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30 Crossing the Borders between the Living and the Dead: An Insight into Knowledge Transfer and Issues of Post-War Reconciliation¹

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Heritage and inheritance are not always examined in relation to the idea of compensation. In the Japanese language, however, these ideas are closely interrelated. The verb “*tsugu*” means “succeed,” i.e. transmitting a heritage from one generation to another; while the verb “*tsugunau*” means “to compensate.” If “compensation” implies a loss, the idea of “succession” also presupposes a loss; Succession is an act of selection which inevitably excludes what one cannot transmit. Heritage management should be redefined from this insight: knowledge transfer cannot preclude the loss of knowledge; on the contrary, the loss is the initial condition on which heritage management is to be constructed. The paper will analyze this anomalous, or literally “preposterous” condition by focusing on several cases of knowledge transfer in the field of “intangible cultural heritage.”

1. Hiroshima Seventieth Commemoration

I grew up in Hiroshima, famous for the atomic bomb. The name of the city is also inscribed in Berlin; Hiroshima Strasse, located just in front of the Japanese Embassy, near the Potsdamerplatz, which had been cut into two by the Berlin Wall up until 1990. It is notorious that the new Japanese Embassy building after *Wiedervereinigung* is a faithful copy reconstruction of the pre-War Embassy of the Great Japanese Empire which served during wartime under Japan's Axial Alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. It is shameful (or is it shameless?) that the name of Hiroshima is commemorated in connection with the infamous Japanese militarism. Quite obviously, it is not my intention to talk about Hiroshima as if it were my lofty task as a descendent of a victim who witnessed the nuclear disaster. From the outset, a Japanese speaker coming from Hiroshima (“je suis de Hiroshima” – Margaret Durras, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*), is not fully entitled to be an acclaimed representative of the atomic bomb victims. One should be ashamed if one were asked to fulfill such an ignominious task.

The task is ignominious for triple reasons. First, Japanese citizens cannot claim their to-

1 This paper was presented at the panel “Heritage Management as an Act of Compensation” of the Conference “Wounds, Scars, and Healing: Civil Society and Postwar Pacific Basin Reconciliation” at the University of Sydney, October 1–2, 2015. My thanks to Yasuko Claremont and Roman Rosenbaum for their kind invitation.

tal innocence on account of the atrocities committed by their parents and ancestors in Korea, China and in the Pacific islands during the War, including Australia.² Second, making use of the atomic bomb as an excuse so as to pretend to be the victim is simply hypocritical. To be the victim does not necessarily guarantee one's own moral superiority, nor does it automatically authorize the claimer to accuse the enemy of injustice. (Precisely for the same reason, justifying the atomic and other indiscriminate bombing on civilians, in the name of world justice and for the purpose of quickly ending the war, so as to diminish the total number of victims, is no less hypocritical). These are two basic conditions for any reconciliation when it comes with the side of "aggressors" and their moral descendants.³ But the most serious reason in our present context resides in the following: how is it possible for survivors to assume the role of those who could not survive.

All those who did know the truth of the catastrophe could not survive; only those who escaped from it can speak in the name of the dead in their place. But what the survived witness is only a shadow of the truth. Just as the shadow of irradiation left on the wall of the building. Those who left their own shadow figure on the wall could not survive, even if they were not instantaneously evaporated by the heat beam of the nuclear fission. "Eyewitness" is a treacherous term here because those who saw the light of the atomic fireball in their own eye near the epicenter simply lost their eyesight.⁴ Eyewitnesses are blind by definition; those who experienced the sound wave several seconds later had their ear tympanum ruptured, even if they were not blown away or crushed together with the falling buildings. (In the city of more than 250 thousand inhabitants, most of the houses were made of wood; only few main public buildings near the epicenter were constructed with reinforced concrete. Among them was the one to be re-named the "Atomic Bomb Dome".)

In reality, however, those who could fortunately escape immediate death had to suffer further and longer. During the rescue operations in devastating conditions, they witnessed the slow but relentless death of innumerable people, known and unknown. They had seen many people with their burnt skin hanging down from their face and arms wander around in

2 From the outset, this puts the case of Japanese empire in sharp contrast to the Jewish memorials in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. On this level, no comparison seems to me possible to establish between the two issues.

