



PR-08-TB-1-E

Synopsis of the research project (Head : Thomas Brisson associate fellow, University of Tsukuba, Japan)

Starting Date : Autumn 2008

Circulation of scholars and knowledge between Japan and the West.

This research plan follows two complementary lines of reasoning: it provides a sociological account of Japanese contemporary intellectual migrations to the West as well as an analysis of how these circulations have resulted in various exchanges of knowledge between different (national and cultural) spaces.

It aims, first, at understanding the current patterns of intellectual and academic migrations. It focuses on scholars who work in the field of human sciences and seeks to analyze who, among them, move, how and for what reasons. Doing so, it seeks not only to understand the sociological dimension of contemporary events, but also to link them with the history of social sciences in Japan during the 20th century. As a matter of fact, the Japanese field of human and social sciences originally developed by adapting European and American theories and methodological devices. The history of intellectual exchanges (and consequently of intellectual migrations) between Japan and the West is therefore at least one century old and allows us to understand the present in the light of the past: what differences and what continuities can we observe between the current process of scientific globalization and the previous academic connections? To what extent do American and European social sciences impinge on the Japanese research: has the centrality of US universities superseded the prior European influence; to what extent, also, is the Japanese field of human sciences focussed on international (vs. national) questions? Last but not least, are the Western-type social sciences still to be the dominating scientific pattern in the future or could we give credit to the idea that Asian scholars will create their own social sciences, without borrowing from the West, as some Japanese scholars, among others, have recently argued?

The second line of reasoning followed in this research project is based on the hypothesis that the circulation of Japanese scholars to the West cannot be understood without analyzing, in the same time, the circulation of Western scholars to Japan. Needless to say that the fields of Japanese studies in the West have been growing, during the last decades, to an unprecedented extent. How do these European and American scholars analyze the Japanese society, and to what extent do their point of view differ – or converge – with the one of their Japanese colleagues? What texts, methodical devices and bodies of knowledge do they bring to (and conversely bring back from) Japan? What kind of collaboration but also (sometimes fruitful) misunderstanding are created through these various circulations of Japanese and Western scholars?