Why Bother?

Relational Knowing and the Study of World Philosophies

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In her book *Caring to Know* (2016), Vrinda Dalmiya calls us to "engage with the messy issues of unjust privilege," which play out in our discipline.[1] Dalmiya urges us to critically reflect upon the power-encoded spaces we inhabit when we do (cross-cultural) philosophy. Our current landscape, even in cross-cultural philosophy, is, as she argues, still dominated by a "hegemony in the production of theories where the non-Western can only serve as 'objects' of study in discursive systems originating from the West."[2] Approaches like Dalmiya's urge us to be more attentive to the power politics played out in philosophy. One reason being that they might cause serious damage to those subjects whose lives are entangled with the marginalized traditions we study. Authors like Dalmiya endorse a philosophizing which is more attentive to the history of this young sub-discipline as well as the geography of our own locations when we engage in this kind of philosophy. They are concerned about what Jim Heisig

1. Dalmiya 2016, 279.
2. Dalmiya 2016, 302.

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in another context calls the "specificity [of theory] masquerading as a universal."[3]

As a step toward resisting the existing hegemony in the production of theories, there have recently been efforts to develop the notion of a 'relational knower.' In the first part of this article, I will sketch salient characteristics of such a knower. In the second part, I will, through the perspective of a relational knower, explore whether, and how, it would be meaningful to draw on some of Nishida Kitarō's and Ueda Shizuteru's thoughts in this context. In the concluding part, I will dwell on one chapter in Indo-Japanese relations to argue that the perspective of a relational knower will shed a more nuanced light on it. The paper thus seeks to make the claim that a transformation in our self-conception as a knower is needed if we seek to study world philosophies judiciously. If the argument made in these pages is plausible, it could be implemented by those seeking to negotiate a middle ground between a strict philological word-to-word translation and a radical liberalization in dealing with primary sources.[4]

WHY A RELATIONAL KNOWER?

As one hitherto dominant understanding of philosophy will have it, this discipline is engaged in "disinterested," "impartial," and "neutral" inquiry into the very essence of our being. Recent scholarship in fields like feminist theory and critical race studies give us plausible reasons to doubt this entrenched belief inasmuch as this belief fails to account for the complex character of human understanding. When we seek to understand something, we do not encounter phenomena as entities or facts external to us. We are thrown into the world; our intertwining with it cannot be completely severed even though several,

3. HEISIG 2003, 66.
4. See for example MORISATO 2016.

general philosophical accounts proclaim to achieve, and maintain, this separation. As Mariana Ortega rightly observes:

> We are always living our lives in specific situations and contexts, and thus being-between worlds, being-in-worlds, being-at-ease and becoming-with are to be understood as happening within those situations and contexts.[5]

Several social factors seem to seep into our philosophical inquiry and influence our processes of understanding deeply. Inasmuch as they directly influence the context of discovery, our knowledge-seeking endeavour is contingent upon such factors and particular through and through insofar as it is deeply influenced by them. The questions we seek to ask in philosophical inquiry, and the answers we claim to obtain in this process, are deeply coloured by our (social) positioning, part of which is determined by varied, intersecting factors like social class, gender, ethnicity, age, cultural affiliation, linguistic capacities, etc. However highly sophisticated our philosophical training might be, our restricted perceptual, linguistic and inferential capabilities only allow for partial perspectives on a particular (philosophical) problem at a given point in time.

One upshot of these ruminations would be that our current academic ways of generating knowledge will have to be critically scrutinized, and perhaps amended, because they seem to be curiously truncated from practice. However, if one did attempt to study philosophical practice more closely, what would be the way forward? One way would be to study common, more mundane ways through which human beings gather information and knowledge. Such a study would illustrate that philosophical information-seeking practices parallel those in ordinary life. Basic knowledge about the world is necessary for human survival. Given the limits of human capacities though, we are epistemically dependent upon other knowers. This dependence

5. ORTEGA 2016, 11.

gives rise to a community of individual knowledge seekers, who team up with each other to exchange information. These discursive interactions are the sites in which knowledge is produced. Generated through discursive exchanges, knowledge is tested, transmitted, and modified within a specific knowledge community. We make meanings with others in a particular spatiotemporal and socio-material setting. Knowers, as we see, obtain knowledge through concrete relations with others. Knowledge results through these relations and is not external to them. In fact, even the notion of a knower seems to gain depth through these very processes.