3 This aspect, or rather mutual complicity between the American occupation army and the post-war Japanese discourse construction, is convincingly demonstrated by Shibata Yūko 柴田優呼, "*Hiroshima/Nagasaki*" *hibaku shinwa o kaitai suru* "ヒロシマ・ナガサキ" 被爆神話を解体する (*Hiroshima/Nagasaki-Deconstructing the Myth of Bombing and Irradiation*), Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2015.

4 Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. The book refers to the same metaphor by brilliantly applying derridian and lacanian rhetoric; the tactics which the present author intentionally avoids.

vain in search of drinking water. Many of them were drawn in the river (on the delta of which the city is located). Their bodies, piled up on the shore, soon began to decompose under the hot and humid summer weather. Later those who thought they could finally escape from the disaster, or those who entered the city for rescue, began all of a sudden losing hair, spitting blood or noticed their excrement covered with blood. People with these symptoms also died sooner or later. Even those who had not been seriously injured and safely evacuated the doomed city in ruin wondered several months later why their burned skin and minor injuries would not heal as usual.⁵ Obviously their chromosomes have been damaged by the nuclear irradiation (though the genetic mechanism was still unknown). In total, no less than 190 thousand people were killed by a tiny “Little Boy” dropped from a B-29 Bomber, nicknamed Enora Gay.

We commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombing in the year of 2015. Those who were 20 at that moment turn 90. Within a decade, practically there will be no survivors who can directly transfer their experience and memory to the posterity. History teaches us that with the loss of eyewitnesses, the human species tend to repeat the same stupidities. The knowledge transfer bridging the generations is extremely fragile and versatile in this aspect (I use the term “knowledge” here with a wider acceptance, in terms of the “memory” as was the case in Saint Augustine in antiquities, and consider it in the context of the heritage management). At the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, there is a cenotaph with the inscription by Tadayoshi Saiga: “Let all the souls rest here in peace, as we shall never repeat the evil.”⁶ I wonder if the human species is wise enough to keep the promise the survivors of Hiroshima have made in front of the dead victims.

5 The movie *Hiroshima*, 1953, dir. Hideo Sekigawa, 104 minutes, tries to reconstruct, partly at least, the process of the bombing and irradiation in retrospect eight years later, but the visualization rather reveals its limit.

6 The English is by Saiga himself. Obviously the unspecified “we” causes several controversies. Though Saiga, as an idealist, hoped to include in this “we” all the surviving humanities from the catastrophe, the fact remains that for the American government as well as for the majority of American citizens, the dropping of the bomb cannot constitute, even nowadays, any “evil” at all, but rather an act of justice made against the Japanese. Some of the main opinion makers among the Hiroshima-Nagasaki victims, especially elite scientists and Christians, duplicated similar interpretations by identifying the A-bomb victims as the “elected target” by the fate, if not by God, and accepted it, not without resignation, in the name of scientific progress as well as part of the necessary compensation of the atrocities committed by the Japanese militarism. In a sense, the “brain washing” conducted by the GHQ worked with efficiency, even beyond expectation as the survivors almost overlooked the “aggressor” or the subject of bombing. Asian invaded lands and people remain almost completely out of the perspective of both the Americans and Japanese.

2. Transfer of Knowledge or a Witness of Loss

Any knowledge transfer by the human species cannot be exempt from this fate: what is transferred from one generation to another is like a shadow of the disappeared; it eloquently and cruelly shows the amount of the sacrifice that the transfer cannot help but make as its inevitable side-effect. What we can transfer as knowledge may well be no better than the by-product of the loss that it inevitably entails. This recognition of the inevitable loss allows us to regard human heritage as a struggle to compensate what we are not capable of compensating. Reconciliation, whatsoever should be based on this irremediable loss, from the outset.

