

## REVIEW

# Philosophy of Gerontology from the Past to the Future in Japan

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### ABSTRACT

Gerontology is not only an interdisciplinary and intra disciplinary study, but also an international and inter-professional study. Gerontology is a study to create awareness on the concept among people, throughout the world. The philosophy of Gerontology is a lively active philosophy to explore the nature of humanity itself and to practice learning. Moreover, Gerontology is considered as a science as well as human philosophy. This paper introduces philosophy of Gerontology in Japan from the past to the present. It explains that Zen has fundamental philosophy of Gerontology.

## 1. Introduction

Gerontology is the comprehensive studies of aging, which are not only interdisciplinary and intra disciplinary study, but also international and inter-professional to create awareness on the concept throughout the world<sup>[1]</sup>. According to the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education, “Gerontology is the study of the aging processes and of individuals as they grow from middle age through later life. It includes: (1) the study of physical, mental and social changes in older people as they age, (2) the investigation of the changes in the society resulting from our aging population, (3) the application of this knowledge to policies and programs”. Geriatrics is a study of medical and clinical about aging people. It is introduced as follows: (1) the study of health and disease in later life, (2)

the comprehensive health care of older persons and the well-being provided by their informal caregiver. Therefore, it must be emphasized that the geriatric medicine is very important aspect of gerontology, as well. This article contains only preliminary, associations about the issue whether gerontology should be developed in the direction of a philosophical discipline in connection with Japanese related culture and philosophy.

## 2. What is Gerontology?

Gerontology is existed to learn more of the purpose of life in not only the terms of longevity, but also of the quality of life. Gerontology is considered as the comprehensive studies of aging which is not only an interdisciplinary and intra disciplinary study. Moreover, it is the international

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and inter-professional study of aging to create awareness of the concept among people throughout the globe. According to the Academy of Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE), “Gerontology is the study of the aging processes and individuals as they grow from middle age through later life. This definition is included as follows: (1) the study of physical, mental, and social changes in older people as they age, (2) the investigation of the changes in society resulting from our aging population, (3) the application of this knowledge to policies and programs”. Geriatrics is considered as follows: “(1) the study of health and disease in later life, (2) the comprehensive health care of older persons and the well-being of their informal caregiver.” Therefore, it must be emphasized that geriatric medicine is a very important aspect of gerontology as well. This paper contains a discussion of philosophical discipline in connection with Japanese culture and religious practice including Zen.

The word “Gerontology” is introduced through the book that Ilya Metchnikoff (1845-1916) wrote in “the nature of man” in 1903 as follows, “Recognition of the true goal of life and of science as the only means by which that goal may be attained would group themselves around that, as in former days men were held together by religion. I think it extremely probable that scientific study of old age and of death, two branches of science that may be called gerontology and thanatology, will bring about great modification in the course of the last period of life”<sup>[2]</sup>. Metchnikoff is known as a zoologist and microbiologist, but his interest has been developed to the studies with various languages and cultures, and seeking the true meaning of life, science, and religion.

### 3. What is Philosophy of Gerontology?

Philosophy of Gerontology is generally understood as an applied Science with all age related practical pedagogy. It draws forth the significance of human existence with practical science for applying into Japanese martial arts even it is called budo for various age persons with various conditions. Budo means way of Bushi’s living matter. “Gerontology” is generally translated as Rounengaku in Japan<sup>[3,4,5]</sup>. Rou means Old. Nen means Year. Gaku means science. Even before modern University was established in Japan Ekken Kaibara (1630-1714) introduced Gerontological Concept through his book, the Book of Yojokun<sup>[6,7]</sup>. It is also translated as “Soureigaku”. This was originally created by Nippon Care-Fit Education Institute<sup>[8]</sup>. Professor Edward F. Ansello at Virginia Commonwealth University gave addresses on The Clark Tibbitts Lecture at the 37th annual meeting of the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education, entitled: What colors would we add?

