

Pioneer of Byzantine Studies in Japan: Late Prof. Kin-ichi Watanabe's Works

Yasuhiro OTSUKI

One of the founders of our Research Group, Professor Kin-ichi Watanabe has passed away on February 6, 2011 at the age of eighty-six. Heartily missing him, we would like to briefly survey his academic footsteps, especially focusing on his early career and some remarkable works in the field of Byzantine History.

Prof. Watanabe was born in Tokyo on December 14, 1924. After four years attending high school, skipping the final year, Prof. Watanabe started studying at Tokyo University of Commerce (now Hitotsubashi University) in April 1941, when he was sixteen years old. As a young student, he showed interest in Philosophy, European Literature, as well as European History. At that time, there were some prominent Professors of History at Tokyo University of Commerce Prof. Senroku Uehara (1899-1975) became the most influential mentor for him, and Prof. Shiro Masuda (1908-2007) also became his initiator into Academia.

On December 8, 1941, Japan was finally engaged in the Second World War. After his first three-years at university, he was also involved in the military service (in the navy, 1944-45). Coming back to the campus, he was deep in his studies, focusing on European Medieval Society.

It was, in fact, both of his mentors, Profs. Senroku Uehara and Shiro Masuda, that influenced Prof. Watanabe in his early days. Profs. Uehara and Masuda concentrated their interests on the problems concerning the birth of Europe, that is, the continuity or not of Roman Influences.

Prof. Watanabe wrote his thesis titled "On the structure of European Grand-Estate in Late Antiquity" (in Japanese, February 28, 1948) while finishing his undergraduate courses. He was then elected as a special research fellow at the same University for five years (1948-53). Among his activities during this period includes a long term paper titled "DE CONDUCTORIBUS SALTUUM ET ΜΙΣΘΩΤΑΙΣ ΟΥΣΙΑΚΟΙΣ" (March 20, 1950).

After his term as special research fellow, in the spring of 1953, he was hired as a full-time lecturer in the Faculty of Economics, Hitotsubashi University, that is, his Alma Mater. His interest had not, however, yet focused on Byzantine at this moment. He had then a wide interest in "ancient societies."

He used to tell me that it was his mentors who initiated his way to Byzantinology, that is, Profs. Senroku Uehara and Shiro Masuda. These two professors were then enthusiastically interested in problems on the transition from Antiquity to Medieval Societies. They eagerly studied, for example, Alphonse Dopsch as well as Henri Pirenne. Prof. Watanabe, as a young professor at his Alma Mater, started to collaborate with his mentors as a Byzantinist.

The works of Byzantine studies achieved by Prof. Watanabe can be divided into three periods. The first period is from 1950 to 1969, the second is from 1970 to 1989, and the last third period is from 1990 to 2011. These divisions are divided according to changes in Prof. Watanabe's intellectual interests. Here, I will try to convey his understanding which repeatedly came up in my conversations with him, including the contents of his autobiography. The contents are as follows.

The first period (1950 – 1969): He followed international academia, which had converged on socio-economic history, criticizing various theories as well as developing his own perspectives. He also analyzed rural communities and presented a theory on the public finance system. The second period (1970 – 1989): His interest shifted to the history of the constitution because of his correspondence with Prof. Hans-Georg Beck (1910 – 99). He analyzed “the Roman Emperor” in the Byzantine constitution and also “the Emperor” issues from viewpoints of international relations with the West. The third period (1990 – 2011): He was interested in the relationship between the modern world and Byzantine studies, historic trends in the twentieth century, and problems in existing Byzantine historical studies. He criticized “postwar historical studies,” which dealt with Japan, and also formed his own theories. He reflected on his own academic interests and European studies.

His interests during the first period focused on following up issues, which were also controversial among international scholars of Byzantine studies. In short, he tried to (1) introduce several issues that converged on a “theory of Byzantine feudalism” to Japanese scholars, (2) discuss the intentions of the preeminent scholars; distinguishing what was dealt with and specifying important issues raised by academics, and (3) examine points of controversy by immersing himself in materials other scholars were familiar with. Specifically, at that time, he was thinking of reviewing the issue of owners of landed estates, which had been developed by the fourth century, using historical materials about the *Africa province* and the *Egypt province*.

