

Philosophy as Translation and Understanding Other Cultures: Becoming a Global Citizen through Higher Education

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This paper will explore an alternative mode of thinking and language for higher education, centering on the idea of “philosophy as translation”—an idea drawn from the American philosopher, Stanley Cavell. This broader sense of translation is inseparable from our reengagement with cultures, language, self and others. From this philosophical perspective, the paper proposes to convert our ways of thinking so that we can re-encounter different cultures as other through a process of border-crossing. It has educational implications in terms of an art of dialogue through which one exposes oneself to the other by releasing oneself and one’s own culture towards the possibility of further growth. This, I shall argue, necessitates us the conversion of the discourse and mode of thinking that pervades the current education for global citizenship, political education and critical thinking in higher education. In conclusion, I shall present the possibilities of a perfectionist education—an idea drawn from Cavell’s Emersonian perfectionism. This is in service of the enhancement of an alternative mode of global and cross-cultural dialogue. We need to tap new human resources for the global citizen—for the individual who will live by taking a chance in uncertainty and who can speak “without bounds.” This I shall conclude to be the fundamental sense of liberal education.

Keywords: Stanley Cavell, philosophy as translation, global citizens, criticism of culture, perfectionist education

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1. Introduction: Education for global citizens in Japanese higher education

I desire to speak somewhere without bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments. – Henry D. Thoreau

Today internationalization is one of the key phrases in policy-making and curriculum development in higher education. Japan is not an exception. For Japanese universities the development of human resources in an international arena is an urgent task in order to compete and be successful in the globalized world. For example, at Kyoto University, the international strategy called “The 2x by 2020 initiative” was launched in 2013 as the core principle of internationalization (*Kokusai-ka*) of the university. Its mission statement runs as follows:

The globalization of our societies and economies has proceeded at a rapid pace, and international competition is expected to intensify further in the future. Given that context, in order to promote the further development of the university as an institution of higher learning that produces world-class knowledge, it is essential that Kyoto University produce a new “International Strategy” and aggressively pursue concrete actions.¹

Even this brief introductory statement is permeated by an urgent sense that the university is promoting “higher” learning and that it should direct itself “aggressively” towards a globalized world. In a similar spirit, at an international symposium held at Kyoto University as a part of the “Re-inventing Japan Project” initiated by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan, Kuniaki Sato, Deputy Director of the Higher Education Policy Division of Higher Education Bureau, asserted that in order to realize the internationalization of Japanese universities, young people should not stay lying “in a lukewarm bath.”² The implication of his message is that Japanese young people should get out of their inward-looking state of comfort and venture onto the global stage. In order to achieve this in the Japanese context, he continued, we need to overcome two barriers: the stumbling block of *foreign language* and the *mindset* of people. We should develop foreign language skills and transform the mindset of the young from its present closed state to a more open one. Although much as what he says is true, this cannot be an agenda for young people alone: what is needed is radical conversion of the mindset of those who educate – university teachers, policy makers and administrators. If internationalization is to be achieved, the whole culture of higher education needs to be transformed.

In this context, the promotion of foreign language education, especially for English as a common, global language, is a significant part of internationalization in Japan: and yet there are two contradictory orientations in what we mean by “internationalization.” On the one hand, in the tide of globalization, English plays a symbolic role in the westernization of Japan: with the “hegemony of English,” as Paul Standish puts this, “the traffic is likely to be one-way” in “policy borrowing” (Standish 2011, p. 73). On the other hand, as a reactionary move against the predominance of English, there is an egalitarian and multiculturalist view on the native language. In the context of this dichotomous choice with its pervading discourse of polemical debate, what might be called an existential aspect of cross-cultural understanding and education – one that involves the “mindset” of people – tends to be covered over: the way of facing others by disturbing the framework of one’s own culture is obliterated, and so is the perspective of educa-

tion that addresses the possibility of self- and other-transformation through the destabilization of one's own framework of thinking. In order to achieve internationalization in authentic, liberating and bidirectional ways, there is a need for research into the understanding of other cultures that enables us to reconsider the nature of human being and language. In this sense foreign language education for the sake of higher learning is inseparable from the transformation of the mindset of the people.

