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SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION

Japanese Philosophy? No Such Thing: Japan's Contribution to World Philosophizing

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For almost five decades I have been studying Japanese philosophy, but only gradually have I come to realize there is no such thing. The ghost of Nakae Chōmin 中江 兆民 (1847–1901) probably gloats with satisfaction to hear this *gaijin* say that. My statement seems to echo his assessment more than a century ago when he pronounced that Japan had always been and continued to be devoid of philosophy. Although I admire Chōmin for his intellectual courage, standing up to the thought police even to the extent of being temporarily exiled from Tōkyō, my position is not at all the same as his. Nakae Chōmin is not only dead, but unfortunately, when it came to understanding both philosophy and its relation to Japan, he was also dead wrong. So although in reference to Japanese philosophy, I claim there is no such thing, I do not mean what Chōmin meant. To understand what I *do* mean, we have to examine my claim word by word.

Thing

Notice first that I said that there is no such *thing* as Japanese philosophy. I did not say that there has not been and does not continue to be Japanese *philosophizing*. Nor did I say Japan is a land without Japanese *philosophers*. Philosophy is not a thing. When we think of it as such, we not only confuse the object of our study; we also stop philosophizing. As I will explain in a moment, this is an issue that some of Japan's most astute contemporary thinkers have identified in terms of the general problem of transforming an *event* into a *thing*, a *koto* into a *mono*. The obfuscation at play in that transformation is, those philosophers have demonstrated, not limited to the topic of philosophy.

It is a quintessential human trait to try to control the endless flow of phenomena by giving it structure, by putting it into words. We use language and concepts to freeze moments like snapshots so that we can store them as data in our memory bank in hopes that we can eventually compile them into a mosaic of meaning. If nothing else, we can at least index them so we can call them up as future memories and reveries. Without that indexing, past events are unordered and follow their own chaotic, dreamlike associations. Unlike a free association of disjointed images, a structured sequence of reveries or chain of thoughts relies on a memory map of data points with coordinates. Through memory the *koto* in the flow of experience have become accessible as fixed *mono*, as things that can be arranged and manipulated by the mind.

Yet that very process of collecting future memories, indexing them, and storing them away comes at a cost. It detaches us from the lived movement of the present to make us an outside observer of the events constituting our own experience. As an example, consider what may happen when trying to photograph a family affair like a birthday party. The party is, as William James would put it, a "buzzing, blooming confusion" – a lived event. Moving about to get the best angles for snapping the pictures, we can easily make a thing of that event, a frozen birthday-party-memory to be preserved and shared in a photo album perhaps. In so doing, however, we can lose our engagement with the party as it occurs. By definition, the standpoint of the photographer is that of an onlooker, not a participant. We are engaged in recording the party, not being part of it. If we are not careful, the party can end and

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we may feel we were never fully "there." Fortunately, the photos of the party will remain to engage at a later moment. That is, unlike the lived events during the party, the pictures do survive the moment. Yet unlike the party itself they are not alive. What was *koto* has become *mono*. We can no longer engage the lived experiences of the party, moving about within them, changing perspectives, adopting different attitudes, interacting with the other people. Oddly, the party is preserved but only as a fixed image, not as an ongoing, interactive happening.

Why do we have this impulse to transform events into things, to treat change as discrete moments? The psychiatrist and student of the Kyōto School, Kimura Bin 木村 敏 (1931–), sees this as a human fear of, and flight from, instability.

> Our consciousness does not seem to like this sort of instability. The reason may be that what we call "self " or "myself " or "I" is in fact not a thing (*mono*) but rather the event (*koto*) of "being myself " or "being I," something unstable without any clear form or whereabouts. The self, by nature unstable, tries to find a spot in the world in which to stabilize itself. But the world of events, far from supporting it, does nothing but increasingly expose its instability. That is why the self, as soon as it encounters an event, immediately takes distance from it and looks at it to change it into a thing. (JPS p. 961)[1]

When we think of the event of philosophizing as a thing, namely as "philosophy," we are attempting to stabilize what is not inherently stable, trying to control our thoughts by standing outside them and treating them as detached objects. Philosophy becomes then something *I* do, *I* think, and *I* control. In so doing, I gain my existence as a stable being, as a thinking thing (*res cogitans*). As Descartes said, *cogito ergo sum*: "*I* think; therefore, *I* am." By stabilizing the flux into an object of thought, we solidify the self into the ego self. Descartes' proclamation is often heralded as the birth of modern philosophy in the West.

Contrast that with Zen Master Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253):

> Suppose a person travels aboard a ship. If she turns her eyes to look back at the coast, she mistakenly thinks the shore is moving away from her. But if she fixes her eyes close by the ship, she knows it is the ship that is moving forward. Analogously, if she has a confused notion of her own body-mind, when she tries to sort out the totality of phenomena, she mistakenly assumes her own mind and her own nature are permanently fixed. Yet, if she returns inward, engaging her daily tasks intimately, she will have clarified the way of things – the totality of phenomena is there without "I." (JPS p. 145)

Such

Now let us turn to the *such* of "no such thing." If we have the courage to engage reality boldly, without imposing our desire for ego-stability, we move from an analysis of *what* to *how*, from *essence* to *modality*, from *substance* to *function*, from the *noun* to the *verb*, from the sentence's *subject* to its *predicate*. That is, philosophizing makes the transition from the detached observation of a world of whatness to what Buddhism calls in Sanskrit a world of *tathatā*, suchness or as-ness (in Japanese *shinnyo* 真如, *nyoze* 如是, or especially in Zen Buddhism, *inmo* 恁麼). The self is not what stands back and observes this world, but instead is a self-awareness within it. As Dōgen writes of *inmo*:

> We are just figures in that world extending in all directions. How does one know there is as-ness (*inmo*)? I know it is so because my bodymind appears along with the whole world and I know

[1]Throughout this text, the abbreviation JPS refers to *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo eds. (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2011).

