

Well-done Steak or *Gyū Sashi*?  
“Sacred Cows” and “Thickening” in Japanese-English Philosophical  
Translation

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***Abstract:** The influential and prolific philosopher and translator of philosophy James Heisig has argued for “desacralizing” translation into Japanese, and against “perfect translation” and for “thick translation” in Japanese to English translation. Heisig prioritizes broad appeal and readability over accuracy, bringing the translated philosopher into the reader’s space and facilitating an encounter on the latter’s terms rather than treating the author as a “sacred cow”. This article discusses Heisig’s programmatic statements on translation strategy in the context of the global dominance of English, the effects of declining language capabilities and unequal distribution of translation capabilities among Anglograph philosophers, the tendentially conservative and “domesticating” Anglospheric regime of translation, and the “foreignizing” alternatives found in Japanese translation history and in Schleiermacher, Nietzsche, Benjamin, and contemporary translation theorists. It suggests that learning from professional practices in the translation industry could help translating philosophers strike a suitable balance between domestication and foreignization.*

Aber nun der eigentliche Übersetzer, der diese beiden ganz getrennten Personen, seinen Schriftsteller und seinen Leser, wirklich einander zuführen, und dem letzten, ohne ihn jedoch aus dem Kreise seiner Muttersprache heraus zu nötigen, zu einem möglichst richtigen und vollständigen Verständniß und Genuß des ersten verhelfen will, was für Wege kann er hierzu einschlagen? Meines Erachtens gibt es deren nur zwei. Entweder der Übersetzer läßt den Schriftsteller möglichst in Ruhe, und bewegt den Leser ihm entgegen; oder er läßt den Leser möglichst in Ruhe und bewegt den Schriftsteller ihm entgegen (Schleiermacher 1813: 4–5).

The study of Japanese philosophy abroad has blossomed in recent years and translation plays a critical role in making the ideas of Japanese thinkers available. New journals and book series have been launched, conferences held by the Japanese philosophy associations are well attended, there have been major translation projects, such as Heisig, Kasulis & Maraldo's monumental sourcebook (Heisig et al. eds. 2011), and handbooks of Japanese philosophy have appeared (Davis ed. 2014; Yusa ed. 2017). Japanese philosophy appears to be flourishing internationally, yet the Philosophical Association of Japan launched this journal voicing fears for the future of philosophy. While Japanese philosophy is thriving abroad, there is a sense that academic philosophy in Japan is under existential threat from outside academia, or that it "feeds off itself, as if in the effort to grow as small as possible and eventually disappear" (Katō 2015; Heisig 2003: 46).<sup>1</sup> In contrast, others hold that Japan is in the midst of an "age of philosophy" 哲学の時代 and in the throes of a "philosophy boom" where "many people are now interested in philosophy" いま多くの人が哲学に関心を抱いている (Bunshun Online 2017; Okamoto 2016).<sup>2</sup>

Whatever one makes of the state of Japanese philosophy in the world and of philosophy in Japan, translation of the texts that are the mainstay of philosophical debate is a key aspect shaping the study of Japanese philosophy abroad. This article therefore contextually discusses two programmatic statements by James Heisig about translation strategy (Heisig 2003; 2010). Where Heisig works firmly within the hegemonic, domesticating, Anglospheric "regime of translation" (Sakai 2006), the article considers the subaltern counter-tradition of foreignization elaborated by Schleiermacher, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Berman, and Venuti as an alternative approach practiced more in Japan, and suggests that valuable lessons may be learnt from professional translators.

## 1. Translating philosophy in an "Anglobalizing" world

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<sup>1</sup> The background to Katō's concern was the controversy surrounding MEXT's ambiguous June 2015 statements, which suggested mass closure of social science and humanities departments. This caused an international "tsunami in a yunomi" or media storm in a teacup when mistranslated reports were picked up by the foreign media, leading the Ministry to issue a clarifying statement in English. (See Steffensen 2015 and Aoki 2017).

