

Paving the Way for World Philosophies through a Philosophy of Practice

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After the Second World War, philosophers from former colonies began to work on a hermeneutic better suited to the postcolonial context, as the frameworks adopted in conventional academic philosophy were considered to be inadequate in this regard. This position had already been taken during the colonial period by thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore. Today, current work on world philosophies seems to be informed by similar concerns. This paper will first focus on the common ground between these positions by delineating reasons for closely attending to the context in which philosophy is carried out as well as to the impact that this practice could, and does, have on the lives of those it affects. The paper will then revisit Tagore's spirited appeal to reappropriate and recontextualise the aspects of Asian traditions that undergird common humanity in a world dominated by imperialism and colonialism, before briefly dwelling on current work on world philosophies.

Keywords: Tagore ; world philosophies ; knowledge-making practices ; postcolonial philosophy ; critical reappropriation

In the period after the Second World War, many intellectuals from Asia worked with their international counterparts to develop what the Indian philosopher S. Radhakrishnan called a “world perspective in philosophy, if not a world philosophy” (Radhakrishnan, 1951, p. 4). This perspective included setting the stage for dialogue between “the East” and “the West.” In the postwar years, this focus shifted. Calls to include voices beyond the ‘East-West’ axis came from philosophers who sought to develop a hermeneutic for the postcolonial context. Especially those with ties to former colonies, worried about what Kwasi Wiredu called “philosophical neocolonialism” (Wiredu, 1998, p. 153), a colonialism that refers to the privileges that were and continue to be granted to the European and Euro-American philosophical tradition. Scholars like Wiredu were concerned that positions associated with world philosophies were excluded from the philosophical conversation, not only in Europe and Euro-America but in the former colonies too. In a kind of boomerang effect, categories and

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“standards of intelligibility” prevalent in the dominant tradition were internalised by philosophers there (Daya Krishna, 1986, p. 64). As Daya Krishna put it, local cultures in these regions of the world were observed, understood and compared in the former colonies through the standard Eurocentric repertoire prevalent in academic philosophy. The ramifications of this Eurocentric positioning were significant. Other ways of making meaning of the world were at best only regarded as worldviews of local scope, not universal philosophy. Also, philosophy students worldwide were taught to believe that philosophy, in general, solely bore a European imprint.

Critiques of exclusivist academic philosophy continue to this very day. In recent years, they have gained traction. They are now supplemented by debates that engage with non-European and non-Euro-American philosophical traditions. Several participants in these debates attempt to diversify philosophy. Some of them object to the manner in which texts/positions/authors from these traditions are simply mined to solve problems within professional philosophy. They tend to see such academic exercises as problematic, insofar as they reproduce the trajectory of resource exploitation that occurred during European imperialism and colonialism. This exploitation has not halted, despite the formal political decolonization of former colonies. In fact, it continues unabated, even in the humanities. While this critique objects to the actual practice of philosophy and its consequences for those who are exploited, other philosophers object to the inadequacy of the framework adopted. They resist the supposed fundamental binary between the so-called East and West that is posited to differentiate between supposed essential, and immutable, features of the so-called East and its counterpart. Their main focus in this regard is the supposed lack of philosophical ability and intellectual innovative prowess attributed to those world regions subsumed under the category ‘East’. These critiques seem to share the view that there is a lack of focus on the act of philosophising in a particular context. This paper will center that common ground and draw into the conversation the Indian poet-philosopher-artist-educationist Tagore, who held similar views.

Section 1 will delineate reasons for closely attending to the context in which philosophy is carried out as well as to the impact that this practice could, and does, have on the lives of those it affects. Section 2 will draw on Tagore’s strategic use of the terms “East” and “West” to direct the attention of his (Asian) interlocutors to the underside of knowledge-making practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The scope of this inquiry will be limited to a focus on Tagore’s critique of contemporary knowledge-making practices. Section 3 will briefly dwell on recent literature that adopts a world-philosophical perspective. This body of work strives to re-examine and rewrite the standard narrative of academic philosophy that sees philosophy as germane only to Europe. The brief concluding section draws together the different strands of the paper.