The curriculum palette. Professor Ansello reported that the democratization of aging has spread across the world and the so-called globalization of aging has brought yet another lens to examine what we teach<sup>[9]</sup>. Dr. Ansello and myself, Ryo Takahashi worked together with a number of Americans began collaborating with Southeast Asian colleagues about 2003, with the grand vision of bringing a set of curriculum standards to Japan. Although the overwhelming majority of Japan’s medical schools had established geriatrics departments, there was at the time only one university, Oberlin University with an educational gerontology program. I, Ryo Takahashi organized Gerontology International Conference in India with the hosts at Andhra University wished to initiate a yoga gerontology program, incorporating not our American concept of yoga as exercise but the sense of meditation, internal communion with a spirit, acceptance rather than resistance. Most of general gerontologist from abroad became aware that their content (subject matter), their methods (research studies) and their values (aging as decline) had limitations. Quantitative studies and descriptive statistics appraise the normative characteristics of groups, the collective of acquired behaviors and lifestyles”. Each Japanese Kanji character has meaning with symbolic characters. “Sou” in “Soureigaku” consists of “Kura” and “Katana”. “Kura” means “path finding” or “pioneering”. “Katana” has means “sword”, which stands for the action “to open the way”. “Rei” consists of “Ha” and “Rei”. This originated from the idea that strengthening one’s teeth leads to his/her longevity. “Rei” is a pictograph that shows people gathering and kneeling down to seek enlightenment. These words show that “Soureigaku= Creating Aging Learning or Study” is a type of learning in which people come together and teach each other ways of happiness and longevity. Gerontology is also history of individual life which is called genealogy. That is explained that searching family history is searching philosophy of individual gerontology<sup>[10]</sup>. Zen is Japanese word which is derived from the Chinese word “chán” and the sanskrit word “dhyana”, which mean “meditation”. In sanskrit, the root meaning is “to see, to observe, to look”. I would like to introduce how Zen can be applied into Philosophy of Gerontology<sup>[11]</sup>.

### 4. What is Zen

Zen is internationally recognized by Dr. Daisetsu Suzuki<sup>[11]</sup>. There is a book entitled “Zen to Chojuhou(Zen and Method of Longivity)in Japan”<sup>[12]</sup>. Many people are interested in Zen. Zen came from the Japanese term for the principle in Buddhism<sup>[13]</sup>. The term Zen is derived from the Japanese pronunciation of the Middle Chinese word

chan, which is a Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit word of dhyāna (“meditation”). Bushido stresses importance of Zanshin within Buddhism. Zanshin is understood as the state when the mind is fully vigilant and aware of its surroundings; when the mind remains still without being attached to anything and is totally present during every moment and action in the here and now. Zanshin is a concept which is found in Zen and Budo (Japanese martial arts), particularly Kyudo, Kendo, Shogido and in many Japanese arts, such as Ikebana (flower arrangement), Sado (the tea ceremony) and Shodo (ink painting), as well. We can Keiko in Bushido for practice among master and disciples. Keiko means to learn from the ancestors and old cultures in Japan. That can be understood as adaptive practical philosophy, as well. In nowadays, it is used not only martial arts and performing arts, but what masters and teachers teach is called Keiko. Also, practicing what you have just learned is called Keiko. Rehearsals include not only traditional performing arts but also piano lessons. In each case, we will improve our ability by Keiko. Rehearsal is also used in the meaning of “Keiko”, but it is also used not only in the arts but also when it is not called “Keiko” because it is included philosophy with all actions in all learning process in all life.

Keiko has philosophy to learn each other regardless age and length of experience with respect and humble soul which is called Edification. The word edify comes from the French edifier and from the Latin aedificare and means to “improve spiritually” and to “instruct” (Robert K. Barnhart, The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology [New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1988], s.v. “edify,” 315). The Oxford English Dictionary gives this meaning: “In religious use: To build up (the church, the soul) in faith and holiness; to benefit spiritually; to strengthen, support” (2nd ed., s.v. “edify,” 5:71). Thus, to edify is to instruct and improve the soul in knowledge generally, and in particular to increase in moral and religious knowledge, in faith and holiness...To edify is part of a revelatory process. The word revelatory refers to the supernal gifts of the Spirit, the source of all light and truth<sup>[14]</sup>. Zen is not only practice, but also meditative prayer to universe. People may not be recognized that is pray or meditation. It is not really important because everything is relating to harmonize to one common language of human beings in universe as we breathe in each moment time. This understanding can be considered how men has to be edified to create harmony through such practical philosophy of Gerontology.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Understanding of individual value is important which may be developed into our own philosophy which will