<sup>2</sup> An indication of the popular interest in philosophy is the fact that one can pick up philosophy dictionaries, introductions to Nietzsche, or primers on logic in convenience stores and from vending machines in train stations.

Philosophy in the Anglosphere is among the least sociologically and intellectually diverse humanities disciplines; philosophers tend to be disproportionately white, male, and socio-economically privileged, with a conception of philosophy as exclusively “derived from Europe and the English-speaking world” (Garfield & van Norden 2016). Its ethnocentric conservatism, claims to universality, and blindness to changing, demographic, economic and political realities is reminiscent of the blinkered “cultural hubris” of the decaying Qing empire (Basu 2014: 937). The current flowering of Japanese philosophy is thus taking place on the margins of a discipline that is skeptical if not downright hostile to non-Western thought, not unlike the “anti-Westernism” that accompanied the collapse of the traditional East Asian order (Wakabayashi 1992). The out-of-touch mandarins today are not Neo-Confucians but the inhabitants of the increasingly detached dreaming spires of seats of Western learning. As a result, scholars of Japanese philosophy often ply their trade in area studies and religious studies departments, and this colors what is considered Japanese philosophy and what is translated (Steffensen 2017: 69).

Western specialists in Japanese philosophy have overwhelmingly focused on Buddhism in its “religious and soteriological aspects” (Parkes 1997: 307). A tendency towards Orientalism, exoticism and “systematically overestimating the role of religion” in the non-West (Sen 2005: 69) reproduces itself through translation. The selection of texts thus plays a crucial role in constituting “Japanese philosophy” as generally synonymous with Buddhist philosophy. As Steven Bein sums it up: “Of all the many volumes of nineteenth and twentieth century Japanese philosophy, almost everything to reach Western audiences is Buddhist philosophy” (Bein 2017: 207).

The gatekeeping and boundary-maintaining role of the leading translators is all the more important in the context of what might be called “Anglobalization”. Globalization is more complex than “the spreading economic and military might of the US” (Jameson 2000: 50), but two centuries of British and American hegemony have made English the first global lingua franca now used by more non-native than native speakers. Outside the Anglosphere, English has come to dominate at the expense of other languages, and inside it fewer academics read in languages other than their native tongue. A few decades ago, the average European undergraduate had a functional knowledge of classical and modern European languages. In Japan, unmediated reading is still considered a hallmark of expertise, but students in continental Europe today will often read Kant, Hegel or Foucault in English translation supported by English-language secondary literature. The distance

becomes even greater when students or academics take an interest in East Asian philosophy, where independent reading ability is scarcer, the corpus of translations much less complete and, arguably, slanted to channel them in certain conservative directions. Research therefore often remains derivative and reliant on translation by a few figures, whose linguistic and hence interpretive authority the readers are ill-equipped to query.<sup>3</sup>

While the global spread of English and decline in foreign language abilities in the Anglosphere has led to linguistic homogenization and narrowing of horizons, there is also a sense that philosophy should reflect and reflect upon the cultural plurality that surrounds it. This means broadening the scope beyond the Greek-Roman and Western European traditions to include Islamic and non-Western thought. There are good reasons for philosophy to become more pluralistic and inclusive, just as it is for it to address its gender imbalance. As Foucault remarked: “should there be a philosophy of the future, it will be born outside of Europe, or as a result of encounters and impacts between Europe and non-Europe” (Foucault 1994: 623).<sup>4</sup>

The ideal where all can read original sources is unrealistic, and limiting ourselves to the languages we can read is restrictive. It is therefore, as Michiko Yusa has phrased it, an “inevitable fact that we are all indebted to translations”, but there is also a “necessity of learning the language in which the text is written”. This is not only for epistemic, but also for ethical and political reasons; engagement and encounter on as equal terms as possible requires reciprocity and linguistic competence equal to that of generations of Japanese scholars for whom mastery of European languages and intellectual idioms has been the norm for over a century and a half. For Yusa, there is a hierarchy of Japanese proficiency, going from a “passive” ability to compare original and translation over an ability “to read the text accurately, even if one is not able to converse in the target language” to a level of fluency where “one can read, speak, listen, think, and write in it and translate it into another language” (Yusa 2017: 16).