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> that it is not an I [separate from the inventory of the world]. My body is already not [an isolated] I: life is carried along in the passage of time, hard to encapsulate for even a moment. (EJP p. 221)[2]

Growing old, Dōgen teaches, is not something that happens to me or to my body. Instead, it is *how* I am, the as-ness of what Kimura called "being myself." In Dōgen's words:

> The blush of youth has left for somewhere else, not a trace to be found. There are many things of the past we can never encounter again. Even the innocent heart doesn't last, but comes and goes. Even if we might speak of there being truth (*makoto*), it is not something persisting in the purview of an individuated ego (*goga* 吾我). (EJP p. 221)

If this reification process is so widespread and natural, why make such an issue of transforming the *koto* of philosophizing into the *mono* of philosophy? Because of all academic enterprises, philosophizing should be the most attentive to how language and concepts take form. Philosophers should never become blind to how their own philosophical systems are sandcastles built of the grains washed ashore by the tides of impermanence. Philosophical systems are edifices vulnerable to the very same forces that made possible their creation.

The flight from impermanence into the standpoint of the detached, fixed ego is a danger recognized by all Japanese Buddhist thinkers, not just Dōgen. Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), for example, recognized that philosophical thinking easily slips into the egocentric project of standing apart from the world to try to "figure it out," what he called the delusional activity of *hakarai*. That *hakarai* represents a faith in detached reasoning and is a fundamental aspect of the Path to Self-perfection (*shōdō* 聖道). The Path to Self-perfection, in turn, is driven by the sense that one can reach insight solely by one's own efforts, *jiriki* 自力. But, Shinran realizes, that whole enterprise is doomed to failure. The Path to Self-perfection, the Path to enlightenment undertaken through my own efforts, assumes that *I* can know and that *I* can undertake the self-liberating praxis leading to enlightenment. Yet, any such activity of a discrete *I* is tainted by egocentrism and selfishness – the only *I* with such an agenda is an ego-based I (*jiga* 自我), the I as *mono*. Such an I is an escape from the I as an event, the authentic process of being myself that Buddhism describes as the egoless I (*muga* 無我). So Shinran concludes that by its own logic, the Path to Self-perfection cannot result in enlightenment. The only alternative is to give oneself up to a power that is outside the ego-self, the "other-power" of *tariki* 他力.

That sense of *tariki* inspired the modern thought of the Kyōto School philosopher, Tanabe Hajime 田辺 元 (1885–1962). Tanabe realized that philosophy must not be a *what* but a *Way,* what he called the Way of *zange* (*zangedō* 懺悔道) or, using the Greek word for change of heart in repentance, the Way of *metanoia*. In his early years he had assumed a basically Kantian approach of transcendental critical philosophy, taking a detached view of scientific knowing. Then he moved increasingly toward a more dialectical approach in his "logic of the specific" or "logic of the species" (*shu no ronri* 種の論理). In the end, however, that also led to frustration and despair as he could not find a way for his philosophy to engage the moral, political, and social situation of wartime Japan. Then, as he explained:

> At that moment something astonishing happened. In the thick of my distress, I let go and surrendered myself humbly to my own inability…. (JPS p. 689)

He had abruptly realized that he was using his criticizing self to criticize everything but the self that was doing the criticism. For critical philosophizing to be a truly "*absolute* criticism," it had to be critical of itself as well. That implies, however, that criticism must be without a self that stands outside what is being criticized.

[2]Throughout this text, the abbreviation EJP refers to *Engaging Japanese Philosophy: A Short History*, by Thomas P. Kasulis (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018).

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> To be sure, this is not a philosophy to be undertaken with self-power (*jiriki*). One's own powers have already been abandoned in despair. It is rather a philosophy to be practiced through other-power (*tariki*) …
>
> Absolute criticism means that reason, faced with the absolute crisis of its dilemma, surrenders itself of its own accord. In the course of this critical task, the personal subject that is undertaking the critique of pure reason cannot remain a mere bystander at a safe remove from the criticism. The subjects of the critique cannot avoid getting tangled in their own web and exposing themselves to self-criticism. They cannot avoid being undone by the absolute dilemma of their own thought…. (JPS pp. 690–91)

In other words, absolute criticism must surrender *jiriki*'s detached self (the *ji* of *jiko* 自己 or *jiga*自我) that is external to the object criticized. Instead it becomes a self-criticism that is auto-criticism in which the other-power of *tariki* transforms the *ji* into the naturalness found in the *ji* of *jinen* 自然 or the spontaneity of Shinran's *jinenhōni* 自然法爾. Shinran characterized Shin Buddhists as following a path of *mugi no gi* 無義の義 (a meaning without meaning, a working without working). Tanabe's parallel phrase was to speak of a "philosophy that is no philosophy."