1 Philosophy-of-Practice: A Brief Sketch

Arguably, philosophy is an activity that takes place when people strive to understand the world around them from their own vantage points in space and time. For this purpose, they make use of a conceptual vocabulary with which they have been familiarized through common customs and life-forms. In other words, philosophical concepts are generated in specific places for specific purposes. They have their own provenance (cf. Janz, 1996). Philosophical

activity cannot be meaningfully separated from the historical and corporeal particularity of its epistemic subjects. It is not carried out by disembodied minds but by concrete bodies placed in specific, spatiotemporal and socio-material contexts. To be able to understand these local processes of meaning-making better, philosophical content must be grounded in the actual practices of different traditions.

Working from this baseline of a philosophy of practice, one can draw on critical philosophers like Lucius Outlaw Jr., who the “limits as set by the rules of control at work in the discursive practices of European Philosophy” (Outlaw, 1996, p. 62). These limits, he argues, are set by an academic philosophy which is “racialized, gendered, and ethnocentric” (Outlaw, 1998, p. 389). Concepts and problems specific to European and Euro-American philosophy are presented as if they were of universal import to all human beings.

In addition, one may refer to publications that thematise the negative consequences of group homogeneity. Studies indicate that people tend to overestimate their own objectivity (Saul, 2013, 43). Homogenous groups, like all-male and/or all-white groups, tend to perceive themselves as being more effective and are more confident about their problem-solving abilities (cf. Bruya, 2017, 999). Applied to our context, such empirical findings suggest that the current demographic setup of philosophy may directly impact its output. Whether a topic is deemed relevant at all to philosophical debates depends on the authority of those who are perceived as so-called experts. In the absence of practitioner diversity, these experts can easily be seen as the “authenticating presence” of philosophical ability, whether in their own philosophical tradition or in another (Martín Alcoff, 1995, p. 99). These philosophers will be sought out as competent, philosophical experts—as a kind of medium to philosophical truth. In this case, an act of easy, and uncritical, representation is potentially fraught with difficulties. The so-called canon may continue to be taught without further critical examination. Its discursive hierarchies might be kept intact. As a consequence, there may be very little interest in engaging with local philosophical traditions, especially in non-European countries that continue to centre European canonical philosophy in their philosophy curriculum. There, only those local philosophical traditions that bear a close resemblance to the canonical may make it to the discussion table.

Recent literature from critical social epistemology could further our understanding. When members of a homogenous (academic) community attribute trust to one another, credibility excess may creep in. Credibility is then attributed without examining whether this attribution is justified. As José Medina points out, as a result, “epistemic authority [will] not [be] proportionate to [...] epistemic capacities and assets” (Medina, 2011, 20). The attribution of this disproportionate credibility excess may influence vital elements of the epistemic situation. Not only can it make experts turn dogmatic and less impervious to criticism, but credibility excess can also intimidate practitioners of local traditions. They can become afraid of openly dissenting from the epistemic authority of the experts, even when they have good reasons not to accept their views. When the epistemic privilege of the experts correlates with the lack of epistemic credibility attributed to lay practitioners, epistemic injustice may occur (see below). Without a critical consciousness of one’s own beliefs, speaking for (marginalised) others can become highly tendentious. It can lead to an essentialised construction of the ‘Other’, objectify the represented, and construe their traditions along lines developed under the sway of colonial and imperial scholarship. In our context, a good example would be the presupposition that so-called Eastern traditions were static and could not be founts of progress, an attribution

Tagore criticised in his controversial address at the Tokyo Imperial University in 1916 (Tagore, 1916a, p. 23; see below).

When only standard approaches to philosophy are used to make sense of human experiences, it is doubtful whether these exercises can be completely successful. Arguably, the standard philosophical repertoire may only be able to track selective aspects of experience. This is because extant philosophical concepts have been predominantly developed to make sense of experiences specific to sections of the European and European-descended populations. The current vocabulary in vogue in academic philosophy will then not be able to make sense of any experience that falls outside the extant concepts. In that case, new meanings cannot be generated unless philosophy's conceptual repertoire is subject to a critical scrutiny, possibly retweaked and recontextualised, or even radically overhauled.