If this is the task of higher education for internationalization, then, some practical questions are to be addressed. How can we create an awakening towards the world from within the "lukewarm bath" of somnolence? And if the majority in a culture choose not to leave such a cozy, enveloped state, how can the call for "higher learning," for a different state of mind and mode of thinking, be put into effect? How can a transformation from within the psyche of people be made possible? These apparently practical questions imply deeper philosophical questions concerning one's relationship with one's own culture and native language. They also confront us with a difficult challenge in exercising one's own criticism from the periphery to destabilize the center of culture. This requires us to reconsider the meaning of *cross-cultural* understanding, how to transcend a border between cultures, and eventually the need for cultivating "human resources" for a globalized mind that can sustain hope for the resuscitation of cultures from within. As John Dewey says, democracy must begin at home (Dewey 1984, p. 368). Higher education requires the perspective of education that involves the inner transformation of ourselves. These tasks would eventually ask us to reconsider what we mean by a *global* citizen and how we can *become* globalized.

In response, this paper will explore an alternative mode of thinking and language for higher education, centering on the idea of "philosophy as translation" – an idea drawn from the American philosopher, Stanley Cavell. This broader sense of translation is inseparable from our reengagement with cultures, language, self and others. From this philosophical perspective, the paper proposes to convert our ways of thinking so that we can re-encounter different cultures as *other* through a process of border-crossing. It has educational implications in terms of an art of dialogue through which one exposes oneself to the other by releasing oneself and one's own culture towards the possibility of further growth. This, I shall argue, necessitates us the conversion of the discourse and mode of thinking that pervades the current education for global citizenship, political education and critical thinking in higher education. In conclusion, I shall present the possibilities of a perfectionist education – an idea drawn from Cavell's Emersonian perfectionism. This is in service of the enhancement of an alternative mode of global and cross-cultural dialogue. We need to tap new human *resources* for the global citizen – for the individual who will live by taking a chance in uncertainty and who can speak "without bounds." This I shall conclude to be the fundamental sense of *liberal* education.

2. Education for the global citizen

When a culture needs to be changed, where can such change be initiated? How can "habit reconstruction" (Dewey 1983) take place? These are the questions that are immediately related to the education of global citizens. Martha Nussbaum's lecture in London in connection with her book, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010), gave an occasion to rethink these questions. The lecture was entitled, "Martha Nussbaum on 21st Century Enlightenment,"

and it took the form of a conversation with Matthew Taylor.³ Nussbaum spoke eloquently on the theme of cultivating global citizenship through sympathetic imagination in understanding the other who is very different from ourselves. In a sense she presented a good model of how a philosopher should speak about education – a style of talking that avoids the “masculine” image sometimes associated with the language of the philosopher and yet that retains clarity of argument. On the back cover of Nussbaum’s book, we find Grant H. Cornwell praising the “clarity and rigor” of her writing, and Harry Brighouse admiring the “lovely light touch” and the balance between passion and calmness in her style of writing.

Nussbaum asks us to reconsider the nature of moral conversation for deliberative democracy. There are some specific concepts that she presents as the conditions for such conversation. First and foremost is what she calls “Socratic pedagogy” (Nussbaum 2010, p. 55). Socratic dialogue is a “social practice” in which critical thinking is taught and through which one learns that “one critical voice can have significant consequences” (p. 54). It is here that Nussbaum appreciates the philosophy of Dewey as “the most influential and theoretically distinguished American practitioner of Socratic education” (p. 64). She puts an emphasis on how Dewey put his philosophy into practice so that “good school pupils learn skills of citizenship by undertaking common projects and solving them together, in a respectful and yet critical spirit” (p. 66). She argues that Dewey’s Socratic pedagogy is not “just an intellectual skill,” but is “an aspect of practical engagement, a stand toward problems in real life” (ibid.). Along these lines, Nussbaum identifies Deweyan education as education for global citizenship (p. 85).