> Yet in the very midst of this absolute disruption and contradiction, the power of contradiction is itself negated: the absolute contradiction contradicts itself. At this point an absolute conversion takes place and philosophy is restored, through the power of the transcendent, as a "philosophy that is not a philosophy." (JPS p. 91)

Tanabe's "philosophy that is not a philosophy" is a Way of philosophizing that emerges from the field of as-ness or suchness. That field is one of ever shifting, interrelating events. It is a dynamism of auto-expressive *koto* rather than the stabilized, clear and distinct array of *mono* fixed by Descartes' *res cogitans* (the "thinking thing").

Even Japan's most prominent modern philosopher, Nishida Kitarō 西田 幾多郎 (1870–1945), made his own transition from a thinking tinged with *mono* to one emerging from the field of *koto*. We can see that transition in his language for "self." In his maiden work, *Study of Good*, he used the term *jiko no ishiki* 自己の意識 or *jiko ishiki* 自己意識 for "self-consciousness," suggesting an independent self (*jiko*) that was the center of a nucleus of consciousness. Soon after, however, he increasingly referred to self-consciousness as *jikaku* 自覚 instead, a term with Buddhist associations, and suggestive of self-awareness or even self-awakening. As a Buddhist term, the *ji* does not designate a discrete agency, but instead a natural self-awakening, an *auto-awakening* without a discrete self.

When Nishida did speak of a self-identity in his later thought, it was a self-identity that, like Tanabe's, negated itself. Hence, we find Nishida's famous trenchant locution "absolute contradictory self-identity" (*zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu* 絶対矛盾的自己同一). More pointedly, when Nishida developed his mature philosophy, his term for the field of suchness or as-ness that envelops both the self and its object was the "place of absolute nothing" (*zettai mu no basho* 絶対無の場所). This brings us the next term to be analyzed in our phrase *no such thing*, namely, the word that modifies *such*: "*no*."

No

Japanese philosophers use *no* (*mu* 無) in multiple overlapping senses, but three are particularly important: (a) as the negating or emptying of conceptual categories (often associated with the Sanskrit *śūnyatā*, which is more technically translated as *kū* 空); (b) as nothingness when contrasted with existence (the latter usually referred to as *sonzai* 存在 but sometimes *yū* or *u* 有); and (c) as Nonbeing when referring to an agentless, spontaneous source of creativity or generation (contrasted with Being, which is *yū* or *u* in a Nonbeing-Being dynamic inherited primarily from Chinese Daoist philosophy). Each of the three senses expands our discussion of *such* and *thing* as discussed so far.

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First, the negating sense of *mu* as "no" or "nothing" underpins Buddhism's skepticism about philosophical thinking's ability to fully capture the nature of reality. As Nāgārjuna argued in India almost two millennia ago, ideas are interdependent with other ideas and, indeed, the meaning of a concept can only be clear in relation to its opposing concept. For example, one cannot understand the meaning of the concept of *past* without simultaneously thinking of the concept of *present*. Yet, that to which the concepts *past* and *present* refer, namely, the past and the present, can never exist at the same time. Hence, the way thinking and language use negation and opposition cannot mirror or parallel the way reality actually is. The result is that philosophical thinking is only an *ad hoc* approximation useful as a heuristic expedient for a particular purpose at a particular time.

It follows, therefore, that the enterprise of philosophizing must itself, like the reality with which it engages, be always in transition, perpetually negating its own formulations as never fixed, abiding truths. Tanabe's Way of *zange* or *metanoia* stressed that sense of *no* as a continuing process of negating that keeps philosophy from absolutizing its own conclusions. Indeed, as philosophiz*ing*, it can never stop. Its conclu*sions* must always dissolve themselves into nothing so the process of conclud*ing* will never cease. As Dōgen said:

> To forget yourself is to be authenticated by the totality of phenomena. To be authenticated by the totality of phenomena is to completely drop away one's own body-mind as well as the body-mind of others. All traces of enlightenment are depleted and those depleted traces of enlightenment go on and on. (JPS p. 145)

In its second sense *mu* is the opposite of existence, a reminder that reality does not consist of things (*mono*) but is instead a field of interrelated events (*koto*). The awareness of impermanence (*mujō* 無常; Sanskrit: *anītya*) is a principal Buddhist idea tracing back to its origins in India. Unlike the original South Asian idea, however, in Japan impermanence added an aesthetic dimension. Most Indian philosophies sought their highest spiritual ideals in eternal and unchanging realities like Brahman or Ātman. The Buddha was unorthodox in teaching that there was no permanent reality behind the world of change and that our liberation depends on recognizing and being resigned to that reality as such. In Japan, however, *mujō* assumed a positive value as a celebration of the fragility of beauty and of life itself. That evanescence – whether of cherry blossoms, youth, or colorful autumn foliage – only intensified our appreciation of them without our wishing them to endure forever. Indeed if they were everlasting, their ability to stimulate our sentiments would disappear. As Yoshida Kenkō 吉田 兼好 (1283–1352) wrote, "The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty." Hardly a Vedantin sentiment! (Or a Cartesian or a Platonic one, for that matter.)