If it can be presumed that meaning-making is an integral part of being human, one could expect academic philosophers to become aware that in certain conditions there is a mismatch between philosophical vocabulary and human experiences. This would be the case especially in those contexts in which local traditions do not easily map onto the conceptual web of European canonical philosophy. The Asian context could serve as an example here. However, a cursory look at the academic debates there, do not, in general, corroborate this assumption. Like their counterparts in Europe, philosophical qualifications in this region apparently continue to be predominantly defined by an in-depth knowledge of European—and to some extent Euro-American—canonical philosophy. In addition, when the idea of 'Asia' surfaces in intellectual debates in Asia, it tends to be deployed in ideological opposition to Europe, whereby the inner-Asian positionings of individual thinkers and regions within Asia are occluded, as Sun Ge critically notes (Sun, 2000, pp. 13-14).

One could hold that in such meaning-making endeavours by philosophers in Asia, at least some of them become aware of the flipside of this activity.ⁱ To make meaning with others, we need to share, to some extent, a common conceptual repertoire. Yet, our own way of explicating these resources and making sense of them with other co-members can render this process hegemonic and authoritarian, from the perspective of those who are not enabled to participate in this activity. This happens when we begin to take a habituated way of understanding as the sole way of understanding a phenomenon and, in the process, lose our ability to change intellectual perspectives and dialogic roles. We are not ready to switch roles from an epistemic authority to a learner. We then attempt to structure the field of meanings with our co-members such that contrary views are excluded or marginalised. Within our context, this structuring could involve a continuation of the relatively widespread narrative that Asian philosophies are predominantly incapable of moving out "to open new vistas of knowledge and power", to borrow Tagore's caustic remark in his aforementioned address (Tagore, 1916a, p. 23).

This dominant social imaginary tends to breed and support what José Medina calls "epistemic arrogance". Purported epistemic authorities speak from standpoints of accrued credibility excess: they speak, in general, to those who are not sufficiently aware that this uncontested claim-making cannot work well in the long term, one main reason being the 'meta-blindness' which results from this discursive practice. This meta-blindness results in an insensitivity to the limits of one's particular perspective. As a result, one's conceptual framework tends to trail behind one's own experience.

One viable way to counter this insensitivity would be to seek out encounters which

challenge our standard ways of knowing. Let us turn to Tagore's suggestion that an alternative intellectual space be developed. This space can be said to resist the dominant understanding of knowledge-making prevalent in the last decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century.

2 Tagore's Vision of an Intellectual Space within Asia

Rabindranath Tagore's (1861-1941) work indicates the salience he attributed to the creation of an intellectual space that would thematise concerns of contemporary Asians and promote pan-Asian unity. Tagore apparently hoped that this space would allow Asians dominated by (European) imperialism and colonialism to find indigenous ideals and recontextualise them for their life in modernity. These ideals, he contented in his *Nationalism*,ⁱⁱ had to be re-discovered and recontextualised through a mindful perusal so that "they do not lose their touch with the growing and changing life" (Tagore, 1917, p. 51). Contemporary Asian societies had lost touch with their ideals, he reasoned. This is partly why he warned Asians about blindingly accepting, and adopting, European knowledge practices and their products.ⁱⁱⁱ It should be added though that Tagore's vision for this space did not involve a closure of the wider context. This is to say that critical conversations conducted in this space could, he hoped, even facilitate a conversation on why certain European ideals (like ethical freedom) needed to be imbibed too (see below).

