Confucianism and the classics are full of Confucius' thoughts. If one reads aloud the classics, even one does not have text with him/her and one still can recite words from the classics. It is because one already embeds all the content of classics in one's body. From this meaning, Professor Tsujimoto called “Sodoku” as “the embodiment of texts.” The language that was embodied is Confucius' holy language and one can use this language to think and express one's thoughts. Japanese who embodied the texts can contact with other intellectuals from China and Korea through the embodiment of Chinese classics, even though Japanese did not know how to speak Chinese. As Kant viewed Latin as main language to express West philosophic thoughts. Thus, intellectuals in the Edo Era always wrote intellectuals articles in Chinese. This means “they think in Chinese.” Confucianism was a knowledge that thought with the language of Chinese classics and can expressed with Chinese language. That is why “Sodoku” was a necessary learning course for Children in the Edo Era though it seems like a learning method that killing knowledge for people nowadays. Of course, the way that Confucianism knowledge was constructed in the Edo Era and the way that knowledge was constructed in modern school are very different.

Current universities are based on modern knowledge originated from Europe without exception. This is totally different to Confucianism knowledge used to shared in East Asia. What can modern knowledge do? What was embedded in it? This is a chance to rethink the possibility and limit of current university. “Media revolution” is developing rapidly and the phenomena that students do not read books any more is highly related to the current situation of media. This is also a crisis for modern knowledge on which university was based. As thinking about different knowledge forms, we might trace back to the time before modern times and find some inspirations from knowledge form of Confucianism in the Edo Era constructed by “Sodoku.” (Written by: Meihui Huang)