In its third meaning, *mu* refers to the field of Nonbeing that is the source of spontaneous creativity that occurs "of itself" (Chinese *ziran*; Japanese *jinen* 自然) with no agenda (Chinese *wuwei*; Japanese *mui* 無為) by any discrete agent. Thus, the as-ness of *such* as the Nonbeing of *no* depicts a field of auto-creative events in which human creativity can express itself. These ideas came to Japan with Buddhist and Daoist meanings from abroad, but they soon melded with a native Japanese notion expressed by the Yamato word *kokoro*. *Kokoro* (こころ、心、情、 or 意) is the ancient Japanese term for the inter-responsive field involving feelings and thoughts, the heart and mind in resonance with the animus of events in the natural world. To engage in the field of *kokoro* is to be in touch with things (*mono*) and to be touched by them.

Given what I have said about the stasis of *mono* it may seem odd to see that word used in association with *kokoro*, but in the Yamato language *mono* often included an animistic sense of spirit, a spiritual presence linked with other terms like *mi* and *tama*. For example, *Nihonshoki* stated that originally *mono*, like the flora and fauna, had the power to speak but were so quarrelsome that the *kami* Futsunushi 経津主 and Takemikazuchi 建御雷 had to quiet them. Thus, to the ancients *mono* was not a static thing to which we *refer* from outside, but more like a thing with which we *confer* or interact. Later, in developing his Shingon Buddhist theory, Kūkai 空海 (774–835) was able to marshal his intimate teachings (*mikkyō* 密教) to argue that wisdom arises from our harmonizing with the

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self-expression of the cosmos as the Buddha Dainichi 大日如来. As he put it, every phenomenon is the true embodiment of the cosmos preaching to us (the doctrine of *hosshin seppō* 法身説法). The cosmos is an invitation to confer, not simply an object to which we can refer.

Perhaps no Japanese philosopher better and more famously explained the dynamic of the inter-responsive field of *kokoro* than Motoori Norinaga 本居 宣長 (1730–1801). According to Norinaga, in understanding a creative act such as the writing of a poem, we must not limit our understanding of *kokoro* to the side of the experiencer alone. There is also *kokoro* in things (*mono no kokoro*) and events (*koto no kokoro*) as well as in words (also *koto no kokoro).* If a person has sensitivity (*kokoro ga aru hito* – a person with heart), he or she will be aware of not only the *kokoro* of things and events but also the related verbal *kokoro*, the spiritual expressiveness of words the ancients called *kotodama* 言霊. An auto-expressive act occurs when the person's *kokoro* resonates harmoniously with the *kokoro* of the events and words. Perhaps the best way to think of this is that *kokoro* is a field of mutual responsiveness among person, world, and word. Therefore, *kokoro* (意) is the site of meaning (意). In an oft-quoted statement, Norinaga asserts we should regard *kokoro* 意, events (*koto* 事), and words (*koto* 言) as "things in reciprocal response" (*mina aikanaerumono* みな相称へる物).[3]

Following Norinaga's Native Studies analysis, the world of which we are a part is a web of intimately related affects. For many Native Studies thinkers, this had spiritual as well as aesthetic implications. The world was born of intimacy. We mean this not only in the sense of the physical acts of love among the gods that led to the creation of the world, but also that creation itself was the fortuitous expression of the gods' inner selves. According to Japan's ancient myths, parts of what we know as the world were originally sometimes no more than pieces of the gods that were washed away while bathing, for example. For Norinaga the key point is that the actors in creation were not necessarily agents with clearly designed, rational plans for their creations. Instead, out of the *kami* being touched by each other, the world spontaneously took form. This resembles the moment of poetic creativity in which the words-things come into being through their spontaneous expression in the poet. Perhaps Norinaga's point will be clearer if I give two contrasting accounts of what is happening right now as I write these very sentences about *kokoro.*

Detachment's description. This first description is more typical of a modern western philosophical account, one based in a world of *mono.* As I am writing these sentences, I see words appear on my computer screen. How does this happen? Ordinarily, I might say the objects of my thought (say, the texts that discuss the Japanese theory of *kokoro*) are "out there." There are books opened on my desk, laid out in front of me. Then there is the process of my thinking about those texts and what those Japanese sinographs on the page seem to express: the eyes sense the black splotches on the page that my mind transforms into words that I then think about and interpret. To interpret, I bring to bear various remembered facts about Norinaga's perspective and the meaning of particular Japanese words. I am, of course, trying to get it right, to explain what Norinaga really said and meant. As I think through what I want to say, I search for words and expressions in the databank of my English vocabulary. I try out these words as symbols to convey what I believe Norinaga meant. Finally, my fingers move across the keyboard and the words appear on my computer screen.

That detached account follows an analysis steeped in independently existing *mono*: I as author and interpreter, Norinaga's book, Norinaga as author of his book, the Japanese language, the English language, my thoughts, my factual knowledge, my fingers, and the computer all exist as discrete entities with their own integrity. Meaning occurs, by this analysis, when appropriate links are forged among those self-contained things. We can say detachment's account assumes that "to make meaning is to make connections." Such an account is familiar to our contemporary Western philosophical context. Now I will try to describe this same meaning-event from the standpoint of the *kokoro* theory.