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<sup>3</sup> Relatively fewer Anglophone philosophers writing on Japanese philosophy seem able to read Japanese than e.g. historians, ethnographers, political scientists, and literary scholars specialising in Japan. It is thus much more common to see doctorates in philosophy based entirely on translated sources than in most neighbouring disciplines.

<sup>4</sup> “Si une philosophie de l’avenir existe, elle doit naître en dehors de l’Europe ou bien elle doit naître en conséquence de rencontres et de percussions entre l’Europe et la non-Europe”. Apart from making the pronouncement, Foucault’s understanding remained abstract and superficial, with Japan as a disorientating “enigma” (Lazreg 2017: 216).

Translation into Japanese is justified even when reading proficiency in European languages is widespread, and there is a need for good translations into English of philosophy written in Japanese. The question becomes what constitutes good translation in philosophy and by which procedures we can ensure that such translations are produced. The current distribution of language skills within the Anglograph Japanese philosophy community creates a dependency on a few authority figures and a conservative bias towards reproducing their intellectual agenda and de facto equation of Japanese philosophy with Buddhist philosophy.

## 2. Desacralization, imperfection and how to serve the meat of a sacred cow

James Heisig is greatest living Anglophone scholar of the Kyoto School building on the tradition founded by his predecessors at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. He is also a prolific translator into English and pivotal in the further transmission of Japanese philosophy into Spanish.<sup>5</sup> Heisig is not only an eminent theologian, philosopher, and translator; he has also reflected theoretically on how to translate philosophical texts. In one article, he argues for “desacralizing” translation, in another he sets out the “case against perfect translations” (Heisig 2003; 2010).

There is much of value that most translators will agree with in Heisig’s considerations. In “Desacralizing Philosophical Translation” he paints a picture of an academic establishment in Japan that is divorced from wider societal discourse and becoming irrelevant through excessive specialization and elitism. According to

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to Japanese and several other European languages, Heisig is fluent in Spanish and has authored several works since 1976 in the language of Cervantes. Spanish translations often follow on from previous English translations, e.g. Raquel Bouso García’s translation of Jan van Bragt’s translation of Nishitani’s *Shūkyō to wa nani ka* 宗教とは何か as *La religión y la nada*. Bouso has also translated Heisig, Robert Carter and Thomas Kasulis into Spanish and a Spanish-language version of Heisig, Kasulis and Maraldo’s sourcebook. Perhaps more than any other of the major Western language communities, the Spanish-speaking world is dependent on English-language scholarship and on English as an intermediary pivot language. Judging by the critical reception (e.g. Vallverdu 2017), this is largely considered unproblematic and Heisig and Bouso, indeed, defended translation via English when the book was launched at Casa Asia. With some exceptions such as Agustín Jacinto Zavala much Spanish research is based on translations of translations with the inevitable risk of a “Chinese whispers” effect. The risk is particularly pronounced when translating books like Carter’s, which is based solely on English-language sources. This risk is much less pronounced among German and French-speaking scholars, where Japanese literacy is more widespread.

Heisig, an important reason is that philosophical texts are not translated “to be widely read”. For him, translation should spread the word as widely as possible, and translators should be freed from constraints. Accuracy and loyalty to the author’s voice take second place:

I would like to argue the case for a radical liberalization of the standards of philosophical translation in Japan. It is time great numbers of aspiring philosophers were set free to err on the side of creativity and rhetorical elegance, which have been longstanding victims of the largely tacit but powerful assumptions regarding translation. The step is an audacious one only because it is unfamiliar. Once taken, however, I am convinced that it will help to free the thinking of the young generation of philosophical minds who typically begin their careers with translating texts, and at the same time increase the reading public of philosophy. Accordingly, the object of my argument here will be the sacred cow of fidelity to the original text (Heisig 2003: 48).