Tagore's critique of conventional knowledge production is embedded in his views about universal consciousness. Human beings have, in his view, an inherent sense of truth and beauty. When these senses work together, they can access the presence of the infinite in all things. Then, our understanding of the self widens. But what does it mean to say that the self widens or narrows? Usually, our senses of beauty and truth do not work together. They are separate. As a result, we distinguish between our own (conscious) self and the world. A widened self, however, would reject this distinction. It would not separate itself from the world. In Tagore's reading, classical Indic literature explicitly warned about believing in human superiority; it held that the "aloofness of absolute distinction" is morally wrong (Tagore, 1996a [1919], p. 398). And yet, the intertwining of the beautiful and the true was lost in his contemporary India, Tagore reasoned.

For Tagore, contemporary knowledge production worked on the premise that our inherent senses of truth and beauty were to be kept separate. A case in point were contemporary European philosophers who claimed that the Indic understanding of universal consciousness was a "mere abstraction" (Tagore, 1921a, 39). Tagore pointed out that these philosophers surreptitiously borrowed, and profited from, the understanding of universal consciousness prevalent in this tradition. And yet, they portrayed this tradition as "otherworldly" and "spiritual" for the scholarly audience in Europe. In consequence, the European discourse on Indian philosophy itself became one-sided. It could, furthermore, silence, or partly erase, the indigenous understanding according to which the "presence of the infinite in all things" must be realised and affirmed in every human activity (Tagore, 1921a, p. 39).

Tagore uses this analysis to underscore that the practices of those who perceive themselves to be—and are perceived as being—philosophical experts is problematic, for themselves and others. When they claim to be the sole arbiters of truth, they sever their own ac-

cess to their sense of beauty. As a result, their own access to universal consciousness is impaired. Furthermore, when such experts firmly believe in their own expertise and do not shy away from declaring the same, they subscribe to a narrow understanding of the self. Instead of widening the pool of philosophies, for example, they narrow it. This is mostly likely to be the case when their claims to possessing the ‘right’ knowledge are not challenged by their larger society.

Such a narrowing of the self has an individual and a societal dimension. For one, it halts the human soul’s journey from the moral to the spiritual, according to Tagore. For another, a knowledge community cannot, then, attend to universal consciousness adequately. Rather, it sets up relations of utility between the human and other-than-human world. Knowledge is used to exploit the world as an external resource. For Tagore, this relation to the world is faulty. It can only be rectified by braiding together the senses of truth and beauty. Their co-work would lead to a widening of the self; it would facilitate access to universal consciousness. The latter would, in turn, motivate us to respect the ideal of universal humanity in moral deliberations. To respect this ideal, however, one would have to familiarise oneself with humanity in all its iterations. In this regard, an open-ended education is crucial, for the mere presence of an ideal in a particular society will not suffice.

Tagore draws on two contemporary examples in this regard. While colonial India, in his view, illustrated that an ideal can fall into disuse when it is not sufficiently adapted to the immediate context, Japan demonstrated that even an ideal that continues to inform life can be sidelined by a blind appropriation of dominant concepts. The Indic civilization had been able to develop a viable understanding of community-building. In the past, it had created a “social federation, whose common name is Hinduism” (Tagore, 1917, p. 115). This federation had successfully created social unity such that “all the different peoples could be held together, while fully enjoying their freedom of maintaining their own social differences” (Tagore, 1917, p. 115). However, the belief that this understanding could bind people through the ages was continued uncritically. Its practice became static and putrescent, for it did not account for the “mutability which is the law of life” (Tagore, 1917, p. 116). The caste system, which ensued as one “social experiment” through which this unity could be achieved, “developed into the blind and lazy habit of relying upon the authority of traditions that are incongruous anachronisms in the present age” (Tagore, 1917, p. 115, 114).

Meanwhile, in contemporary Japan, the spiritual bond of loving-kindness, the ideal of “maitri, maitri with [human beings], and with Nature” that had been established in the past, was sidelined (Tagore, 1917, p. 73). An all-too-eager appropriation of the nation concept had occurred. The chapter of *Nationalism* referenced here is drawn from his lectures in Japan in 1916. There he audaciously claims that his contemporaries in Japan mistook “modernizing” for “modernism,” when it was only “a mere affectation” thereof (Tagore, 1917, p. 75). “[Modernizing] is nothing but mimicry, only affectation is louder than the original, and it is too literal” (Tagore, 1917, p. 75). Modernism, in contrast, was “freedom of mind, not slavery of taste”, “independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European school-masters,” he told his audience at Keio Gijuku University (Tagore, 1916b, pp. 15-16).