Since the beginning of his research activities, Prof. Watanabe had been interested in the end of the ancient era called “Spätantike”. He tried to understand the role that churches and monasteries played as they became owners of landed estates. These issues seemed to him as controversial phenomena.

However, just as academia dealt with this issue at that time, he did not distinguish the differences between landownership of churches/monasteries and feudal lords in his papers on

the “theory of feudalism”. It should be pointed out that the paper that Nina Pigulevskaia (1894 – 1970) et al. (1960) presented at the main table in the 16th International Congress of Byzantine studies was also written completely under the same assumptions. Later, I was engaged in an extensive discussion with Prof. Watanabe regarding this issue. As a result, it was concluded that solving this symptom structurally was the key to understanding the Byzantine Empire. However, it was at the beginning of the 1980s when the redistribution system for the properties of churches and monasteries became open for discussion and specific analyses started, as you may know. (cf. Thomas, John Philip, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*. Washington, D.C., 1987; Otsuki, Y., Donations to the Church and the State in the Byzantine Empire - Legislation in the 5th and 6th centuries. in *Mediterranean World XIII* (1992) p. 9-20. In my opinion, the pioneer work on redistributive role of ecclesiastical charity with financial privileges was Evelyn Patlagean’s brilliant work, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e-7e siècles*. Paris, 1977.)

The most outstanding accomplishment of his works during this time was a survey of international academia written in French: *Problèmes de la «féodalité» byzantine*. Une mise au point sur les diverses discussions, *Socio-Economic History*, 30(3/4), 1965, p. 293-329, 1-2.; *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Vol.5, Non.1 (whole No. 5) Jan. 1965, p. 32-40, Vol. 6. No. 1 (whole No. 4). Sept. 1965, p. 8-24. (reprint: in *Mediterranean World XV* (1998) p. 125-155.)

The structural outlines of the affirmations of Georg Ostrogorsky (1902 – 76) and some other scholars in the former Soviet Union, and Paul Lemerle (1903 – 89) in Paris, are described here. From his objective viewpoints, the whole picture regarding the arguments was made clear and this work made a great impression on young students of the day. The name, “Kin-ichi Watanabe”, has become well-known in the world for this survey and the name of Hitotsubashi University has become known too.

After World War II, Byzantine studies developed in response to certain moral tones like “postwar democracy” and “postcolonialism” while each society was going down its own independent path towards realizing political agendas: “class liberation” and “national liberation”. The arguments of feudalism were, in essence, filled with opinions that the “liberation” of “citizens” should be realized. Looking back to the past from the present, this was definitely an obligation the times requested, as the main theme in ancient history in Japan used to be the “history of liberation of slaves”.

Even at Hitotsubashi University, the opinion that social sciences should take an important role as “citizen” studies was becoming popular. Prof. Watanabe’s interests responded to this interest of young students of the day. Although their feelings, sensibilities, and consciousness for the task were not necessarily in line with Prof. Watanabe, ten to sixteen students studied at his seminar every year. This number is quite high considering the whole number of the students in Hitotsubashi was then only 550.

In the seminars, Marx's classics were read. Among Marx's books, the book that was the most often read was *Formen, die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen (Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations)*. At that time, this book's translated version was not available in Japan and the students joined his seminars because they wanted to read this book.

Prof. Watanabe was still contemplating the meanings of his Byzantine studies while he was responding to the present needs of the students. He was subjected to a cross examination by student activists on campus during which some buildings were blockaded. However, this experience brought Prof. Watanabe to think about himself more deeply and finally he decided to go to Munich after he resigned the position of director in the general education course of the Kodaira campus.

In Munich, Hans-Georg Beck was a chief historian at Sminar für Byzantinistik und neugriechische Studien. Prof. Watanabe had been exchanging letters with Prof. Franz Dölger since the International Congress of Byzantine Studies held in Ohrid in 1961 and he went to Germany because he was greatly interested in the history of constitutions. However, through discussions with Prof. Beck, Prof. Watanabe gradually turned his interests to studies on the Byzantine world view.