Second, while Socratic pedagogy creates the public forum for discussion and facilitates the cultivation of a sense of solidarity, it requires critical self-examination. Nussbaum presents a vision of the way to democracy as coming from within the self – even, let us say, from within one’s private life. Admiring Mahatma Gandhi, she pays attention to the “psychology of the individual” (p. 43) – to the internal conflict between “compassion and respect,” on the one hand, and “fear, greed, and narcissistic aggression,” on the other. She diagnoses such internal conflicts as inimical to the creation of “a free and democratic nation” (p. 29). Democratic education needs to address the question of “what we can do to help compassion and empathy win the clash over fear and hate” (p. 43). To confront one’s “internal demons” (p. 36), she argues, calls for a cultivation of “inner eyes,” a metaphor Nussbaum borrows from Ralph Ellison (p. 107).

Third, inner eyes should be directed not only to one’s own self, but to “the inner life of others” (p. 123). This is related to Nussbaum’s call for cultivating imaginative sympathy, “the ability to understand other positions from within” (p. 72). Nussbaum’s emphasis on understanding different others is at the heart of her political stance of democratic inclusion and mutual respect, which requires becoming “an active, critical, reflective, and empathetic member of a community of equals, capable of exchanging ideas on the basis of respect and understanding with people from many different backgrounds” (p. 141). In the same spirit as *Not For Profit*, in her more recent talk in Helsinki entitled, “Global Ethics and Justice,”⁴ Nussbaum emphasized the significance of “international dialogue” for global peace and put an emphasis on the necessity of cultivating political emotion for the education of a global citizen and on the idea that “face-to-face dialogue” is a key to the foundation of political trust.

The “international dialogue” (via Socratic dialogue) and critical thinking that she envisions for the education of a global citizen have some distinctive characteristics. First, they are founded on what might be called a *language of balance*. In her lecture in London she mentioned that it was necessary to “strike the right balance” between the principle of justice and sympathy.

Such a commitment can also be detected in her book, for example, in the way she addresses “internal conflicts” as a matter of winning over bad (negative) emotion through good (positive) emotion; and in the way she talks about the need for both self-examination and compassionate concern for others. Second, it is a discourse of *problem-solving*. Nussbaum as a philosopher declares that her argument is intended as “a call to action” (p. 122). Underlying this statement is her position that philosophy should be connected with (and should solve) the real problems of the world. Such a problem-solving mode is evidenced by her support for Dewey’s pragmatism and by her focusing on that aspect of Dewey’s educational thought that is most concerned with pedagogy. Third, this is a mode of speech that is heavily reliant upon the moral vocabulary of Kantian enlightenment (such as human dignity and mutual respect). For example, she says: “mutual respect for reason is essential to the peaceful resolution of differences” (p. 54). This will involve the cultivation of the kind of active, critical voice that counts in a democracy. As she puts this: “By emphasizing each person’s active voice, we also promote a culture of accountability” (ibid.). Nussbaum’s own voice, which seeks to be accountable with “clarity and rigor,” exemplifies the type of voice she wishes to cultivate for moral conversation and international dialogue for global justice.