In the speech delivered there, Tagore called upon Japan at the beginning of the Taishō era to revert to its legacy of opening the “heart to the soul of the world” (Tagore, 1916b, p. 13). Contemporary Japanese, Tagore claimed, were able to intertwine the senses of truth and beauty mentioned earlier through the ideal of loving-kindness. This “ideal of ‘maitri’ is at the

bottom of your culture,—‘maitri’ with men [human beings] and ‘maitri’ with nature” (Tagore, 1916b, p. 14). Tagore presented himself in this controversial lecture as Japan’s ‘friend’ and ally, who could call out the inconsistency between the country’s ideal of loving-kindness and its actual practice of imperialist expansion. Arguing that Japan’s imperialist practices should be halted immediately, he contended that Japan, in an attempt at gaining the respect of Europe, was trying to show “that the blood-hounds of Satan are not only bred in the kennels of Europe, but can also be domesticated in Japan and fed with man’s miseries” (Tagore, 1916b, p. 23).

Taken together, the lectures at Tokyo Imperial University and Keio Gijuku University first attribute a tradition of loving-kindness to Japan. In addition, they point toward its relatively high economic independence to claim that this country had the means to take up the role of a leader in Asia.^{iv} In view of this independence coupled with its tradition of loving-kindness, it could potentially pave the way in implementing Tagorean modernism, meaning freedom of the mind, in the early decades of the twentieth century. Tagore appeals to his Japanese interlocutors of the Taishō era to “to remember that she [Japan] has the mission of the East to fulfil,” meaning to “infuse the sap of a fuller humanity into the heart of the modern civilisation” (Tagore, 1916a, p. 31). To this end, it would be worthwhile for them to imbibe the ideal of ethical freedom associated with Europe, for “we in the East” have “insulted humanity by treating with utter disdain and cruelty men who belonged to a particular creed, colour or caste” (Tagore, 1916b, p. 28). Notice the parallel between this Tagorean point and the concern voiced in the first section.

From his general, non-academic perspective, Tagore holds that some knowledge frameworks are unable to adequately make meaning of our interdependent world under certain conditions. The extant frameworks are merely able to make sense of the experiences of a certain section of the world’s population at a particular point in history. The blind adoption of these frameworks by others may have detrimental consequences for them, and for the world. More than a century later, this concern is echoed by several philosophers worldwide today. Like Tagore, they endorse an independence in thought that knows no boundaries. In fact, they reiterate his call for constantly reworking the body of beliefs which inform our actions so that these beliefs may help us make meaning of our interdependent world.

3 World Philosophies and the Retelling of the Dominant Philosophical Narrative

Several philosophers worldwide currently strive to re-examine the standard narrative of academic philosophy that sees philosophy as germane only to Europe. Their retelling of this narrative aims to include marginalised traditions (such as those of India, China and Japan) as well as those which have previously been completely dismissed as non-philosophical (like African(a) and Indigenous). These philosophers endorse an engagement with worlds of philosophy that are conventionally attributed to the so-called non-Western world. Working along the lines sketched in section 1, they hope that their research can make visible aspects of non-European philosophies, without reverting to the conceptual frameworks prevalent within conventional academic philosophy. Following the observation of Sudipta Kaviraj that, “At every stage in the academic presentation [...], [the] subaltern presence and contestation [is]

erased in the retelling, so that the historical *re*-presentation of this process is far more European than the process itself,” they endorse methodological vigilance (Kaviraj, 2015, p. 303). The latter, they hope will help to avoid what Kaviraj elsewhere calls “fluent lisping imitation[s]” of the dominant tradition (Kaviraj, 2013, p. 381).