Seven years later, Heisig inveighed “against perfect translations”. This time, his target was translation from East Asian into European languages, and he argued for “redrawing the canons of translation of East Asian philosophical texts in order to draw Western philosophers more deeply into conversation with them” (Heisig 2010: 81).

I am convinced that much more is gained in the presentation of Asian philosophies in Western languages than is lost, and that, on balance, it is better to err on the side of readable, widely accessible translation than on the side of a meticulous, esoteric rendering. The addiction to the opinions of a small but critical readership of specialists in the field is nearly epidemic among translators of philosophical texts, and for this, there is no known rational cure. One can only stand by and watch the same irony play itself out again and again as obscurity of thinking and inadequate skill at expression are projected onto the insistence that the original text is responsible for the clumsiness of the translation. This kind of failure is understandable enough, but it should become more and more inexcusable as time goes by. For that to happen, *we need to take a posture of critical suspicion towards all claims*

*that communication should suffer in the name of fidelity to the text* (Heisig 2010: 84–85, emphasis in original).

To save philosophy in Japan and spread East Asian philosophy in the West, Heisig seeks to interlingually disseminate ideas efficiently and effectively. To achieve his mission, he is willing to slaughter the “sacred cow of fidelity to the original text” while preserving the sanctity of the target language (Heisig 2003: 46). Extending his metaphor, one could add that his next step is to cook a well-done “thickly” cut steak rather than serve it raw as “thinly” sliced *gyū sashi*.<sup>6</sup> Heisig distinguishes between “thin” and “thick” translation, building on an idea of Gilbert Ryle’s, which Clifford Geertz popularized in his work on “thick description” in intercultural hermeneutics (Geertz 1973). Heisig defines “thin” or “perfect” translation as follows:

By a thin translation, I mean a largely literal rendition, faithful to the original phrase by phrase, consistent in its translation of terms, often annotated to indicate obscure allusions, and resigned to forfeiting literary style of the original for the sake of the meanings and ambiguities of the words themselves, even where this involves a certain clumsiness in syntax. The thin translation is typically marked by the introduction of neologisms or foreign words, the insertion of bracketed remarks, and an unnatural flow in style. For the translated text to introduce nuances of meaning not present in the original is as much a fault as is the mistranslation of a term or the misreading of a grammatical construct. How perfectly the translation is executed depends also on the knowledge and skill of the translator. The ideal translation, therefore, is one in which interference by the translator and by the medium of translation is so thin as to be all but transparent, and the accuracy of the equivalences of such a high standard as to render it translucent of the underlying original. Even if such perfection were possible, the translation would be of little use to those who can read the text fluently in the original, except perhaps to save them the time when they need to cite it in translation. But for those to whom the original is closed off, it is the best they can hope for; and for those who read the original with difficulty, its thinness enables them to navigate their way quickly to the parts they want to check in the

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<sup>6</sup> *Gyū sashi* 牛刺 is beef sashimi, i.e. slices of raw meat.

original. In any case, the thinner and more perfect the translation, the more it is considered reliable for “scholarly” purposes (Heisig 2010: 85).

Against this, he argues for “thick translation” as a superior strategy:

If the shadow of the original hangs forever over any perfection achieved in a thin translation, it is all but absent in the completion of a thick translation. Its aim is to express the content of the original in a syntax, idiom, and fluency of prose that makes it at once intelligible and satisfying to the linguistic tastes of the translator, and appealing to the native reader of the language of translation. The thickening of the translation begins where dictionaries and reference works reach their limits. The translator breathes in the text, holds it, and then breathes it out so that the words frozen stiff on the printed page can melt into a vernacular that flows naturally for the reader. Like a good editor, the translator is not bound by the syntax and idioms of the author but aims at improving the original or, in the case of a masterly written text, making it at least plausible in translation. Lapses of logical connection are restored, wordiness is tightened, rigidity is loosened up. Sound and rhythm replace the tiresome, heavy plod of what has been carelessly written or what would appear to be carelessly written if presented in a thinner, more literal rendition. The result is not a finished product because the thick translation is not aiming at perfection (Heisig 2010: 86).