It may be said that during this second period, he gradually focused on histories of constitutions and thought through discussion with Profs. Dölger and Beck. This was the time when he translated a book called "*Bizantsu sekai no shiso kozo*" (Hans Georg Beck, *Die Denkstruktur der Byzantinischen Welt : Sein in der Grundlage der Literaturshöpfung*. (Tokyo, Iwanami-shoten, 1978) includes five following articles : An den Rändern der europäischen Geschichte. das Modell Byzanz; Das literarische Schaffen der Byzantiner : Wege zu seinem Verständnis; Antike Beredsamkeit und byzantinische Kallilogia; Besonderheiten der Literatur in der Palaiologenzeit; Die griechische volkstümliche Literatur des 14. Jahrhunderts).

Additionally, Prof. Watanabe took a great interest in the roles and functions of "the Roman Emperor" in Christendom of the middle-ages, after he learned of Prof. Dölger's accomplishments. As I mentioned earlier, he connected this interest with the world view. He wrote several papers based on this interest. The issue of "the Emperor" in the middle-ages cannot be grasped within the framework of the world view. He learned from Dölger, Werner Ohnsorge, and Otto Treitinger how to grasp these concepts and tried to introduce the concepts to Japanese academia.

He tried to understand the situation which we call "Zweikaiserproblem", but it seems he reached the limit of his work. He was looking at the situation by the standard of the modern theory of hegemony, in short, both of the emperors from the Byzantine world and the West were competing with each other to control "the world" of that day. According to this viewpoint, the situation of conflict between the Roman Emperor and the Holy Roman Emperor in Medieval Europe was interpreted as the same concept reflected as the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union after the middle of the twentieth century.

However, considering the reality of the Byzantine Empire, this was completely an erroneous interpretation. The world order was integrated into the Emperor based in Constantinople, and was shared by the people in Christendom. From the current situation, this viewpoint gives a clear idea of how we understand several events.

The third period was the time when he tried to validate the meaning of his study interests or works in the twentieth century and the postwar history of Japan. He reviewed the changes of his own interests from a wide perspective.

The following is a part of the essay he wrote on the occasion of his retirement from Hitotsubashi University in 1988.

“The meanings of a person’s behaviors are not clearly recognized by him each time. Even if the behaviors can be explained on the scene, you will never know if the behaviors are legitimate. Especially when the behavior is not a repeated daily routine and moreover, is caused by an unreasonable situation beyond a person’s limits, it must take time for a person to understand the meaning of the behavior. It seems that my life that had started in Kodaira Campus probably belonged to this category.”

I would like to bring this to a close.

The foundation of Prof. Watanabe’s works was raised and formed in the Tokyo University of Commerce where he spent his time when he was a student. He was attracted by the European world, which senior scholars like Shinshichi Miura, Senroku Uehara, and Shiro Masuda had introduced to him. He was interested in politics, economics and cultural phenomena and tried to understand these.

He cultivated his academic interests in this small field. However, this small world was enlarged to a global scale by exchanges with the great scholars. Prof. Watanabe preferred a general theoretical way of thinking. He was trying to explore historical methods of analyzing concrete phenomena, but at the same time, he always got back to abstract themes and encouraged young students.

When looking back to the teaching I received from him, I can say this about his teaching: Powers interact mutually. People’s desires influence reality. Powers like physical power, intellectual power, spiritual strength, and strong nerve interact with and influence each other and a real society is made with these powers. History is a subject from which we understand an actual social system produced by the power of the people and a mechanism restricting people’s behaviors structurally and dynamically. Prof. Watanabe taught us to grasp the political system, social system, and economic structure in a certain region or period, as a structured or an organized power system. He also set up the task of grasping a social phenomenon, “Byzantine” which was rooted in the concept of Europe, as a whole.

I have to apologize to Prof. Watanabe for having not introduced his intellectual interests in detail in his late life after the third period when he retired from University. He was constantly

reading foreign newspapers, such as *Die Zeit*, *Le monde*, *Humanité*, as well as *Pravda* since 1985, when Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev was elected the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Nobody else could have been able to keep reading this large amount of news material every week in Japan. We would like to introduce his work on modern world history when we have another opportunity.