Engagement's description. There is an interdependent, inter-responsive field of *koto* extending in all directions. In writing about *kokoro* there is no knowing how it will turn out. A passage – some

[3]Ōno Susumu 大野 晋 ed., *Kojikiden* 古事記傳. In *Motoori Norinaga zenshū* 本居宣長全集 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1968), vol. 9, p. 6.

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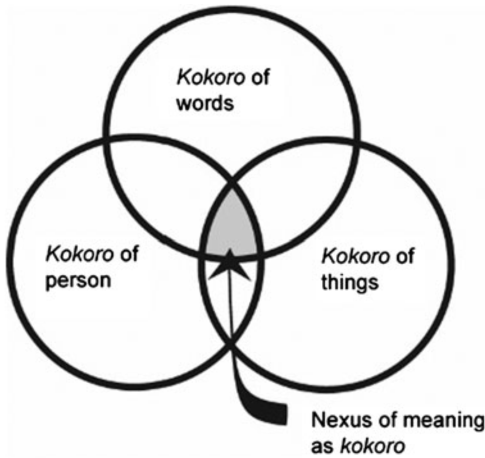

Figure 1. The Auto-Expressiveness of Meaning through Kokoro

phrasing remembered from a previous experience – appears in consciousness and a hand reaches out. In the visual field is a book with Norinaga's Japanese words imprinted on it. In focusing on the page that beckons, the experiential field collapses its periphery at the same time as the book's page zooms to fill the experience to its edges. In reading, consciousness envelopes Norinaga's texts such that I meet the text halfway; his words reverberate in my own mental voice. Interpreting more deeply, there is a conference: my interests reach out to the text and the text responds with its interests accordingly. Attention shifts to hands on the computer keyboard, eyes fixed on the monitor. Looking for the words to express the situation, the search for words becomes the words coming forward, as if from nowhere. All the words are familiar as words from texts I have previously written, but whenever they come to me as they do now, they bring their own configuration, resonating with each other in ways both surprising and yet obvious. Fingers move at the periphery of awareness and as the words sound in consciousness, they mysteriously appear on the computer screen. By this account, meaning does not make connections. Instead, meaning arises from the internal connections already there, springing forth as auto-expressive events in the overlapping *kokoro* of self, ideas, events, and words. Figure 1 depicts the situation.

The detached and engaged accounts describe the same event in divergent ways. The first account is given as if there were an external standpoint from which I am watching myself and explaining what is happening. In the second account, by contrast, the description is given as if it were arising from inside the experience as it is happening. In fact, if the second account were given in Japanese, because of the nature of Japanese syntax, I could have given the description without using any personal pronoun for "I," or "me," or "my." This would make the distance between the narrator and experience collapse even more as engagement would dominate over detachment, and intimacy over integrity.

That comment about the difference between English and Japanese raises the issue of language. How are we to understand language that is not the expression of a discrete speaker used to refer to things (*mono*) in a detached world but instead language that is the auto-expression of an inter-responsive field of events (*koto*)? Nishida Kitarō believed the key was to rethink the function of the sentence, understanding meaning as emerging from the predicate rather than the subject of the sentence. He believed that western philosophy generally depends on the Aristotelian logic of substance-attribute, a dualism reflected in the grammatical form of the Indo-European sentence's subject-predicate structure. That is, the substance (expressed in the sentence's subject) is primary and its meaning unfolds through attribution of its characteristics (expressed in the sentence's predicate). Hence, in my previous example of writing about *kokoro*, "I" was the subject of the sentences and the predicate described my activities in relation to my reading the texts, thinking what I wanted to say, and typing my description of Norinaga's theory. That "logic of the sentential subject" privileges the idea of a detached ego-agency (a being, in this case, the *res cogitans*) performing an action.

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Nishida proposed instead a "logic of the sentential predicate." By that he means the real ground is not Being, nor even its opposite – (relative) nothingness. Rather, the ground is absolute nothing – what cannot be characterized, what cannot be a subject of any sentence. That is, it is a pure predicate that is a self-expressive field which envelopes my being me but is without subject, a pure activity without external agency. As Nishida wrote, "It is not that there being the individual, there is experience, but instead, there being experience, there is the individual." (JPS p. 647)

Tokieda Motoki 時枝 誠記 (1900–1967) expanded on this approach in his "language process" theory of linguistics. Drawing explicitly on ideas from Norinaga and his follower Suzuki Akira 鈴木 朖 (1764–1837), Tokieda developed a theory in opposition to his understanding of Saussure's structuralism. Tokieda explained the Japanese sentence as a set of nested boxes in which the nucleus is the predicate and the rest of the sentence, including the subject, is an expansion of it. Sakabe Megumi 坂部 恵 (1936–2009) endorsed that view, but criticized Tokieda for not being true to the spirit of the Edo linguists as specialists who based their theories in *poetics*. Tokieda, Sakabe believed, had taken a theory of language that grew out of *how* to understand Japanese so as to better *use* it and transformed it into a scientific linguistics that made the language into an object of detached study. In effect, Sakabe was criticizing Tokieda for transforming the *koto*-based engagement theory of the Edo poetics into a *mono*-based modern *Wissenschaft* of scientific linguistics. Tokieda had lost the awareness that he was writing *in* the language he was also writing *about.* To that extent, I maintain (and from conversation with him I believe Sakabe might have agreed), Tokieda was making his theory move away from the spirit of Japanese philosophy. This brings us to the first words of the title of this essay: *Japanese philosophy.*

