

Editors' Introduction

The idea for the present volume stems from the Fourth Annual Conference of the European Network of Japanese Philosophy (ENOJP), held in September of 2018 in Hildesheim, Germany. For us as editors, it was the first time to organize an international conference and we are grateful for the generous support of the ENOJP, Prof. Dr. Rolf Elberfeld and Dr. Ralf Müller, as well financial assistance from the Institut für Philosophie Hildeheim, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and the Toshiba Foundation. As with the previous ENOJP conferences, it was a momentous event. Not only did it draw more than ninety scholars of Japanese philosophy from around the globe, but it reunited a growing circle of colleagues joined by a common passion and the shared vision to connect Japanese philosophy to the broader field of cross-cultural and contemporary thought. To host this event at one of the birthplaces of the ENOJP was a special honor.

"Transitions," the central topic of the conference, reflected one of the main aims of the network, namely, to promote engagement in inter-cultural and cross-linguistic modes of philosophizing. Our aim was to consider how "thinking transitionally" not only relates to conceptual boundary-crossing as a perennial part of Japanese philosophy itself, but also how it might help us transcend the limits of our respective specializations and provoke new ideas on universal themes of human existence and contemporary issues. Moreover, each of the languages used at the conference—German, English, and Japanese—had its own contribution to make to the web of cultural and linguistic

tic relationships that take shape around the concepts of “Transition,” “Übergang,” and the newly coined term *utsuri-watari* (移り涉り).

Transitions are generally characterized by a creative vagueness and openness, a multi-faceted, iridescent, and continually changing process. On the one hand, transitions can be seen in terms of spatial continuities: blurred borders, spaces of openness, and mediating intersections. On the other, they highlight the temporal side of transmission, tradition, and transformation. Taken together, these two dimensions combine to form spatiotemporal dynamics and transpositions. Transitions can also be operationalized on a purely conceptual or methodological level, which has repercussions for the basic categories of thought that can be traced directly in translation and inter-cultural exchange. The phenomena of transition are more than the concrete tracks they leave along the way. They blur the boundaries between apparently distinct phenomena and the predefined concepts associated with them, enabling them to resonate and emerge in provocative, often contradictory arrangements.

Japanese philosophy is rich in examples of this process. The notions of nothingness (無) and emptiness (空) in Buddhist thought can be interpreted as modalities of indeterminacy and infinitude, as spaces of co-dependent origination that promote non-obstruction and interpenetration among differing phenomena (事事無碍). They also provide the conceptual basis for ethics and the concrete practice of openness and non-attachment. This emphasis on the transitory and inter-dependent nature of reality is particularly evident in modern Japanese philosophy. Nishida Kitarō’s logic of place emphasizes the (me-)ontological priority of encompassing fields and autopoietic processes of self-formation over rigid substances. Watsuji Tetsurō’s notion of betweenness (間柄) stresses the relational and transitional nature of human existence, which inspired the sociologist Hamaguchi Eshun’s concept of an “intersubject” (間人). In similar fashion, practices of self-cultivation across East Asian philosophy present the human subject as open to transitory self-transformation, enabling mediations

between body and mind through habitualized enactments of bodily patterns (型) and psychosomatic discipline. Such modes of philosophizing stimulate a kind of “thinking in transition” that reforms itself continuously through practice and contributes to current debates on a wide range of scientific and aesthetic questions. “Thinking in transition” is further enriched by embedding it in deliberate efforts at cross-cultural engagement in a variety of languages.

All of this and more is reflected in the essays that make up this collection, where transitions are studied in a variety of disciplines ranging from phenomenology to linguistics, feminism, aesthetics, political history, martial arts, spiritual practice and anthropology. Philosophy has traditionally emphasized clarity and distinction in its ideas. As a result, it has not always been easy to pry its dominant modes of thought to the deeply relational, unstable, and often nebulous reality of the transitory phenomena that appear at the fringes and in the intersections of the clear and distinct. The editing of these pages has taken place in the transitional crisis a global pandemic, reminding us forcefully of the fragility of everyday life and the transitory nature of social contact. It is our hope that this tenth volume of *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy* will guide readers to new ways of thinking to take us through these trying times and beyond.

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