Now, if our being in the world heavily influences our knowing the world, it is clear that this influence continues to hold when we attempt to know our own selves too. In these attempts, we tend to encounter a self which is connected with, and imbricated in, the phenomena in the world. It too seems to gain in depth in its engagement with the world. In this engagement, the self is not necessarily experienced as operating as one homogenous, seamless whole. Rather, it sometimes undertakes epistemic shifts and somersaults in its travels across specific contexts; its access to these contexts would be restricted without these shifts. To use Ortega's term, this self is often experienced as a complex, "multiplicitous", "decentered self."[6] So, does it make sense to claim that there is a sense of self at all? This question can be affirmed. A sense of self is generated through the temporal continuity of its experiences as well as, to use Ortega's term, through an attribution of "mineness."

Indeed, the multi-faceted nature of the self could possibly go unnoticed under normal circumstances. It is, however, likely that certain situations trigger off a sense of unease. This could be the case when there is a rupture in daily practices. Following Ortega, a thin sense of unease results from experiencing minimal ruptures in daily practices, while a thick sense is experienced as a result of unfamiliar "norms,

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6. Ortega 2016, 74.

practices, and the resulting contradictory feelings about who we are given our experience in the different worlds we inhabit."[7]

Now, generations of philosophy students have been taught to believe that philosophical inquiry is driven by a centred, seamless, universal self, which alone can facilitate successful results. But if this belief does not match our experiences, we do seem to have reasons to question this belief and explore other possibilities, which could create a better fit between beliefs and lived experiences. Several cross-cultural philosophers endorse a "lived-theory" for precisely this reason.[8] The idea is that such a theory would be enriched by the experiences we have in our daily lives; our future experiences, on their part, could profit from a constant recalibration of cognitive processes. The hope is that a theory seriously born out of a "gut-wrenching personal struggle," and in which external factors like history and geography play salient roles, could be an interesting possibility in testing new ground.[9]

The notion of a relational knower does, it seems, differ in important ways from standard, conventional conceptions of the same. In this regard, the intellectual virtue of "relational humility" (a term suggested by Dalmiya) could be promising.[10]

To understand how, let us briefly apply these ruminations to the cross-cultural context: A relational knower would not strive to maximize what is conventionally taken as knowledge about another culture, for instance. This knower would, in fact, just have to abandon her position of epistemic privilege and become more receptive to "cognitive Others," who happen to be placed at social locations differing from their own.[11] This knower might have to realize that moments

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7. Ortega 2016, 61.

8. Ortega 2016, 17.

9. Ortega 2016, 38.

10. For a more detailed exposition of the relational knower see Kirloskar-Steinbach and Kalmanson 2021.

11. Dalmiya 2016, 114.

"of self-receding and other-foregrounding" are "organically related," should our inquiry elicit viable cross-cultural results.[12]

Now, with some background in current developments in cross-cultural philosophy, one could be willing to concede that applying conventional accounts of the self in some cross-cultural contexts may indeed prove to be an awkward and lame academic exercise. Albeit having the potential to make the studied context more amenable to concerns in disciplinary philosophy, such exercises could just be strewn with dangers of cultural essentialism, reification, etc., which many cross-cultural philosophers avoid as they are standard methodological weaknesses. But why underscore that even a relational knower should be guided by moral commitments? Why underscore that the practice of specific intellectual virtues is salient to this inquirer too?

As noted earlier, the relational knower is imbricated in phenomena. Some such phenomena relate to power dynamics too, which from the point of the viewer change from context to context. In other words, in some contexts, a person could find oneself in a role associated with erstwhile dominators, in other contexts, however, the inhabited role could be associated with those of erstwhile dominated, or even one associated with those who consciously resist domination. A person's role could change depending on the concrete situation. Consequently, dominators, dominated, resisters are not fixed, static points in the role-landscape. Ortega seeks to capture this momentum when she writes: "Selves need to be understood in their complexity and in terms of the different roles they play in the matrix of power relations such that each of us can be understood variously as oppressors, oppressed, or as resisting."[13] Through these shifts, the relational knower becomes deeply sensitive to the power dynamics being played out in societal interactions.