Japanese Philosophy

Some members of the academy have tried to exclude Japanese philosophers as philosophers, denying them a place in academic departments inhabited by Presocratics, German idealists, British empiricists, French existentialists, medieval Latin scholastics, American pragmatists, and so forth. When pressed to justify that exclusionary policy, they often bizarrely narrow their definitions of "philosophy." For example, *philosophy* is a western term and so the claim is that it must be limited to western thinkers. Yet Thales, whom Aristotle called the first philosopher, was from Miletus in today's Turkey; western scholasticism was directly influenced by the Persian philosopher Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and the Moor Ibn Rushd (Averroes); Leibnitz's ideas about pre-established harmony were inspired by his reading translations of Chinese neo-Confucians; Hegel, Schopenhauer, and the American transcendentalists were influenced by the *Upaniśads*. Others exclude Japanese philosophy because it is too closely connected to religion, but what about the Pythagoreans, the Neo-Platonists, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Berkeley, and Kierkegaard? Still others say Japanese philosophy lacks the development of rationally argued systems, but is Kūkai less systematic than Whitehead? Dōgen than Wittgenstein? Nishida than Fichte?

Let us consider an incident from the recent western tradition. In early twentieth-century logic texts, the nonexistence of married bachelors was commonly contrasted with the nonexistence of black swans. The distinction was that the first null set is analytically true (necessarily so by definition), the second synthetically true (contingently so by empirical evidence). Later, upon hearing from their Australian colleagues that there were indeed black swans in Australia, the Oxbridge philosophers *could* have responded, "Well, they can't be swans because all swans are white," and then proceed to contort the definition of *swans* to exclude black ones. Instead, they quite reasonably just changed their textbooks to use other examples of contingent null sets like "the present king of France" to replace the black swans. Analogously, now that an abundance of Japanese philosophical texts are available in western translation and an increasing number of philosophical commentaries about them are also available, it is time for the provincial western philosophers to remove their blinders and cease their hollow claim that "There can't be philosophy in Japan because all philosophy is western." As there is no denying the existence of black swans, there is also no denying the existence of Japanese philosophy.

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Yet we should not avoid the question of how Japanese philosophizing proceeds. I say this not to defend Japanese philosophers as philosophers, but to help clarify their rightful place alongside other philosophers: the German philosophers, the British philosophers, the French philosophers, and the American philosophers, for example. Of course, Japanese philosophizing is no more monolithic than philosophizing in those other traditions. We cannot limit Japanese philosophy to philosophy done by Japanese philosophers any more than we can say that German philosophy is what German philosophers do and only German philosophers do German philosophy. As we all know, German philosophy is sometimes carried out by Japanese or American philosophers and German philosophers sometimes perform British or Chinese philosophy. So we need to be more sophisticated in stating what makes Japanese philosophy *Japanese*.

In the final analysis, for any tradition, whether German, British, Chinese, or Japanese, I think we can find, as Wittgenstein would say, a *family resemblance* among the target group. Hence, I put forward the thesis that most major Japanese philosophers, classical and modern, share such a resemblance. Of course, not all members of any family share some *single* defining characteristic (shape of nose, type of hair, height, shape of face, general physiology, etc.) that distinguishes them from members of other families. Yet, we still often see a so-called family resemblance. How is that possible? Basically because, Wittgenstein explained in his *Philosophical Investigations* (§67), of a long list of possible physical characteristics, members of the same family share a larger number of those characteristic than do members of other families.

Therefore, to identify a family member (or a philosophical tradition), we should not seek a single defining quality or even a set of two or three qualities that all members of the group share. There is no essential "Japaneseness" in philosophy (or anywhere else, I maintain). Instead, we should compile a list of qualities that perhaps no single member of the Japanese (philosophical) family possesses completely, but as a group the (philosophical) family members share a large number (a larger number than people from other philosophical families). I will be more specific.

Philosophical traditions build on elements that are discovered, engineered, combined, and adapted to meet the needs of their particular systems. For its elements, western philosophizing has depended mostly on primary concepts like *things*, *facts, stuff*, *sensations*, *subject*, *object*, *being*, *substance*, *essence*, *attribute*, *quality*, *cause*, *effect*, *agent*, and so forth. As that list of elemental concepts has become standardized, it has served as a glossary for future thinking and further philosophical initiatives. Western philosophers may discover or even craft new elements, but they do so against that preexisting background, like filling gaps within the periodic table.

