

## A marginal in the history of Greek philosophy: On the two terms of Greek philosophy in Edicts of Ashoka

Osamu KANAZAWA

In this article, I will examine the two terms of Greek philosophy used in the translation of Edicts of Ashoka, including their historical circumstances and routes of introduction. First, the appropriateness of vocabulary selection in translation will be considered. This will be done through comparison with inscriptions in Indian language. Next, the route of their influx into the Indian cultural sphere should be observed. This is the task of inferring the information network of Greek philosophy according to historical perspective.

Ashoka, the third Mauryan Emperor, lost hundreds of thousands of lives in wars with neighboring state. As a result of his repentance, he abandoned military rule and replaced it with dharma-based governance. He constructed many inscriptions inscribing his policy and his views. These are the Edicts of Ashoka. They have been found not only in present-day India, but also in Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. It is noteworthy that two of these Edicts were in Greek. One is bilingual in Greek and Aramaic (first inscription), and the other is only in Greek (second inscription).

What is even more surprising is that the first inscription uses two terms from Greek philosophy. The first is “ἀπέχεται βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐμψύχων” in lines 5–6. This phrase was used by the Pythagoreans and Empedocles to express the prohibition of eating meat, and I suppose that the translators used this phrase since both of them believed reincarnation, similar to Indian culture.

The second one is “εἴ τινες ἀκρατεῖς πέπαννται τῆς ἀκρασίας κατὰ δύναμιν” in lines 9–10. This vocabulary for ἀκρασία, lack of self-control, strongly reminds us of the Aristotelian Ethics. However, there is no equivalent expression in the Edicts in Indian languages. I infer that this is because the translators analyzed the Indian society of the time based on knowledge of Greek philosophy and used it in their own translations.

How did the translators obtain philosophical knowledge in a land so far away from Greece? Fortunately, there is a hint to this problem. This is an inscription excavated from the ruin of the Greek city of Bactria, Ai Khanum (presumed to be Alexandria Oxiana), located northwest of Kandahar. The name ‘Clearchus’ is written here, and this is a philosopher of the Peripatetic school. A fragment of papyri containing Plato’s theory of ideas has also been discovered. From these it is proven that Greek philosophy reached at least this ruin. From these evidences, it seems reasonable to assume that the translators’ knowledge had its source in this ruin.

These considerations provide an example of the transplantation of Greek philosophy to the Kandahar region, which can be called a marginal in the history of Greek philosophy.