Overture

Japanese philosophy has been experiencing extraordinary growth in European academia over the past several years. The first Europe-wide association of scholars specializing in philosophical topics related to the intellectual history of Japan, the European Network of Japanese Philosophy (ENOJP), was founded in November 2014 in Hildesheim, Germany. The following year in December 2015, an inaugural conference was held at the University of Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain. More than fifty scholars from Europe, North America, and Japan came together to share the fruits of their philosophical research in Spanish and English. In late June of 2016, a small group of ENOJP members based in central and eastern Japan, convened an international conference at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in Nagoya devoted solely to the works of Watusji Tetsurō. Although following close on the heels of that first conference, no less than twenty-eight presenters from across the islands of Japan, Europe, and North America took part.

Meantime, a group of volunteers from the ENOJP formed an editorial board whose core members set to work immediately after the Barcelona conference to compile and edit a selection of essays and translations from the event. On 16 July 2016, the inaugural issue of the *European Journal of Japanese Philosophy* appeared, the first international academic journal of its kind. With the support of a local publisher in Nagoya, Chisokudō Publications, the journal's editors then set to expanding their publication efforts. Within the first five months,

a total of four reprints in the series "Classics of Philosophy in Japan" and four monographs in the series "Studies in Japanese Philosophy" have been issued with others soon to follow. These volumes, globally distributed through major online retailers and library catalogs, have been produced at greatly reduced prices to make them easily affordable for students and young scholars.[1]

As I write these lines, final preparations are underway for the second conference of the ENOJP, scheduled to take place in the heart of Europe at the Université libre de Bruxelles in December of 2016. There are now more than ninety presenters on the program, representing sixty-eight universities from Europe, North, Central, and South America, East Asia, and Australia. At this point it seems safe to say that Japanese philosophy, which European academia has traditionally treated as a marginalized specialization attracting only a small number of eccentric scholars, has asserted itself as a positive force in the field of philosophy in general and is rapidly earning respect among established academics.

The first ENOJP conference and the Watsuji conference also highlight a marked change in the reach of Japanese philosophy. Despite the monumental step the massive *Sourcebook*[2] in Japanese philosophy took in in redefining the field, most scholarly activities had tended to evolve around the works of Nishida Kitarō and the development of his ideas in the Kyoto School. The Barcelona conference not only saw panels centered on other thinkers peripheral to conventional research on the Kyoto School (like Watsuji Tetsurō, Kuki Shūzō, and Nishitani Keiji), but also on other contemporary thinkers (including figures like Maruyama Masao and Hiromatsu Wataru) as well as premodern thinkers (Zeami, Nishikawa Joken, Yamagata Bantō, Andō Shōeki, Ogyū Sorai, and Yamaoka Tesshū, among others). The place of Nishida and his school in the intellectual history of Japan and in philosophy in gen-

1. See http://chisokudopublications.blogspot.jp/.

2. James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis, and John Maraldo, *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).

eral is secure. But these panels proved that interest in the history of Japanese thought reaches much further and hold out the promise of a wider range of intellectual resources being made available in translation to the philosophical community at large.

Introducing neglected themes and thinkers from the Japanese past to the European academia in the present is one thing. Testing the value of philosophical works written in Japanese within the broader history of philosophy is quite another. We have to do much more than expose scholars of philosophy abroad to philosophical texts from Japan. As the Watsuij conference in Nagoya made clear, the next logical step is to cultivate critical perspectives on Japanese philosophy. This historical event may have marked the first conference focused exclusively on Watsuji's thought, but its greater significance by far is that it showed a community of scholars working together to deepen their critical approach to relatively unexplored territory. For those of us who took part, it was clear how important an increase in the number of collaborators is to improving the quality of our individual research.

The present volume is another example of what European scholars in Japanese philosophy have been up to in recent years. The papers collected here, most of them presented at the two conferences mentioned above, have been arranged in four thematic parts. The first two parts cover the history of Japanese philosophy, as their topics extend from premodern thinkers to twentieth century philosophers; the last two parts focus on Nishida and Watsuji respectively. Rather than attempt to locate each of the contributions within ongoing philosophical discussions, I would like to speak to the merits of the entire volume by way of an extended metaphor.

The current state of academic philosophy in Europe is characterized by a general—one is tempted to say rampant—tendency toward specialization. Setting aside the details of specific cases (except to acknowledge that many of us are complicit in the tendency, one way or another), we might liken our situation to musical performance. There are any number of reasons why someone would turn to music. Perhaps

you have been moved by a particular composition and want to experience firsthand the enchantment of its performance. Whatever the case, the first thing you have to do is decide on a musical instrument. Some instruments are similar, so that once you become proficient at one of them, you are then able to pick up another with greater ease than, say, someone who has never played an instrument of any kind. But if you want to become a professional musician, most likely you would have to choose a single instrument and stick with it. If you want to enter competitions or earn a distinguished seat in a famous orchestra, you will have to discipline yourself to practicing assigned scores with your chosen instrument, drilling over and over again the parts that cause you particular difficulty.

As you play and replay the standard compositions to satisfy your teachers and critics, the freedom to play your favorite pieces slips away from you. You have no choice but to put out of your mind the amazing feeling you experienced the first time you encountered an assigned piece, let alone the reasons that inspired you to study music in the first place. By this time, the desire to compose and perform your own music has completely evaporated. You have become a technician, adept at manipulating an instrument to play a small and repetitive range of works to maintain your seat in a professional orchestra. Somewhere along the line of devoting yourself to this demanding and highly sophisticated task, you have ceased to be someone filled with artistic inspiration. You are out of tune with the world of music; you are no longer a musician in full and classical sense of the word.