Against the background of these ruminations, there is reason to

12. Dalmiya 2016, 119.
13. Ortega 2016, 51.

hold that the notion of a relational self has a good, hitherto relatively untapped, potential in the study of world philosophies. It would allow those of us philosophers who have some marginal identities, whether professional or otherwise, to free ourselves from conceptual frameworks of dominant identities, which make us believe that only certain specific ways of being in the world and cognitively accessing these ways are legitimate. In addition, it would orient us towards a more nuanced study of the material (see below).

Philosophizing as a personal adventure

Now, why should debates, which seem to lean heavily on feminist theory and Latina philosophy, be in any way relevant to specialists on Japanese philosophy? Let me briefly sketch some points of contact.

Christopher Goto-Jones' claim that "[t]he dimensions of 'philosophy' themselves become political boundaries" would probably be seconded by Naoki Sakai, who for a long time now has repeatedly underscored the need to become more aware of the power-encoded spaces we inhabit when we do philosophy, or rather theory.[14] Sakai warns about the "civilizational spell," which hinders us from associating theory with Asia.[15] Noting the "*microphysics of power relations*," which still continue to persist in the production of theory, he brings to our attention how theory production is confined only to that which is circumscribed as being the "West," although many of us perceive ourselves as partaking in a global academic exchange.[16] He points out that Asia is a self-projection of the so-called "West." It was created to be its other. "The West," he writes, "comes into being precisely when 'being different from us' is thus rendered analogous to 'being Asian,' 'being Afri-

14. Goto-Jones 2005, 1.
15. Sakai 2010, 441.
16. Sakai 2010, 445.

can,' and so forth."[17] In this supposed binary between the "West" and the "Rest," the "West" is not allocated a particular place on the globe. It hovers above us. It is, in his observation, not an entity which can develop and grow, but rather an "allocation of differences."[18] From this static meta-position, it develops theory for the rest of the globe. In Sakai's analysis, educational institutions in Asia still continue to think of themselves as importers of "western theory." "It is understood as something of a truism that theory cannot be generated in the 'Rest'; it must be imported from the West."[19]

Recently, Bret Davis warns about building "isolationist intellectual walls" in philosophy, which seek to systematically exclude the introduction of world philosophies into the curriculum.[20] He underscores that the current status quo of "Eurocentric exclusivism" in not a viable option for a field which prides itself on being open to dialogue. Davis urges colleagues engaging in disciplinary philosophy to open up to an exploration of other philosophical vistas and warns: "Genuine cross-cultural philosophy is an intensely personal adventure of thought, rather than a disengaged taxidermy of ideas."[21]

Way back in 1996, Yoko Arisaka drew attention to the larger social setup in which Japanese philosophy was fashioned. When Nishida Kitarō and his contemporaries philosophised in Asia in the early decades of the 20th century, she astutely observed, their engagement with contemporary philosophy was asymmetrical in one crucial respect: While they meticulously studied and imbibed philosophical developments in Europe, they continued to be outside the orbit of their European counterparts, at least in their public acknowledgement of relevant sources. Ironically, thus, the point of reference of philosophy, in general, continued to be wholly European, although think-

17. SAKAI 2010, 20.
18. SAKAI 2009, 184.
19. SAKAI 2010, 19.
20. DAVIS 2017, 116.
21. DAVIS 2009, 11.

ers like Nishida Kitarō were simultaneously involved in mapping out "indigenous" philosophies in which "they [continued] to negotiate [...] their relation to European intellectual trends."[22] These indigenous philosophies were constructed as offering better, more wholistic, alternatives to philosophies in Europe, while also being better grounded in local realities. Today, we are struck by how some of these early "formulations of anti-Eurocentrism" contain, to some extent, apologetic elements.[23] Although these thinkers grappled with the dominating elements of the philosophic universalism which they saw descending on them from the "West," they in their own works fashioned an "East," which in its universality could match its counterpart. In their myriad attempts at fashioning their own alternatives to the "West," they took pains at working out the global impact of these philosophies. They seemed to have had no doubts that these philosophies could offer viable philosophical alternatives on the global stage.