Nussbaum’s well-intended scheme of achieving democracy from within, with its appeal to our “inner eyes,” no doubt addresses an urgent task in the education of cosmopolitan, global citizens. My question is addressed not so much to what she says *per se* as to how she says what she says. See, for example, the list of abilities that she proposes good citizens must have in order to nurture democracy, which includes critical thinking, open-mindedness, sympathy, and so on (pp. 25–26). Does not her apparent clarity in fact cover over a dimension of our moral life, one that is not so easily accountable? Does not the accessibility of her language ironically prevent us from getting access to a realm of moral life that does not exactly fall into the scheme of the “right balance”? Does not her clear-cut moral language contain too neatly the complexities of our moral lives? Despite her call for inner eyes, which she claims to be the crucial condition for creating democracy from within, there is something in her language that stops us going deeper into the complexities of the human psyche – something that still awaits us when our own “internal demon” is won over by sympathy, as it were in the process of solving problems. And this can be a real stumbling block in international dialogue and “mutual understanding and reciprocity” (p. 84). A good example of this is Nussbaum’s reference to a classroom debate in which a student is encouraged to present a position that he in reality is opposed to. She praises this practice as it “humanizes the political ‘other,’ making the mind see the opposing person as a rational being who may share at least some thoughts with one’s own group” (p. 52). In this artificial debating exercise, it is as if the different other were already set up in the terms of a categorization that has been established from the start, and as if commitment to the other were circumscribed by these terms – as if it were the case that understanding “different” others and different cultures is made possible in a neutral way by putting one’s partiality in brackets. Nussbaum’s call for cultivating the global citizen is in no doubt well-spirited and practically significant. Is her way of thinking and mode of “international dialogue” powerful enough, however, to create the radical transformation of the inner spirit, to such an extent that their mindset is destabilized, encouraging those who sleep to wake and cross the borders of different cultures? What would be an alternative route to thinking for cultivating the global citizen, if such there can be, for achieving a more radical transformation of mentality from within?

3. Philosophy as translation

In shifting gear towards an alternative mode of thinking and language for higher learning and foreign language education, it is the idea of translation that can shed a new light on it. In “Social Justice in Translation,” and drawing on the work of Naoki Sakai, Paul Standish discusses the difficulty of translation between English and Japanese in respect of the concept of social justice, with its concomitant notions of the human subject (i.e. *shutai* and *shukan*) (Standish 2011, pp. 74–77). In Standish’s view, the predominant discourse of social justice in critical pedagogy and political liberalism, which is based upon a Rawlsian discourse of rational choosers and autonomous subjects, tends to blind us to the experience of translation – where this is understood in broader terms than the technical matter of switching between different languages. Such experience involves “the space for judgment – precisely the space where there is no rule to resolve the difficulty [a translator] faces” (p. 76). It is this experience of the unresolvable, the invisible, and the uncertain that Standish argues is crucial to the “transformative rather than informative” conversation (p. 78). This is an idea that Cavell presents in his criticism of Rawls’s emphasis on cooperation: he highlights the “opacity, or non-transparency of the present state of our interactions” (Cavell 2004, pp. 173–174 in Standish 2011, p. 78). This would be the case not only between different languages in cross-cultural understanding but also in an “intra-lingual” way (Standish 2011 p. 78). The experience of translation in this distinctive sense, Standish argues, is indispensable to the transforming of the monolingual mentality to the multilingual, bidirectional mode of communication between *and within* cultures.

Developing further the line of Standish’s argument in order to elucidate its significance for the higher education of the global citizen, I shall highlight Cavell’s idea of *philosophy as translation*, an idea that is presented most vividly in *The Senses of Walden* (1992), his rereading of Thoreau’s *Walden* (1992). Translation in the sense involves the encountering of the strange in the familiar, where one finds anew one’s place in one’s language and culture. Cavell destabilizes our conventional idea of translation simply as a mechanical process of switching from one language to another, and this undermines ideas of language acquisition in terms of progression through developmental stages, from a first language (mother tongue) to a second language (foreign tongue). Thoreau expresses this with the phrasing: “The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly *translated*” (Thoreau 1992, p. 217). Truth refuses to be finally fixed. Thoreau’s anti-representationalist view of language is characterized by transience and volatility. Translation here is the intrinsic nature of language itself. For Cavell language not only serves as a bridge between the human being and nature, providing “the cherishing mother of all significance,” as Dewey says (Dewey, 1981, p. 146), but also constitutes a rift: it demands not only sharing and continuity, but also separation.