The elemental concepts of most Japanese philosophizing are strikingly different: *of itself* or *auto-* (*jinen* 自然), *generative force* (*ki* 気), *pattern* (*ri* 理), *event-words* (*koto* こと), *the midst* (*aidagara* 間柄), *cultural/ethnic embeddedness* (*fūdo* 風土or *minzoku sonzai* 民族存在), the *interpenetration of thing with thing* (*jijimuge* 事事無碍), *conditioned co-production* (*innen* 因縁), *absolute nothing* (*zettai mu* 絶対無), "*howzit*" (*inmo* 恁麼), *as-ness* (*nyoze* 如是), *inter-responsive field* (*kokoro* こころ), *the performative intuition* (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直感), *true working of nonworking* or *true meaning of nonmeaning* (*mugi no gi* 無義の義), *no-I* (*muga* 無我), *no-mind* (*mushin* 無心) and so forth. Such terms reveal the conviction that philosophy arises from the philosopher's being situated within a field of interrelated processes, not a network of externally related things. So, it is not only that the western and Japanese traditions have different pictures of reality; they also use different conceptual media to create those pictures.

The western list can be seen as more readily generating *what* questions and the Japanese list *how* questions. If I want to grow a plant, the western categories might serve me well in determining what is its species and what nutrients and conditions it needs to grow. On the other hand, the Japanese categories may be more helpful in asking *how* I can help a particular bonsai to flourish, *how* to interact with it and nurture it so that it finds its own ideal shape. The difference is one of a detached knowing that aims to control reality and of an engaged knowing that works with reality. It is like the contrast between how a geologist and a potter know clay.

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To sum up: the Japanese philosopher typically views reality as a complex, organic system of interdependent processes, a system that includes us as the knowers. As a result, we cannot begin our analysis with a separation of knower from known; to know reality is to work with it and within it, not as a discrete agent, but as part of a common field, a *kokoro.* The person and reality work together in the discovery of knowledge. In Japanese philosophy, the world is often more like light for the photographer than light for the physicist, more like words for the poet than words for the philologist, more like breath for the meditator than breath for the pulmonologist.

This distinction between detached and engaged knowing is not unique to Japan, of course. Consider, for instance, this statement from the opening pages of Henri Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* written in 1903:

> Philosophers, in spite of their apparent divergencies, agree in distinguishing two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it....[4]

Again, unlike some proponents of *kokugaku* 国学 and *nihonjinron* 日本人論, I am not claiming any Japanese essentialism, any uniqueness to Japanese philosophy as a tradition. After all, Bergson was French, not Japanese. Yet it is still fair to say that within the Japanese family of philosophers, we commonly find an emphasis on a Way of engaging reality as a field, a field that includes the self as part of that field. By contrast, within the western – especially the modern western – family of philosophers we more often find a scientific (*wissenschaftliche*) standpoint of a detached onlooker analyzing reality from outside. In the modern West, Bergson is probably more the exception than the rule; in traditional Japan, he would probably be more the norm than the outlier.

This leaves philosophy with two critical options: the Way of engagement and the standpoint of detachment. It is worth noting that although the engagement option has been more prominent through most of the Japanese tradition, it has become rather rare in postwar philosophy departments in Japan with their westernized curricula. The detachment option, on the other hand, has been increasingly dominant in the West ever since the Enlightenment's construction of philosophy as a *Wissenschaft* and has been intensified further with today's models of education as delivery systems of knowledge. Still, even in the West, there have also been notable counter movements emphasizing engagement, not only Bergson but also other figures within the traditions of Marxism, voluntarism, pragmatism, existentialism, process philosophy, some speech act philosophies, and philosophies of the body or performance. Given this situation, what is the future for Japanese philosophy in a global context? As scholars of Japanese philosophy I think we have two responsibilities.

First, continue to promote the study of Japanese philosophers. It is imperative, though, that we not limit that study to only modern Japanese figures because that only reinforces the prejudice that Japanese thinkers are philosophical only to the extent they were influenced by western philosophers or when they use western terminology in addressing traditional western problems. In fact, much of my own work in the history of Japanese philosophy has been to show that Japan's modern philosophers have been continuous with themes and modalities from premodern Japanese philosophers. Admittedly, some of today's thinkers in Japan have not recognized that debt to their own tradition, but as an outsider I see obvious connections between the modern and the premodern in Japanese thinking. These include an emphasis on (1) internal over external relations; (2) an emphasis on engagement over detachment; (3) an understanding of philosophy as transformative of both self and world rather than being an accumulation of knowledge that leaves both unchanged; and (4) an assumption that polarities (subject/object, self/world, body/mind, I/you, individual/society, person/culture) are abstractions derived from a primordial field of betweenness or milieu. None of these ideas is unique to Japan, but they have often been marginalized or have fallen into disuse in the

[4]Henri Bergson. *An Introduction to Metaphysics,* trans. by T. E. Hulme; with an introduction by Thomas A. Goudge (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), p. 21.

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modern West. Philosophy in general would be enhanced if Japanese philosophizing could highlight these dimensions often overlooked in our contemporary approach to today's global issues.

The second responsibility of scholars of Japanese philosophy is more subtle and long-range. Since it is still somewhat inchoate, I will take the liberty of speaking personally. Up to 2011 and my co-editing of *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, my career had primarily been helping to make Japanese philosophy available to English readers through translations and analyses. I felt like the Australian early in the twentieth century telling my colleagues of the black swans. I tired of arguing that there are black swans, of *arguing* that there was philosophy even in premodern Japan. Instead I decided to simply *show* it was so. Of course, there remain and will always remain those who will deny the reality of what is in front of them, giving *a priori* reasons why there cannot be black swans or Japanese philosophy. Eventually their increasingly globalized colleagues in the academy will refute their provincial blindness, criticizing it for what it is.