The Questions of King Menander (Milinda Panha) is a famous Buddhist literature, an outcome of the conquest by Alexander the Great, recording, as it is said, the conversation between an Indian-Greek king, who ruled Afghanistan and the Northern part of India in the second half of the 2nd century B.C., and a Buddhist *bhikkhu* (monk), named Nāgasena. One of its most famous anecdotes is about fire. Is the burning fire on the torch the same fire as the one which was burning yesterday? So long as the burning continues, there is no interruption as a fire; and yet the fuel consumed in the fire can no longer be the same combustible provided yesterday.⁷ Human knowledge transfer cannot be much different from this fire, if we were able to grasp in one glimpse the entire human history, by condensing the wide time scape of several hundred years into one minute, for example.

As the opening of the famous essay by Kamo no Chōmei (1153/6–1216) states 800 years ago (1212), “the river stream is continuous and yet the water there is no longer the same.” “The foam floating and vanishing on the water current” (*nagare ni ukabu utakata* 流れに浮かぶうたかた) is a metaphor of the brief existence of each of us. Our individual consciousness flickers and disappears in a moment (just like the innumerable lanterns commemorating the dead souls on the Motoyasu and Ōta rivers of Hiroshima every summer); it is lost once for all and one after another incessantly. And yet the water current remains almost in permanence, for eternity, if judged from the human eye. The permanence of the river stream repeats its dynamic life according to the ecological system of water circulation on the planet. Since the immemorial past, the earth continues its rotation and revolution, with climatic heating-up and cooling-down, far beyond the life cycle of a tiny individual life and death. The amount of these “tiny foams floating and vanishing” constitutes the entire traces left by human species on the earth. And even this entire span of traces is nothing but an “Augen-

7 *Milindapañhā*, Japanese translation from the Pali original; 『ミリンダ王の問い』 by Nakamura Hajime 中村元 and Hayashima Kyōshō 早島鏡正, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1963, Vol.1, pp.111–113 (Book I, chapter 2).

blick” in the geological time scale.

Knowledge transfer may also be explained in terms of tradition. The Japanese translation for Western “tradition” 伝統 is usually composed of two Chinese characters, “transmission” and “lineage”, but “transmission” of the “light of a lantern” is also a homonym which is respected in the esoteric Buddhism of the Tendai 天台 sect since the 8th century, in the monastery of Hieizan 比叡山 located at the east of the Kyoto basin. The lettering 伝燈 means transmitting the torch-fire of belief and teaching from one generation to another. It is true that the individual human transmitter cannot live for eternity, and should disappear one after another, but the fire on the torch is maintained like the relay of the sacred fire in the Olympic games, without losing its initial splendor.

How about Shintoism? The sanctuary of Ise 伊勢 celebrated its latest and 61st transfer in 2013, by replacing the old wooden structure with an entirely renewed and identical version.⁸ According to extant documents, the first transfer was conducted in the year of 690 in Gregorian calendar, or in the second era of the reign by the Empress Jitō 持統. Since that ceremonial initiation, each generation of the sanctuary has been dismantled and newly rebuilt every twenty years, shifting its location back and forth between the vacant empty place (for the former and next generation) and the place occupied by the wooden structure of the current generation). According to Junko Miki, scholar in aesthetics, the sanctuary’s “intangible vitality” generates from this rhythmical reciprocity between the ephemeral presence and the empty vacancy. The void suggests at the same time the past origin is already lost, and the not-yet born future shall succeed the heritage.⁹ The notion of “intangible cultural heritage” adopted by the UNESCO may find out an unexpected model case in the successive transfer 式年遷宮 ritually practiced at the Sanctuary of Ise.

It goes without saying that irregular interruptions took place by accident several times during the long history of more than one thousand three hundred years, due to civil wars and other disturbances. It must also be remarked that succession has not been maintained without any stylistic modifications. It is officially claimed that the current building faithfully inherits the style of the precedent model, thus transmitting to this day the initial style of the 7th century without alternations. And yet, in the 16th century (1582), for example, carpenters had to make the reconstruction without referring to the precedent structure, as it had been lost for long, due to the civil war which devastated the whole country. To use the terms

8 See Shigemi Inaga, « La Vie transitoire des forms, un patrimoine culturel à l'état d'Eidos flottant », in *Sanctuaire d'Ise*, Éditions Mardaga, 2015, pp.144–145.