Something like that is happening to the performance of philosophy. We have been led to focus on manageable bits of the history of Western philosophy, to perfect our technical precision in interpreting them, and in time we have forgotten what it was that drove us to think philosophically in the first place. We are no longer thinkers but postdoctoral researchers and assistant professors who care more about the ranking of the journals we publish in than writing essays to satisfy our own intellectual quest. Scholarly pieces that come to our attention but

fall outside the purview of our assigned task as a specialist in a particular field, it is most likely that we will regard their study as a waste of our time. Perhaps I am being overly pessimistic and things are not as bad as I imagine in academia. Still, I cannot help wondering how many of us (and I am thinking particularly of postdoctoral researchers and assistant professors like myself here) would risk our opportunities for employment to publish an original monograph with a small publisher in order to reach more readers and avail ourselves of more criticism rather than send a standard contribution to a major academic publisher who will market it at a price out of the reach of our colleagues but in exchange for putting the shine of their name to our curriculum vitae.

That said, I find that many scholars working in the field of Japanese philosophy today are a rare breed. Most of them have been trained alongside their fellow students in Europe as specialists in Western philosophy. Some have mastered their instruments with sufficient technical precision to give them a reasonable chance at securing an academic position in Europe. But somehow, a significant number of them have begun to wonder if there is not more music to be played than the compositions that have been defined as standard. They have given up repeating the same pieces like a broken record and started to look for another kind of intellectual music that challenges the prevalent conventions.

This may seem sheer career madness. It is not like giving up one instrument and picking up another, or like trying to use multiple instruments to appreciate the richness of a single musical tradition. For some, it has meant putting aside their own skills in Western music to travel to a foreign land where people use different instruments and compose their tunes with different rules and different sensitivities. At first, something beautiful to the trained ear in that unfamiliar setting may strike the traveler as strange and confusing. But those who were genuinely committed to seek out the meaning of those foreign melodies had to discipline themselves until what was once completely for-

eign became their own and they could truly call it their music, too. In the process of retuning themselves to a different intellectual tradition, the philosophical wanderers have also come to recognize the unities and disunities of cross-cultural thinking. And—lo and behold!—some of them have even begun to create their own harmonies to combine very different spheres of human reasoning.

How might this non-specialized, cross-disciplinary kind of philosophical practice be beneficial to those in European philosophy? I see at least three possible side-effects. First, it could lift the needle from the broken record of major works or themes in the history of Western philosophy. Second, it could lead us to re-examine what counts as "philosophy" and how it is to be performed, reminding us of the reasons we came to philosophy to begin with. And finally, it could free us to think more on our own by disarming philosophy of the cultural weaponry that has systematically doubted the significance of philosophical works outside the Western tradition.

Obviously, none of this would contribute to one's chances of a tenure track job at a reputable philosophy department in Europe. Nor does it imply that the field of Japanese philosophy is exempt from the same dangers of specialization. What is more, the adventure of what one scholar has called "thinking on a bridge"[3] might makes us sloppy when it comes to the technical precision required to interpret philosophical works, Western or Eastern. But as accomplished musicians often say, it is one thing to be faithful to the notation and another to perform a piece well. Who among us can deny the value of a philosophical performance, even if it is marred by scholarly imperfections, as long as it can open us to matters of the greatest philosophical importance? (One has to go no further than Nietzsche and Heidegger with their creative misinterpretations of the history of philosophy.) In fact, when it comes right down to it, it is thanks to just this kind of philosophical performance that we have such things as scholars of philoso-

3. See James W. Heisig, "Philosophy on a Bridge," *Confluence* 4 (2016): 257–70.

phy and specialists in specific areas of the history of human thought. To be or not to be a thinker is your choice. My function as the editor of this volume is only to inform readers that this collection of essays is further witness to a shared enthusiasm for philosophical thinking beyond the familiar boundaries.

Something needs to be said regarding the multilingual character of this volume. Europe is not a homogeneous category of those sharing a single lifestyle or way of thinking. It is a chorus of examined and unexamined lives that offers a dynamic stage on which to express ideas as we come to know more and more about ourselves and the world we live in. To those familiar with more than one part of Europe, it is immediately evident that the practice of philosophy differs from place to place and reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the language in which it is expressed. For those of us who have stepped on to that stage, it is also evident that to publish anything as a European means to reflect its diversity of language.

To follow up on an earlier remark, polyvocal ventures like this are neither lucrative nor practical for mainstream publishers. The editorial and orthographic headaches caused by combining Eastern and Western scripts, even if overcome, would force a pricing and print run that makes it all but impossible for students and scholars of philosophy to afford. Without the generous support of the general editor of *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, and the painstaking assistance of many others along the way, it would have been impossible to present each such a variety of texts in a form compatible with the demands of different languages and academic publishing traditions. In that vein, I would like to extend particular thanks to Andrea Altobrando, Lucas dos Reis Martins, Simon Ebersolt, Felipe Ferrari, Inutsuka Yū, and Jonatan Navarro, for their indispensable and invigorating collaboration in the editorial process. Their passion for philosophy is a constant source of inspiration to me, and their unflagging dedication to know more about Japanese culture and philosophy is one of my reasons for studying comparative philosophy. A special thanks, too, to Jim Heisig. Without his

work trailblazing efforts, the ENOJP would have taken much longer time to publish this collection of its members' philosophical essays.

The volume you have in your hands is proof that a network of selfless individuals can help us be philosophical in the globalizing and intercultural world we live in today. It is my hope that this token of generosity will invite new readers to join our community and inspire them to the inner freedom to think beyond the confines of their particular academic specialization.

Takeshi Morisato

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Nagoya, Japan