become original philosophy of Gerontology with individual culture, and art and human nature. This philosophy can be learned by learning and observing ourselves from third person. This is a concept of Meditation, Prayer with pondering, and Zen. When Rabindranath Tagore, the first Asian Nobel Prize awardee visited Japan, he expressed his feel of Japan with respect and love to the people as follows:

“West is dangerous for Japan is not the imitation of the outer features of the West, but the acceptance of the motive force of Western nationalism as her own”<sup>[15]</sup>. Suzuki Daisetz gave also his lecture that Some Japanese think that the East doesn’t have an independent philosophy like the West, and somehow think that the East are inferior to the West, but that is a mistake. The philosophy of the Orientals is not “human”, and is always out of it, not out of it. This is its characteristic. Even art is not separated from humanity. Music, poetry, and painting are all closely related to the training of the person<sup>[16]</sup>.

(1) The Japan Gerontology Society was founded in 1959. However, even before modern geriatrics and Gerontological society was founded in Japan Ekken Kaibara (1630-1714) introduced Gerontological Concept through the Book of Yojokun. The purpose of Gerontology is not only contribute Aging study, but also providing assistance to professionals a variety of fields such as industry, government, academia and the private-sector who are interested in improving services for an aged society. Providers of services to the aging and their families require wide-ranging expertise in gerontology.

(2) Family history is world widely known through the book called “Roots: It is important to learn oneself who we are as human beings. It is called Genealogy work. Genealogy work is a part of Gerontology. This work is applied for school teaching and learning within Positively Aging Curriculum.

(3) Martial Arts is originally called in Japanese as Budo. Sasaki stated that historically, Budo has had a very broad meaning<sup>[17]</sup>. Even nowadays, Budo is still used in a broad way, in that there is still a tendency for it to be used to define a culture of spirituality and moral values. It is important to keep these pioneers’ SOUL as we call again, “Kigatsuku” means “an inner spirit to act without being told what to do”. SOUL can be grown by See, Observe, Understand, and Listen to learn each other. Zanshin is also a central philosophy of Bushido. Zanshin is a way of Yawara. Zanshin is unconditional SOUL to grow for caring and concerning others even relaxing dairy living. Zanshin is to polite to others with humble heart to express thanks. Zanshin is a way of learning from everybody to grow oneself and going back to basic principle mind. The

most important feature of Gerontology is the research and practice to raise individual quality of life based on current living circumstances, placing the right people in the right jobs. It is required to apply the power of “awareness” according to each country or environment. Therefore, in order to carry the project forward, it is important to focus on developing the potential ability of awareness, which is naturally possessed by human being (SOUL Theory), before acquiring cultures around the world. SOUL Theory is a hands-on theory, which argues that developing synthetic abilities of Seeing, Observing, Understanding and Listening develops the potential ability of human nature. The term “gerontology” is derived from Ilya Ilyich Mechnikov (1845-1916) in the book “The Nature of Man: Studies in Optimistic Philosophy”, “The basis of research is the real life and scientific objectives when we take a comprehensive approach to research based on various languages and cultures, including religious and philosophical fundamental ideas from various perspectives. People can become one towards one ideal” [2].

I recommended the following action for developing applied gerontology in future.

(1) It is important to develop his/her own philosophy of life instead of learning philosophy of others.

(2) Active learning with collaborative learning is necessary to develop unlearned experience to share each other in national and international setting with culture difference.

(3) It is important to breakout barrier of academic fields to make and find commonality to unit as one living and acting community.

(4) It is the most important to find of self-value of ourselves with mind of respect others by searching family history and keeping his/her own living history as journal toward to the journal in the context of our future as an individual and community journey from Japan as a central of the SUN shining.

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