9 Junko Miki, « Représenter le sanctuaire d'Ise une dialectique entre fermeture et ouverture », in *Sanctuaire d'Ise*, *ibid.*, pp.124–143.

in genetics, something like atavism (return to the archaic simplicity) or genetic mutation sporadically took place in token of the historical vicissitudes.

And yet, it seems as if the material discontinuity (in reality) has strengthened the spiritual sense of continuous and uninterrupted transfer from antiquity (in ideology). If one is capable of observing the span of 1400 years in one minute, one may certainly be surprised by the stability the sanctuary has managed to maintain. The (illusory) vision of its sustainability is fostered in contrast to the vicissitudes with which other historical monuments have passed through incessant rise and fall, edifications and destructions. Despite several interruptions in time (especially in the 15th–16th centuries) and minute oscillations in the details, the shrine of Ise as a whole successfully inherited its lost prototype as if the double spiral of the DNA faithfully reproduced itself in genetic transmission.

The driving force in the succession ritual of the Ise Shrine cannot be reduced to the idea of restoration or repairing. The idea of restoration is epitomized in the case of the ship of Theseus in ancient Athens: when one portion of the historical ship is rotten, that part was substituted by a new material, and in the long run, it is said, the original wood entirely disappeared from the ship of commemoration. This is what is happening to the Staircase of the Chateau de Fontainebleau, for example. Only 30% of the original stone remain there from the 16th century. In contrast, in the case of the Ise Shrine, the precedent structure is intentionally demolished as a whole so as to be replaced by an entirely renewed one. This total replacement implies the idea of metabolism; the sanctuary simulates the ecological succession which takes place in the surrounding forest. And the dismembered pieces are put into recycling for the secondary use in auxiliary sanctuaries all around Japan, especially in places where the shrines have been damaged or destroyed by natural calamities.¹⁰

This metabolic replacement together with the idea of recycling guarantees a sort of “permanence in impermanence.” The wooden structure, which is “eternally new” (as it cannot be more ancient than 20 years old) fosters the illusion of the presence of a building which is “eternally old” (as it dates from the year 690, at the latest, surviving, as it were, for more than 1300 years in succession). Discovering this eternally old and eternally new sanctuary, a German architect, Bruno Taut, proposed in the 1934, during his “exile” in Japan, a vivid comparison of Ise with the Parthenon in Athens: if the Parthenon is no longer but a ruin, a heritage of the lost glory of the Greek antiquity, Ise still maintains its living form as a spiritual

10 In recent years, the Nachi Shrine destroyed by flood or the shrine at the Rebut Island in the north were reconstructed by using the woods provided by the Ise.

symbol uniting a whole nation.¹¹

The notion of metabolism, evoked above, may be particularly relevant. The wooden structure is replaced every twenty years. No material continuity is aimed at. Yet by sacrificing material originality, the form as an idea (*eidōs*) is to be renewed and hopefully maintained for eternity. If Plato could see this in Japan, he would have been delighted in finding out the living model of his philosophical idea. The dichotomy of *eidōs* versus *hyre* (which stems from the wood as Spanish term suggests), are ideally combined and visualized in the practice of knowledge transfer through the ritual succession at the Ise shrine. Yet the materialized *eidōs* in Ise is void of sense; it does not put any predetermined theology or ideology onto the material, if not the message of successive transfer itself. Instead of “*signifiant flottant*” proposed by Roland Barthes and elaborated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, I would name it “*eidōs flottant*.”

Why “*eidōs flottant*”? The *signifiés* to be filled in this empty floating form cannot be found from within (*emic*), but it has been proposed from the outside (*etic*) by each of the successive generations; the empty and invisible precinct remains silent. It seems as if this silent empty receptacle had accumulated a succession of knowledge of its own, yet all of which are coming from exterior one after another. The temple has served as a passive depository of these *etic* documents trying to elucidate its mystery, in vain. The sanctuary stands for a mute observatory: by rejecting its own historicity, it reveals instead the historicity of these *etic* accounts on its own as these accounts have been attracted around this “silent center” (R. Barthes). Among them, the idea of “simulacra without original,” (Jean Baudrillard) was no exception. This idea was applied to the sanctuary at the previous transfer in 1993. Even this post-modern view of the sanctuary, proposed two decades ago, is by now inscribed in history. It is registered among the clichés of this chrono-political monument.¹²