This is most distinctively captured by Thoreau’s and Cavell’s idea of the “father tongue” – “a reserved and select expression, too significant to be heard by the ear, which we must be born again in order to speak” (Thoreau, 1992, p. 69; Cavell, 1992, p. 15). Thoreau and Cavell, while not negating the role of the “mother tongue,” say that the human being needs to gain distance on the mother tongue, in order to “be born again.” Reengagement with the father tongue is a way of sustaining the space of what Cavell calls “the daily, insistent split in the self that being human cannot . . . escape” (Cavell, 2004, p. 5). If the mother tongue is characterized by the immediacy

typically represented by spoken language, the father tongue is represented by the indirectness of the written word as “the maturity and experience” of the mother tongue (Thoreau, 1992, pp. 68–69; Cavell, 1992, p. 15). There is no “pure” state from which language is born and towards which language is headed. Rather, translation as the nature of language hinges on the moment of conversion. We are as humans fated to this dual relation to language, and hence to inheritance and innovation.

In Thoreau’s *Walden* there permeates the sense of bottomlessness:

I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless. (Thoreau 1992, p. 190)

There is a solid bottom everywhere. (Thoreau 1992, p. 220, in Cavell, 1992, p. 76)

The sense of bottomlessness may create despair on the part of the reader who aspires to connection with the writer. In the process of reading as the matter of translation, the bottom of reading, or the secure ground of reading, is in the hands of the reader. It is her responsibility to weigh towards this and to find where to stand – to found each moment. In *Walden* and *The Senses of Walden*, words are not mere words but are inseparable from the work of “placing ourselves in the world” (Cavell, 1992, p. 53). In order to have “no particular home, but [to be] equally at home everywhere,” one must acquire the art of *sauntering*, as a “*Sainte-Terre*,” being *sans terre*, without land, without ground (Thoreau 1982, p. 295). Founding a bottom in a bottomless condition is the work of questioning more thoroughly one’s relationship with the native – with native language and native culture as well as with native community and nation.

Thoreau’s *Walden* is filled with the realistic observation of the facts of nature and of daily life. It is permeated by a sense of embodiment, his feet gravitating towards the ground. His realism, however, is not a matter of the exact representation of a “reality out there.” Rather it is what might be called the “realism of the obscure.”

I do not suppose that I have attained to obscurity, but I should be proud if no more fatal fault were found with my pages on this score than was found with the *Walden* ice. . . . The purity men love is like the mists which envelop the earth, and not like the azure ether beyond. (Thoreau 1992, p. 217)

He communicates to us the reality of the transience of our words and life, something which we can never fully grasp – the sense of the “indescribable” (p. 145). It is only by going through the obscure in transience that one can “lay the foundation of true expression” (p. 216). In order to achieve “purity,” one must learn to persevere on the precarious border of obscurities, standing on tiptoe. This requires a particular mode of thinking, what Cavell calls “onward thinking,” with ourselves always on the way (Cavell 1992, p. 135). It is this very sense of the obscure, the uncertain – the sense that “we should live quite laxly and undefined in front, our outlines dim and misty on that side” (Thoreau 1992, p. 216) – that is the condition of true expression, and hence, of finding truth in translation.

4. Taking a chance: To become globalized through perfectionist education

I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced. *Extra vagance!* It depends on how you are yarded. (Thoreau 1992, p. 216)

In performing philosophy as translation, we must learn to speak in risk-taking language beyond bounds, the language of the “*extra-vagant*.” For Thoreau, self-possession requires dispossession, it requires losing oneself – to go outside and saunter. Translation is the process through which we learn to be “beside ourselves in a sane sense” (Thoreau 1992, p. 91; Cavell 1992, p. 102). The wit of Thoreau’s phrase bears some scrutiny. In English, to “be beside oneself” is an idiomatic phrase that means primarily to be crazy, to be mad, or at least to be overcome: one can be beside oneself with grief, or anger, or happiness. But here the phrase is qualified (“in a sane sense”) so that the madness is tempered or balanced. What is emphasized is that we must be taken outside ourselves, which is to say out of any complacent settled view of the world, with its easy categorisations and stable frameworks of thought. The relation to the other requires no less, and this is at the heart of understanding *other* cultures. This is the experiencing of the strange and unfamiliar within oneself – an encounter with the otherness within the self, and an acquisition of the standpoint of outsideness within the familiar. Thoreau’s father tongue occasions the undergoing of such disjunctive moments of awakening and rebirth – but only from within the mother tongue. Such rebirth involves a process of translation. This is the experience of what Cavell finds in Thoreau’s and Emerson’s transcendentalism in the ordinary, what Standish calls “transcendence down” (Standish 2012). Whether one succeeds or not in transcendence is shown only in the moment of leaving – leaving home, leaving the boundary within which one has been contained.