Arisaka's warning about the extensive after-effects of this self-positioning should be heeded more extensively. It would not be exaggerated to state that large chunks of cross-cultural philosophical literature, whether being produced in Japan, India, Europe or North America, still seem to be under the sway of this positioning, unfortunately. Sakai's ethereal West apparently hangs over our activities like a Damocles sword, hereby hindering us from exploring the creative potential of these world philosophies.

Given the fragile status of cross-cultural philosophy in most educational institutions across the globe, and the relatively low chances of immediate changes in the near future, it does seem to be prudent to play the ball low, at least for now. It does seem to be advantageous to refrain from openly admitting that there are indeed non-Euroamerican philosophies, which merit philosophical analysis, even though one may indeed know better. And yet, I would like to do just that. Allow

22. ARISAKA 1999, 543.
23. ARISAKA 1999, 545.

me to explore, whether, and how, Nishida Kitarō's work can be implemented in debates of the relational self.

To begin with, Nishida Kitarō would, in my reading, endorse some key aspects of the conception sketched above. He would draw our attention to the dialectical relation between individuals and their communities. Although individuals are deeply influenced by the cultural patterns of their communities, they too can "counter-determine the cultures in which they live."[24] Human beings are neither the free-floating, atomistic, unencumbered individuals critiqued by communitarian thinkers nor are they beings completely predetermined by their native communities. They are rooted in certain cultural traditions and yet can potentially criticize aspects of the very roots which bind them to their communities. Two presuppositions seem to be in play here: The individual is aware of her communal binding and has the ability to question this binding. She could feel motivated in a particular situation to do so because, for whatever reason, she is not happy with the status quo and seeks to break free of it. To use Ueda Shizuteru's phrase, individuals do not experience their own world as being one of "infinite openness."[25] Rather, they perceive themselves as being trapped within the boundaries of a delimited world. I read these thoughts as complementing Ortega's observations about ruptures in daily practice. For whatever reason, an individual could simply experience a hiatus between expected behavioural patterns and one's own lack-of-fit with them.

For our purposes, what is important about Nishida Kitarō's thoughts on the place of dialogue is that this place sets up a relation between the people involved in it. The place of dialogue determines the individuation of the people involved. When two individuals meet in such a dialogue, they do not meet as representatives of their own traditions but as "two 'focal points' of the self-determination of the

24. Davis 2014, 177.
25. Ueda 1995, 9.

ultimate place (or universal) of absolute nothingness, that is, as two uniquely 'creative elements of the creative world'."[26]

Nishida Kitarō reasons that these individuals are not to be taken as particular instantiations of a universal of being which predetermines who and what they are. Rather, the place of dialogue allows them to delve into the realm of "absolute nothingness." Not only does this dialectical universal enable such a dialogue, it is also deeply freedom enhancing. It allows those involved in the dialogue to engage with, and realize, those parts of their selves which are not predetermined by cultural, nativistic or political circumstances. This is possible because the place of dialogue is not the site of an affirmation of individual characteristics, but a place in which several possibilities in experiencing this absolute nothingness can be explored. To be able to fully explore these possibilities, however, individuals would have to consciously empty themselves of attributions which make them believe that they are self-contained, individual and distinctive selves. One way for such a radical cut would be to consciously free themselves from the authority of any pre-given tradition. The dialogue allows for this cut since its "place of nothingness" is the "nonreductive medium of dialectical interaction."[27]

In my understanding of this place of dialogue, Nishida Kitarō would probably not explicitly contest that this sense of mineness, which is generated through temporal continuity, holds the various, often conflicting, experiences, together. However, he would caution about an all too fixed "mineness" which is deployed to define the uniqueness of the individual and, in a further step, clung onto in the dialogue. In fact, he would argue that such a sense of mineness has to be discarded in the dialogue. The I, he underscores, is one which is achieved through, or after, a process of discarding the self. In Ueda Shizuteru's words: "I am myself by not being myself." Or in German: "Ich bin, indem ich nicht

26. Davis 2014, 180.
27. Davis 2014, 182.

ich bin, ich."[28] This is the seat of Nishida Kitarō's "action-intuition." I and Thou, he would underscore, co-emerge in this place of nothingness. They arise through the selves mutually individuating each other. In certain ways, the I and the Thou bind each other inasmuch as they co-arise through the mutual experience of absolute nothingness.