As for our philosophy colleagues in the Japanese academy who adamantly refuse to recognize the reality of Japanese philosophy, they present us with a somewhat different problem. In effect, they remain shackled to the worldview imposed by the western colonization of ideas in postwar academic Japan. As I suggested in *Engaging Japanese Philosophy*, I find Japan's rejection of its own tradition and submission to western academic philosophy in the postwar years understandable, but regrettable.[5] It was part of an attempt to escape any remnants of the Japanism (*nihonshugi* 日本主義) that had led Japan to its national disaster. Yet, I think the burden of living even a partially Japanese life while thinking exclusively in a western mindset will eventually become too much of a schizoid existence to bear, and the chains of intellectual colonization will crack open. In short: I believe the universal acceptance of the reality of Japanese philosophy, like that of the reality of the black swans, is inevitable. So my work in laying the groundwork for that acceptance is probably mostly complete. For that reason while writing *Engaging Japanese Philosophy*, published just last year, my focus and sense of mission as a scholar began to shift.

Socrates saw his role as a midwife, a person who helps others birth their ideas and, when they are healthy, brings them to life in the world. I now find myself positioned more as a matchmaker, a *nakōdo* 仲人, who brings Japanese and western philosophizing together. I hope to effect a marriage that will spawn offspring that are no longer simply Japanese or simply western, but a progeny of both. To do that, like any good matchmaker, I must make the proposed mate attractive, provocative, intriguing, and even perhaps a bit exotic. At the same time, though, the prospective partner must be

[5]EJP, pp. 544–45, 578–80. It should also be mentioned that the shift to Japanese philosophy departments as teaching only western philosophy had origins in places well before the postwar period. Most notably when Inoue Tetsujirō 井上 哲次郎 (1855–1944) retired as chair of the Philosophy Department at Tōkyō University in 1914, he was succeeded by Kuwaki Gen'yoku 桑木 嚴翼 (1874–1946). Inoue had included Asian philosophy (Chinese and Indian, specifically) as part of the "philosophy" (*tetsugaku* 哲学) offerings, but Kuwaki insisted on converting the department to the "pure philosophy" represented by such thinkers as Descartes, Kant, and Schopenhauer (so-called "DeKanSho"), moving Asian philosophy to other departments. Interestingly, Kuwaki's move to Tōkyō opened the way for Nishida Kitarō to take over the leadership of Kyōto University's department, making it the spearhead of modern Japanese philosophy.

There was perhaps some practical value in Kuwaki's move inasmuch as the University of Tōkyō lay in the shadows of the political, religious, and ideological centers of State Shintō. There were perhaps, therefore, some benefits in keeping philosophy free of associations with Buddhism and Confucianism, at times seen as rival traditions to Shintō. Fear of censorship and government retaliation was a serious concern. When it came to the postwar situation, Inoue's wartime blending of Confucian values with the Way of the warrior (*bushidō* 武士道) and the National Morality (*kokumin dōtoku* 国民道徳) curriculum blended premodern Japanese philosophical ideas with the later much maligned Japanism of the fascist years. Hence, "Japanese philosophy" as a whole was considered guilty by association and disregarded out-of-hand on rather superficial grounds.

Note, however, those are historical *causes* or *conditions* for Japan's philosophy departments to wholeheartedly embrace the westernization of their philosophical curricula in the immediate postwar period, making them *de facto* intellectual outposts or colonies of Europe or the US. Those are not sound philosophical *reasons* for doing so, however. There were also such postwar causes and conditions for devaluing traditional Japanese literature and arts, for example. Yet, within a decade or two after the war, the Japanese realized there were no good *reasons* for doing so. As a result, those traditions, unlike premodern Japanese philosophy, once again flourished.

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approachable, intelligible, and have enough in common that cooperative and mutual collaboration can survive the initial moment of attraction and become an enduring union. So in *Engaging Japanese Philosophy* – and this only became clear as I worked on the book over several years – I did not simply present Japanese philosophy objectively so the western philosophical readers could make up their own minds about the value of the ideas in a detached manner. Rather I presented it so as to make it engaging, to work toward an engagement that might, as it were, lead to a marriage of Japanese and western philosophizing.

In the long run, as I imagine the future of philosophy on a global scale, I hope to see Japanese philosophy fulfill its role as "no such thing," to disappear into the Way of philosophizing itself. As we no longer think of Kierkegaard as simply a Danish philosopher, Hegel as a German philosopher, or William James as an American philosopher, so too will Nishida, Dōgen, and Kūkai and their philosophical descendants also someday become no longer Japanese philosophers but just members of the extended family of philosophers at large. Plato, Kant, Russell, Wittgenstein, Habermas, and Nussbaum will join their Japanese kinfolk to walk together along the *Tetsugaku no michi*: debating ideas, sharing insights, winding their Way, sometimes getting lost, and sometimes happening upon unexpected new vistas. I expect some will periodically circle back to their own respective homes. When they do, however, they will have been renewed by having walked the cherry-blossomed Path with their extended family and they be looking forward to their next family reunion.

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