Many of these philosophers decline to follow the standard European mould of comparative philosophy that was used to understand world philosophical traditions. For them, comparativists tend to remain trapped within the confines of their own narrow philosophical horizons; their questions generate answers to issues by which they were already seized and which are determined by their own cultural conditioning. Their narrow mode of inquiry does not allow them to face the possibility that the text, position, tradition at hand could require formulating totally new philosophical questions (cf. Rosemont, 1988, p. 66). In standard comparative work, non-Euro-American traditions have to be mirrored through the prism of familiarity to be recognised as philosophical traditions at all. As a result, traditions from near and afar begin to resemble each other, however remotely. At best, their study delivers (missing) parts of a mosaic, a mosaic of the philosopher’s own intellectual familiarities.

Some of these scholars acknowledge that they cannot offer pat answers to questions like, how should a philosopher work in actual practice? Should they be guided by the insight that similar ideas may emerge from different cultural contexts? Or should they rather focus on reconstructing salient features of the specific context at hand, without necessarily relating them to other contexts? Should they approach ideas without reference to other contexts, taking care not to utilise any conceptual elements which can be considered exogenous? Or should they rather anticipate that preconceptions and pre-judgments will, in the words of Sheldon Pollock, not allow one to properly “perceive what may be different about the relation of culture and power at other times and places” (Pollock, 1998, p. 44)? And yet, these philosophers are reluctant to develop one single, abstract and true, theoretical model which alone can capture the panoply of differing contexts. For such a model would very likely lead one to “simply find[...] more of oneself and what is familiar to one” in the positions one studies (Deutsch, 1997, p. xiii). Following this line of thought, these philosophers do not perceive themselves as excavators and exhibitors who present relics of human history to their audiences along a set template. Rather, their focus is on actual philosophising practices.

Through her critical engagement with the self-positioning of modern Japanese philosophy, for example, Arisaka Yoko has highlighted the need for a more nuanced study of this field (Arisaka, 1999, 2014, 2017). When Nishida Kitarō and his contemporaries philosophised in Asia in the early decades of the 20th century, she astutely observes, their engagement with contemporary philosophy was asymmetrical in one crucial respect: While they meticulously studied and imbibed philosophical developments in Europe, they continued to be cast outside the philosophical orbit by their European counterparts. Although their points of reference in philosophy were, in general, wholly European, philosophers like Nishida were, ironically, involved in mapping out “indigenous” philosophies, while simultaneously continuing to negotiate with European philosophical positions. The result was their rendition of a “Japanese yet universal” philosophy (Arisaka, 2014, p. 6).

Another example is Michiko Yusa’s exciting work on Japanese women philosophers who “rocked the philosophical boat” (Yusa, 2009, p. 168). Along with Leah Kalmanson, Michiko Yusa addresses the role played by Zen in the life of the early Japanese feminist Hiratsuka Raichō (Yusa and Kalmanson, 2014). As is known, Raichō established the Bluestocking So-

ciety or Seitōsha in 1911 to nurture the creative writing of young women. She was the founding editor of the journal *Seito* from 1911 to 1916. This early Japanese feminist is often portrayed as a libertine who used European figures as role-models to draft her life as a so-called modern Japanese woman. Through Yusa and Kalmanson's careful reading, however, a different Raichō comes to light. Trained in Zen meditation, Raichō used her meditative practices and her *kenshō* experience to reflect about her sexed body and her "true self" as a woman in post-Meiji Japan. She called upon contemporary Japanese women to first develop self-awareness before (dreaming of) initiating societal changes.

Raichō apparently initially believed that the sex of a person was immaterial in liberation, which simply involved becoming free from one's non-sexed body. In fact, clinging to purported differences between males and females in this context was telling. It indicated that one had yet to grasp the truth of the inner self. "This distinction of male and female does not exist at the highest level of the 'self', of the 'true ego' (*shinga* 真我) that is immortal and imperishable," she is said to have claimed at this stage (Yusa and Kalmanson, 2020, p. 619). But her experiences as an unwed lover, mother, and female intellectual led Raichō to realise that liberation is a liberation "from the self as it is for the self" (Yusa and Kalmanson, 2020, p. 624). Self-liberation occurs for a sexed body, which is connected to other bodies through physical, mental and spiritual bonds.