3. Metempsychosis and the Renewal of Heritage

Shūzō Kuki (1888–1941), one of the most distinguished Japanese philosophers in the pre-war period, made reference to the metaphor of the torch-fire in the *Questions of King Milinda*. In 1928, at the end of his 8-year-stay in Europe, Kuki delivered two lectures in French at Pontigny explaining the oriental notion of Time to Western philosophers. From the torch-fire metaphor, demonstrating the continuity by way of discontinuity, Kuki moved to the story of Sisyphus in the Greek mythology. The giant is charged with the stupid task of transporting a

11 For more detail, see Jourdan Sand, “Japan’s Monument Problem: Ise Shrine as Metaphor,” *Past and Present* 226, 2015 (supplement 10): 126–152.

12 Shigemi Inaga, “To be a Japanese Artist in the So-called Postmodern Era,” *Third Text*.33 (Winter 1995–1996): 17–24.

huge rock to the top of the mountain. Whenever he pushes the rock to the top of the mountain, it mercilessly drops into the bottom of the valley, and Sisyphus has to climb down the path to resume the same toil again. The Western philological tradition had seen in this meaningless repetition, a doomed destiny, a course inflicted upon the giant as an extreme punishment. Yet Kuki boldly expressed his disagreement to this view.¹³

It was shortly after the outbreak of the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, a catastrophe which completely devastated Tokyo, the capital of Japan. Kuki had been repetitively asked by his European colleagues: why do the Japanese try to reestablish the metro-underground traffic network in the same metropolitan area which is doomed to the next earthquake within the span of one hundred years? Is the earthquake sinister? Is the destruction a curse or punishment to which the inhabitants of the archipelago are destined at the fringe of the Pacific Ocean? To this question, Kuki replied “No.” The will to resume reconstruction with hope, the courage to overcome negative fate and the determination of rejecting resignation, these are the message of the myth: To do one’s best without hesitating repetitive endeavor was the stern manifestation of one’s free will, a positive proof of the liberty, which had nothing to do with the predestinated defeatism or fatalism. Kuki states in this way and proposes to read in the myth of Sisyphus a torch-fire of hope, symbolizing the dignity of human free volition. It was 14 years later, or only two years after Kuki’s premature death in 1941 that Albert Camus published his *Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942). Several scholars speculate the possibility that the French existentialist could have been inspired from the reflection by the Japanese philosopher (Camus could not have missed the fact that the young Jean-Paul Sartre had been Baron Kuki’s “répétiteur” during his stay in Paris in 1920s).¹⁴

Among many possible references to Kuki’s bold reinterpretation of the Myth of Sisyphus, one may detect Kuki’s affinity with F. Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal return. The circular and recycling notion of Time is one of the stereotypical understandings of “Oriental Thought,” which lies in contrast to the “Western” modern idea of Time as linear development and progress. And yet, the idea of “eternal return” implies a famous paradox: so long as I am conscious that I am the outcome of an eternal return, my “self” should logically be different from my previous “self” by the very consciousness in question. For my previous “self” could not have noticed in advance its own rebirth into my present “self.” This self-consciousness is superfluous in any attempt to accomplish the perfect “eternal retour,” as it prevents

13 Shuzo Kuki, « La notion du temps et la reprise sur le temps en Orient, » repris dans *Propos sur le temps*, Paris: Philippe Renouard, 1928, pp.9–27.

14 Sugimoto Hidetarō 杉本秀太郎, “Tetsugakuteki Zuan” 哲学的図案 (Philosophical Design), in Monthly Report 月報, Kuki Shūzō Zenshū 九鬼周造全集 (*Complete Works of Kuki Shūzō*), vol. 1, 1981, pp.1–3.