Translation as inherent in language *per se* is a crucial condition for critical thinking and the education for global citizenship. Criticism of culture is essential here, but this is not to be accomplished simply through an “aggressive” or “active” mode of thinking. Rather it requires patience and receptivity, a readiness to go through the indefinite, the transitory and the vague in encountering the other, both within and outside one’s own culture. One must learn to keep standing on tiptoe. At the same time, learning to speak without bounds, one must learn to take a chance in testing one’s words against those of others. Otherwise, a radical transformation of the self is impossible. To take a chance does not mean to destroy the stable ground of culture. Rather it means rediscovering culture’s resourcefulness: it is “to confront the culture with itself, along the lines in which it meets in me” (Cavell 1979, p. 125). It should be noted that Cavell uses the term, “resources,” not “sources” (Cavell 1976, p. 196). In more conventional terms, “source” might suggest a pure origin of inspiration, a well-spring, whereas “resource,” a reworking of source materials, smacks of Heidegger’s “standing-reserve.” But for Cavell there are no firsts, no absolute beginnings: rather sources are constantly being renewed. Hence, continual exploration or unfolding is internal to language, and sensitization to this opens a path for critical thinking.

To take a chance is not to abrogate rules, but to resuscitate the practice of rule-following in a continual revision of the criteria of judgment. Cavell’s *A Pitch of Philosophy* (1994) presents the idea that finding one’s voice is a matter of finding “perfect pitch” (pp. 30, 48) – an attune-

ment of my words with those of culture, and this at each moment. This is Cavell's Emersonian perfectionism, an idea of perfection as perfecting, perfection without perfectibility (Cavell 1990; Saito 2005). Cavell encourages us to release our power *from within*, in the process of finding our own voice, and this paradoxically by disowning oneself, such that "the inmost in due time becomes the outmost" (Emerson 2000, p. 132). Our own partiality, our own taste, never dissipates. Criticism of culture is to be conducted from within, and the test of its success cannot be known in advance. And so, "power seems to be the result of rising, not the cause" (Cavell 1992, p. 136). In Cavell's Emersonian perfectionism, we always begin anew, taking a chance. We need to learn to take a risk in speaking, where risk implies not so much adventurous forward movement but rather a humble, receptivity in action, involving suffering and patience.

As a guiding principle of perfectionist education for higher learning, especially for the education of a global citizen, philosophy as translation has implications not simply for language education. It more generally involves what it means to be reengaged with cultures and how we can live with other cultures – with those others from other cultures but also those within our own. More practically, it will awaken us to a hidden dimension of our thinking and provide us a means to the transforming of the mode of our thinking and mindset from within, through our reengagement with language. This may be a destabilizing experience: we may lose our way. Yet still we must go through the uncertain moment of getting lost in translation. Education for a global citizen requires this perfectionist sense in order to resuscitate the political emotion of and aspiration for perfection, yet without falling into cynicism.

Coming back to the original question of how we can convert the mindset of people for globalization and how we can achieve higher learning for foreign language education, perfectionist education would give us a hope – a hope for awakening oneself and others by trusting the unlimited resourcefulness of language. In the sense that one is encouraged to liberate one's voice, to be reengaged with one's native language and culture as the other, this is *liberal* education.

Notes

1. This is an introductory statement in the pamphlet, "The 2 x 2020," published by Kyoto University in 2013.
2. An international symposium, "Tasks in Constituting International Collaborative Programme and its Future" (Kyoto University, July 30, 2014).
3. December 16, 2010 at RSA, London.
4. Global Ethics and Justice Research Symposium was organized by the Department of Management Studies at Aalto University School of Business and the Academy of Finland (August 29, 2014, Aalto University School of Business).

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