

## Foreword

The immediate occasion for gathering together the thirteen essays that make up this volume was a conference held at the Humboldt University in Berlin from 18 to 21 October of this year. Entitling the collection *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy* was a natural choice. Geographically, the discussions took place at the periphery of the circle of scholars interested in the indigenous philosophy of Japan. In terms of content, there is much to be found in these pages that reflect pioneer work in the ongoing development of that tradition. The fact is, the number of students abroad, Japanese or otherwise, specializing in the field is already overtaking the number in Japan. The volume, and I would venture to say also the quality, of the research is not far behind. But more than place and focus, it was the frontier ethos that suggested the title. The same spirit of cooperation and exchange that has become a defining mark of those participating in the small but steadily expanding international forum on Japanese philosophy was once again in evidence.

All together, there is no longer anything particularly strange about addressing the future direction of Japanese philosophy from Europe. A mere twenty years ago the claim might have sounded presumptuous, if not slightly ridiculous. Even today the idea that an assembly of scholars from six countries, most of them less than two years on either side of their doctoral dissertation, should in any sense be considered representative of the borderlands of Japanese philosophy may sound to some like little more than misplaced flattery. It is a good deal more than that. Even the language barrier, which so many Japanese intellectuals have so long thought to be an insurmountable obstacle that keeps outsiders permanently at one remove from the subtleties of their native thought and insures that control over its development will remain firmly in the

hands of those who have been born and reared on the inside, has begun to come down, stone by stone, as surely and demonstrably as the Berlin Wall itself. I think it is time to say it clearly: *Japanese philosophy belongs to the world*. No more than Aristotle is primarily for the Greeks, Kierkegaard for the Danes, Llull for the Catalans, or al-Ghazzālī for the Iranians, Dōgen and Nishida have outgrown the circumstances of their birth. Their writings have left the ranks of the arcane and esoteric to be read and studied around the world as part of the general patrimony of philosophy.

The number of up and coming scholars straddling cultures to wrestle with the philosophical texts of Japan, particularly twentieth-century thought, is increasing. Little matter that Western academia is slow to reflect this change. For now, it is enough that this younger generation is motivated and hard at work. In time they will be in a better position than any of us to decide what the next step is and how best to take it.

I am proud to have had the chance to participate in the meetings and to prepare this volume for publication. A special thanks goes to Ralf Müller for organizing the entire event and managing the internet site of “Nihon tetsugaku” to facilitate content among participants and share information with the wider scholarly community. In addition to basic funding from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, I would also like to acknowledge the financial assistance of the Centre d’Etudes Japonaises at the Institut Nationale des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris.

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15 December 2006

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