Analogous remarks can be made about societies too. The individuation of societies, it seems, takes place in such a dialogue. It is doubtful whether a strong communal self-understanding of being a self-standing, individual society can be developed further when there is a perceptible hiatus between this self-perception and the other's perception. Secondly, if societies consist of individual members who are instantiations of a dialectical universal of nothingness, it would follow that societies, through their members, too, are instantiations of such a universal, of course with these instantiations being in flux. They do not incorporate essential characteristics of a particular community, nation or state. This means that both individuals and communities are not to be perceived as self-contained habitats of individual or collective egos.[29] Rather, they are perceived as distinctive entities through their interaction with other individuals and groups. And yet, this interaction reveals the momentariness of such a distinctiveness. At every single point in time, there are several other possibilities of realizing the potentialities of absolute nothingness, both for individuals and communities. One sees the one in the many and the many in the one continually.

> The world of the self-determination of the dialectical universal which determines individuals as the self-identity of absolute contradictoriness must have the precise meaning of being the world of personal life. Social

28. Ueda 1995, 1.

29. As Michiko Yusa notes, Nishida Kitarō advanced the view that "genuine culture must discard its 'ego' and self-complacency to take its place openly in the wider world." Yusa 2009, 162.

and historical determination must in essence be the self-determination of the world of personal life.[30]

Another similarity would be that Nishida Kitarō too would underscore the deep connection between individual knowers involved in the dialogue and morality. Ethically speaking, these knowers, he would say, are also bound by a deep sense of responsibility for each other. The Thou can arise only if the I supports its attempts to achieve freedom for the self as well as freedom from the I-ness of the self. To paraphrase Ueda Shizuteru: I and Thou arise when those involved in a dialogue alternate between the roles of a responsible host, who talks, and a responsible guest, who listens, albeit being ready to take on the host role when necessary. "Im Grunde," writes Ueda Shizuteru, "geht es um den gegenseitigen Austausch des 'dem Anderen-den Vorzug-geben.'"[31]

This deep feeling for the other in one's own self allows one to recognize the alterity of the other. It arises after experiencing the deep recesses of one's own true self. Importantly, Nishida Kitarō's understanding does not claim to tell one what to do but rather how to be:

> In short, absolutely good conduct is conduct that takes the actualization of personality as its goal, that is, conduct that functions for the sake of the unity of consciousness.[32]

Notably, this dialogue can only be set in motion through the motivation of individuals who are keen to engage in it. One possible reason for this is that they have acutely experienced the shortcomings of their current ways of being. This experience drives them to initiate a dialogue with those situated in their proximity. To quote Ueda Shizuteru, they "suffer [...] from the closedness and dimly perceiving the wrongness of [their] ways, and for the sake of truth, make [...] the attempt to open [themselves] up."[33]

30. Nishida 1970, 83.
31. Davis 2011, 304.
32. Nishida 1990, 133.
33. Ueda 1995, 10.

Nishida Kitarō's "dialogue of dialogues" seems to suggest that an experience of being at unease in the world should be taken seriously in theory. In fact, this dialogue would highlight the need to empty essentializing attributions of the self from another perspective. If a person feels unfree after interacting with another who is not socialized in the same social imaginary, and as a result thereof wants to change their own status quo, they would have to encounter the other person on an equal footing so that the transformation in the status quo can begin. If the latter, for their part, experiences the former as being socially dominant, the chances are high that the exchange will be unable to yield the expected results. The latter's experience could in this case trigger off a chain reaction, in which every individual reaction in the chain is a response to perceived power disparities, thus stymieing a more productive exchange. This spiral can be thwarted, when the person who is being perceived as being dominantly situated makes clear that the exchange is not sought out for a confirmation of privilege, nor for intellectual posturing or cultural appropriation etc., but as an opportunity to learn. Only when the readiness to fearlessly hear is communicated well and understood, can a fearless speaking be initiated. The first step at initiating a new practice of trust, it seems, will have to be taken by the dominantly situated person.[34]

Since this new space opens up hitherto untried roles, however, both participants in the exchange will have to strive to keep the exchange going. For example, both would have to make room for each other to learn these roles through repeated usage and circumstances. Both will have to endeavour to maintain a middle ground between domination and subjection because power disparities threaten to quickly seep into the exchange and snuff it out. In short: This would be an exchange of two embodied and situated persons acting in 'response-ability.'