“me” from being identical with the previous “self”. Once revealed, the self-consciousness thus saps the very condition of the eternal return. In other words, metempsychosis can be maintained so long as one is not aware of it.¹⁵

Here is another paradox of knowledge transfer: Tradition is self-deceptive by definition. Ironically enough, those who believe in their faithfulness to the precedent example inevitably deviate from the tradition because of their faithful-consciousness. On the contrary, those who have no notion of faithfulness or respect to tradition are incapable of measuring to which extent they are faithful or not in their heritage succession. This is obvious, for they are lacking in the will of succeeding the tradition or making effort for any faithful transmission. Only those revolutionaries (*hommes révoltés*, in Camus’s expression) who intentionally want to destroy tradition can grasp it, in as much as they are conscious of the critical distance they want to establish vis-à-vis the tradition in question. The tradition therefore would not reveal itself unless it is confronted with the destructive relationship such as disobedience, treachery or unconditional rupture... Accessible tradition always hides an inaccessible reverse side.

Thus, knowledge transfer turns out to be inseparable from the sense of irremediable loss. Succession and transfer of knowledge is nothing but the reverse side of its impossibility. What we can transfer to posterity is no more than the empty residue of what we wish to transmit in vain, the traces of loss indicating the failure of our endeavor to transmit. Ruins are the physical memory of such unsuccessful transfers. We call such debris and remains “ruin” as they have lost their *raison d’être* and practical value (be it utilitarian, political, economic, heuristic, or religious, or whatsoever), despite the fact that our ancestors put all their wisdom, intelligence and energy in their realization and maintenance (in their vain search of their “sustainability” in the future...).

What kind of ruins can Japan of the 20th century transfer to the posterity of human beings? Will it be the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima (1945) on the one hand, or the abandoned nuclear reactors of Fukushima (2011) on the other? And must we wait for the day when *Fukushima Strasse* will be installed side by side with *Hiroshima Strasse* in the Capital of the Bundes Republik Deutschland? Is it still allowed for us to cherish the optimistic hope of a Sisyphus in front of these nuclear disasters? The reconciliation with the dead is the task which still awaits us.

Let me finish by a requiem I composed in commemoration of the lost lives in the North Eastern Japan Great Earthquake of March 11, 2011.

15 Cf. Karl Löwith, *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen*, 1935; Felix Meiner, 1986.

Survival

— At the end of the year 2011 —

To the memory of the lost lives at the 3.11 Earthquake

All of us

Who live on Earth are no other than the latest survivors.

In our shadow are hidden all who could not survive.

The enormous amount of the Dead sustains our Life.

Life is nothing but a peak of an immense iceberg;

Under the sea level lies the vast domain of the Dead.

Thanks to the invisible dark shadow of our dead companions,

We are allowed to live; entitled to a moment of survival.

Let us express our innermost thanks for being kept alive now,

For, it is the only way to praise those who could not survive.

The Dead are accompanying us so long as we live.

Let's stop worrying about the probability of our own survival rate.

For the last one who can happily survive is not the "I" who is alive.

It is only where the not-survived have given their place to the survivors,

That the sunlight reaches, and the darkness is wiped away to nurture new lives.

Just like the stump of a cut-down tree which put forth the new crimson buds,

Just like the carbonized stubbles nourishing the green sprouts on the burnt field.

Death is not the enemy of Life; it is a seedbed, a cradle for Life,

The dead provide us with the vigor, blessing us with the chance to live.

The mindful thought of the non-survivors is bestowed upon our lives.

It is our duty to accomplish this entrusted life, a gift sent from the dead.

And let us share our suffering of Life, in token of our respect to the Dead.

Facing the calamities beyond description, words fail us, we are kept voiceless.

Yet the voiceless silence gives birth to voices; words are spun again into a yarn of stories.

Yet the reanimated words will one day fall on the ground again, like the dead leaves;

And the leaf mold heaps up slowly and silently at the bottom of an unknown lake.

The soil accumulates annual sediment, while the trunk of a tree ages year by year.

The layers preserve the traces of climate mutations and earth-tectonics of the millennium.

Like the archival documents, the sediment of soil composes the chronicle of the planet.

The patterns of Lives are woven in the layers of fossilized terrain to record

The irreplaceable Chain of Being for eternity,

Crossing the animated and the inanimate.

The dignity of a soul lies in its transmigration, beyond individual Life & Death.