Similar endeavors to introduce innovative ways of dealing with world philosophical traditions are underway in, for example, the *Journal of World Philosophies*, the *Bloomsbury Introductions to World Philosophies*, and *Bloomsbury Studies in World Philosophies*.^v Showcasing innovative engagements with thinkers and positions from a host of world philosophical traditions, they feature various texts on Japanese philosophy. In his *Philosophy of Science and the Kyoto School*, Dean Brink works out a counter-hegemonic postcolonial gesture of differentiation (Brink, 2021). Morisato Takeshi's *Tanabe Hajime and the Kyoto School: Self, World and Knowledge* delves into Tanabe's meta-noesis, a knowing that includes both transcendent and immanent aspects (Morisato, 2021). Rossa Ó Muireartaigh's *The Zen Buddhist Philosophy of D.T. Suzuki: Strengths, Foibles, Intrigues, and Precision* offers a novel interpretation of D.T. Suzuki's unique Zen-inflected philosophy. Along with many other publications in the pipeline, these books can be said to put into the spotlight polycentric sites of philosophising. In time, they may contribute to a rectification of the all-too-easy, but inaccurate, claim that philosophy is a development unique to Europe.

It must be added, though, that although philosophers who adopt the world-philosophical perspective challenge the dominant narrative of European and Euro-American philosophy in their work, their scholarship has yet to be adequately acknowledged by funding agencies, philosophy departments, journals specialising in academic philosophy, or even standard indexing machines.

4 Conclusion

This paper began with the claim that it could be worthwhile to focus on the act of philosophising in a particular context. After explicating this claim, the paper briefly dwelt upon Tagore's critique of contemporary knowledge-making practices. Against this backdrop, it focused on recent scholarship on world philosophies that draws attention to the different sites

in which philosophical knowledge has been produced, edified, and contested before it could be handed over to the next generation throughout human history. The paper argued that research on world philosophies along the lines mentioned earlier might allow world philosophies to step out of the long shadows cast by the hegemonic reading of the European and Euro-American tradition. This research can offer a more nuanced reading, even of relatively well-studied figures like Rabindranath Tagore. If David Wong's claim that cultures are akin to conversations that encompass diverse, often conflicting and evolving views as well as judgements were to be extrapolated to the terms "East" and "West" (Wong, 2009, p. 103), it would, arguably, match to some extent Tagore's use of these terms. Neither do the so-called East nor the so-called West form a coherent body, Tagore would say, nor are they wholly separated. Those willing to engage in critical conversation can surpass the boundaries stipulated between the "East" and the "West".

Notes

- i In the following, I draw on my argument in Kirloskar-Steinbach (2019). See also Tully (2017).
- ii For the fallout of Tagore's lectures in Japan, see Bharucha (2006, pp. 84-88) and Hay (1970). Tagore was interpreted as a pessimist who failed to see the significance of the nation concept for Asian countries.
- iii Claims pertaining to Tagore's supposed endorsement of a pan-Asian civilization or an Indo-Asian spirituality cannot be examined within the scope of this paper. For more on these claims, see Dirlik (1996, p. 105, 109); Frost (2012); Hay, (1970, p. 41), and also Mizutani (2015).
- iv Before his first visit to Japan in 1915, Tagore had apparently already become wary about whether Japan would be able to rematerialise its social ideals given the political developments there. A few years later, he admitted to the Indian trading community in Japan that he had first witnessed the naked force of the nation in Japan (see Sen, 2020, p. 80). Tagore saw a historical parallel between Japanese colonial rule in Korea and British colonial rule on the Indian subcontinent (see Mizutani 2015).
- v For more on both the approaches, see, for example, Kirloskar-Steinbach, Ramana and Maffie (2014) and Kirloskar-Steinbach and Kalmanson (2021).

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