We can say, for example, that this middle ground can be created when the persons in the encounter alternate between the roles of a

34. For a more detailed account, see Kirloskar-Steinbach 2019.

responsible guest and a responsible host. They allow each other room to transform their own selves through the process sketched above. The mutual respect they experience in this dialogue allows, or rather emboldens, them to take on the task of emptying conventional attributions of their own self, delve into their inner recesses and discover the other person there and emerge from this process with a deep experience of an I which is not opposed to the Thou but is tied to it through a deep sense of responsibility. To quote Nishida Kitarō in Jim Heisig's translation here:

> There is no responsibility as long as the Thou that is seen at the bottom of the self is thought of as the self. Only when I am I by virtue of the Thou I harbor at my depths do I possess an infinite responsibility at the bottom of my existence itself. This Thou cannot be a universal, abstract Thou nor the recognition of a particular object [sic] a simple historical fact (…). The genuine 'ought' is only conceivable in recognizing the other as a historical Thou within the historically conditioned situation of the I.[35]

As we see, it is not farfetched to draw on Nishida Kitarō and Ueda Shizuteru in the context of exploring the notion of a relational self. However, one important difference should be noted. If the reading offered in these pages is plausible, both Dalmiya and Ortega would caution about the actual process of emptying attributes associated with the I. A sense of being a distinctive I could feed on memories of oppression, which, in certain situations, set these individuals apart from other participants of the situation. As a result, these memories could play a role in generating a sense of uniqueness in a particular situation. Furthermore, in actual practice, precisely these memories could serve as orienting points to avoid further oppression, both for one's own person and also in interactions with others. Were one to empty them, these resources for learning would be lost.

Having said that, Dalmiya's conception could, conceivably, be

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35. Nishida quoted in Heisig 2000, 199.

implemented to argue that this emptying of the self to reach the non-self would indeed be a first step in facilitating dialogue, the caveat being that this emptying of I-attributes should first be practiced by one select group: those whom a society marks out as powerful.[36] Members of this group should initiate processes that can lead fellow members to voluntarily empty their essential I-attributes. By practicing relational humility, these moral agents can illustrate that they are indeed keen on, and sincere in, shedding their own privilege. Without such an effort at rectifying power disparities, adopting relational humility may be rash, even unwise, for those whom a society marks out as having less, or negligible, power. Members of the latter group, Dalmiya would add, should practice intellectual humility as long as they in their encounters with the privileged, do not have reason to hold that "some griefs and memories of harm continue to haunt."[37] Should some of these griefs and memories of harm indeed remain, they could choose to opt out of such a relationship.

There is reason to hold that Ortega would second Dalmiya's use of the exit option from such relationships. However, her conception does not seem to make much room for emptying I-attributes. To begin with, not every single human being experiences oneself as having multiplicitous selves. Those who do so, experience themselves through their in-betweenness in the world. Sometimes, this in-betweenness is predicated upon their memories of being marginalized, misconstrued or misrepresented in at least some of the worlds they traverse. "The multiplicitous self," Ortega writes, "is caught between histories and traditions and is forging new histories as well."[38] Multiple histories are inherited, and refashioned by those inhabiting them. We thus see that Ortega's conception does not seem to allow for an abandonment, or suspension, of the strong connection between social positionality and

36. Cf. Kalmanson 2012.
37. Dalmiya 2016, 79.
38. Ortega 2016, 131.

relationality, even momentarily. Selves are characterized by their particularity of being in the world. Erasing this particularity would have deep existential repercussions on their lives.

Till now, this paper has attempted to follow the trail of the relational self. But what potential does the relational self hold for a study of world philosophies? Let us turn to this question by studying one particular chapter in Indo-Japanese relations.

Life-Rhythms and their Petrification

The winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature of 1913, Rabindranath Tagore, visited Japan in 1916 where he was hosted by the silk magnate and art collector Hara Tomitarō. During this visit, Tagore met the artist Kanzan Shimomura and was deeply impressed by the latter's painting 'Yorobōshi.'[39] This picture of a blind sage being able to see the setting sun with Buddha's mercy, reminded him of a verse in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad which appeals to god to lead one from darkness. Kampō Arai, a discipline of Yokoyama Taikan, who in turn was a disciple of the famous Okakura Kakuzō, was sent to India to paint a similar picture for Tagore. Okakura Kakuzō and Tagore knew each other since 1902 when Okakura Kakuzō visited India. During his visits there, the latter had taught Tagore's nephew Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose what he considered to be essential to art in Asia. According to this understanding, art did not consist in copying nature but transporting the latter's "real nature" in such a way that it could effectuate a self-transformation in the viewer. For this purpose, the artist had to mediate between tradition and nature. Nandalal Bose and Kampō Arai became good friends.

From our own specific spatiotemporal location, there could be several reasons for cleverly sidestepping this intercultural encounter

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39. Cf. Inaga 2009, 158.

in "aesthetic nationalism."[40] For one, Okakura Kakuzō's Asianism does appear to be suspect: Why should a huge, densely-populated continent like Asia have one essence, one soul only? Furthermore, why should only one nation—ironically his own Japan—be destined to carry the torch of 'Asian' spirituality? A cursory glance at Okakura Kakuzō's *The Ideals of the East*, would give another reason to avoid this encounter. There, Okakura Kakuzō likens art to warfare and technique to weapons and suggest that war with the "West" is to be fought with the right weapons.[41]

Fig. 1: Shimomura Kanzan "Yorobōshi" (弱法師, 1915), left screen

Fig. 2: Shimomura Kanzan "Yorobōshi" (弱法師, 1915), right screen

40. Clark 2005, 3.
41. Kakuzo 1920, 214f..

As for Tagore's role in this encounter, one could follow Arif Dirlik's observation that this "missionary" of a "pan-Asian civilization" tended to disguise "national appropriations of what may or may not have been a common legacy."[42] Given Nandalal's role in fleshing out the Hindu dimension of Indian nationalism, one could, moreover, be inclined to concur with Dirlik that "different pan-Asianists [of this period] projected upon Asia the different 'characteristics' of their own national societies."[43] Together, they created an Asia which was made out of Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, but without Daoism, Zoroastrianism, and, more significantly, Islam.

And yet, the relational knower sketched above would not necessarily be daunted by these reasons for sidestepping this encounter. Two reasons come to mind: The relational knower does not seek a unidimensional analysis. As mentioned earlier, this knower is attuned to the possibility that its experiences of, and in, different worlds do not necessarily have to fold into one seamless whole. Some of these experiences might fit with each other, others may be curiously disjointed and ambivalent, yet others contradictory. Relatedly, one can anticipate that the research results of this knower would not necessarily completely fold in with conventional academic interpretations either.

In engaging with this Indo-Japanese encounter then, this knower would stumble upon Kampō Arai teaching Bose how to use the Japanese ink brush; Bose teaching Kampō Arai the isometric perspective and symbolic drawing. They would witness the new techniques developed by several artists involved in this encounter. Kampō Arai, for example, returned to Japan with detailed knowledge in the different techniques used in the past to depict Buddha, a topic which was closely followed by Watsuji Tetsurō. After his return to Japan, Kampō Arai continued to incorporate elements of the Indian depiction of Buddha in his own paintings; Bose attempted to perfect the sumi-e technique

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42. DIRLIK 1996, 105, 109. See FROST 2012.
43. DIRLIK 1996, 109.

in order to capture the "life-rhythm" of the Indian landscape, as Okakura Kakuzō taught him. Remarkably, Okakura Kakuzō is not remembered as a pan-Asianist in this Bengali art school. His legacy rather is traced to his pedagogical insight that an artist is a conduit between tradition, originality and the artist's personality. As Rustom Bharucha notes about this triangle:

> If 'tradition' is not impacted by the 'personality' of the artist determining his or her 'originality', and if it was not challenged by the world embodied in 'nature', then it would simply petrify into 'convention.'[44]

In addition, one finding of our relational knower would be that Okakura Kakuzō's English translation of the *Ideals of the East* was extensively redacted by Vivekananda's British associate Sister Nivedita during Okakura Kakuzō's India stay in 1901–1902. Sister Nivedita, who famously had her own agenda in promoting a virile Indian nationalism, could have played the "ghost-writer" in this edition as is suggested by Bharucha.[45] If this is indeed the case, a more careful study of Okakura Kakuzō's notes in Japanese, penned before his Indian stay is warranted. Furthermore, we would also chance upon Tagore's vociferous critique of nationalism in Asia, including its Japanese rendition.

Beyond such details in art history, the relational knower would possibly glimpse at least one facet of what has been termed an Indian *masala* modernity. In the philosopher-poet-saint Aurobindo Ghosh's, *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture* (1997), which is a collection of his essays from 1918 to 1921, Okakura Kakuzō is mentioned as one of those few "foreign critics" who possess a culture that "can judge the intrinsic value of its productions, because they alone can enter entirely into its spirit."[46] Okakura Kakuzō is referenced here as a reliable source on "Eastern" art, whom Ghosh would consult

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44. Bharucha 2006, 44.
45. Bharucha 2006, 35.
46. Ghosh 1997, 100.

willingly.[47] He is contrasted with most European critics, who dismiss Indian art for ideological reasons. Ghosh then goes on to play on the same binary between a "Western" outward-directed art and its "Eastern" counterpart, which is purportedly "soul-directed." The Japanese, "with their fine sense in these things" are marked out as a people who have understood that "Eastern" art cannot be appreciated in "crowded art galleries and over-pictured walls" like in Europe but "on mountains and in distant or secluded scenes of Nature" so that its "undisputed suggestion can sink into the mind in its finer moments," "when the soul is at leisure from life."[48]

Fig. 3: Nandalal Bose
"Dolan Champa" (1952)

Such references to Okakura Kakuzō are revealing in our context: Not only do they help us glimpse the extent to which Okakura Kakuzō influenced contemporaries in colonial India. In these passages, Ghosh, a fierce exponent of a specific Indian identity, worries about the "false weights and values" deftly deployed in intercultural comparisons between Europe and India.[49] A comparison with Okakura Kakuzō's

47. GHOSH 1997, 101.
48. GHOSH 1997, 292.
49. GHOSH 1997, 286.

Japan, however, is placed on another plane, seemingly, because one is dealing with similar cases here. Both are in their own ways dedicated to the inward soul. For: "[T]hrough the eye that looks on his work," an artist in both countries has to, "appeal not merely to an excitement of the outer soul, but to the inner self, the antarātman."[50] "For here it is the spirit that carries the form, while in most Western art it is the form that carries whatever there may be of spirit."[51] And yet, there are in Ghosh's reckoning differences between Japan and India. Remarkably, Ghosh follows Okakura Kakuzō in giving Japan a special place in the world of art at that moment in time. Indian art, he claims, may just be "predominantly less artistic than that of Japan."[52] Note Ghosh's careful remark that this discrepancy arises because India "has put first the spiritual need," thereby suggesting that India was the true inheritor of spiritual supremacy in Asia![53] It should be added though that Tagore had already voiced these thoughts when he wrote in a letter: "They [the Japanese] have acquired a perfect sense of the form at some cost of the spirit. Their nature is solely aesthetic and not spiritual."[54]

Conclusion

To sum up: In placing the relational knower front and centre, the paper has followed recent scholarship in cross-cultural philosophy which attempts to overcome methodological weaknesses in the conventional comparative approach to world philosophies. In general, different thinkers followed, and continue to follow, this approach in an attempt at integrating world philosophies into the academy. Given the dominance of the Euroamerican canon, the comparative approach has, at best, only been able to deliver a unidimensional view of world

50. Ghosh 1997, 269.
51. Ghosh 1997, 271.
52. Ghosh 1997, 313.
53. Ibid.
54. Quoted from Bharucha 2006, 88.

philosophies. They appear as faint copies of positions in the dominant tradition. Today, an increasing number of authors works to rectify this asymmetrical "Euromonopolism."[55] These authors seek for "a cultural disarmament of philosophy [by taking] a deliberate decision to abandon the aim of global dominance, and the liberation of universality from particularity."[56] The notion of a relational knower can be placed in this context too. As these pages have attempted to illustrate, this approach seems to have the potential to lead to a more nuanced understanding of world philosophies as well as to an increased intercultural sensitivity. This potential can be glimpsed even when dealing with translations.

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55. DAVIS 2019, 592.
56. HEISIG 2004, 100.

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