It must be noted that this conception of “thick translation” differs from other treatments, such as those of Kwame Anthony Appiah (Appiah 1993) and Theo Hermans, who also draw on Ryle but arrive at their conceptions via Grice and Searle’s philosophy of language and Geertz’s notion of ethnographic “thick description”, to which it is “grafted on” (Hermans 2003:385). This means that for Appiah, “thick translation” is almost diametrically the opposite of what Heisig proposes. It is a form of “academic” translation, translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context”. And unlike Heisig, Appiah argues that such work is “eminently worth doing”, not only for research but also for teaching purposes. Unlike for Heisig, for Appiah a “thick translation” is one that does not aim to be a work of philosophy in itself but one that “tells us about the culture from which the object-text it translates has come” (Appiah 1993: 817).

In his distinctions between “thin” and “thick”, and “perfection” versus “desacralization”, Heisig voices dilemmas as old as the practice of translation itself and comes down squarely on one side, that of the reader. For Schleiermacher, translation is an intersubjective exchange mediated by the translator, and, as Sakai notes, the translator “regulates communicative transactions, but her mediation must be erased in the representation of translation according to which the message issued by the writer in one language is transferred into an equivalent message in another language, which is then received by the readers” (Sakai 1997: 9–10). The translator is always torn between two ideals that pull in opposite directions — on the one hand, a wish to be faithful to the author and to write a translation that accurately reflects the source text and, on the other hand, a desire to recompose a text that reads fluently in the target language. For Heisig, the aim “is not to retain the purity and innocence of an original text at all costs, but to engage the original in conversation, faithful to its meaning if not always to its idiom” (Heisig 2010: 87).

As successful examples of the strategy, he points to Jan van Bragt’s translation of Nishitani’s *Religion and Nothingness* and his own collaboration with Takeuchi Yasunori and Valdo Viglielmo on Tanabe’s *Philosophy as Metanoetics*.<sup>7</sup> Heisig cites the testimony of the theologian Joseph Kitagawa, who found these translations “often to be clearer and more interesting than the original Japanese” (Heisig 2010: 86). Kitagawa realized that things “had been found in the English version that were only dimly there, if they were indeed there at all, in the original”. This is because “the text had been thickened to draw connections and conclusions as English style required, and to introduce ambiguity where the Japanese was straightforward and univocal. To the native reader of English, the translations read as if written originally in English, but to achieve this, a heavy editorial hand was needed” (Heisig 2010: 87). The proof of the pudding is thus its easy digestibility.

What distinguishes a good translation, according to Heisig, is that it leaves no traces of its foreignness, and leaves philosophical English unchanged. What some would consider the mistake of over-translation (insertion of things that were not in the original) is turned into a virtue. The translator presents an interpretation and there is no need for the reader to “be a cow” and practice the Nietzschean “art of reading” as “rumination” (Nietzsche 2006: 9). The sacred cow is cut up, cooked and served to the reader to be effortlessly digested.

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<sup>7</sup> As testimony to his influence and the well-deserved esteem he is held in, Heisig was closely involved in van Bragt’s project as well as in Graham Parkes and Setsuko Aihara’s translation of Nishitani’s *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* (Heisig 2009: 299)

Even if Heisig's brand of comparative and continental philosophy is a minority interest struggling for recognition against resistance from a mostly analytic Anglophone academy, his "thickening" translation strategy is firmly within the mainstream Anglophone tradition and very different from the Japanese "thin" translation he criticizes. As Indra Levy has succinctly stated, "modern Japan is a culture of translation" which has tended to preserve "the foreign character of the source text in a way that radically expands the horizons of the target language" (Levy 2011: 1, 3). Writing "translationese" or *honyakugo* 翻訳語 is not considered a sociolinguistic sin and modern academic Japanese is very much a hybrid language. Translation has been used for social and intellectual transformation in a subaltern culture and "played a formative role in the constitution of Japanese modernity" (Haag 2011: 16; Maruyama & Katō 1998; Clements 2015). Japan has been an importer of ideas and the Anglosphere a net exporter. As Heisig's recommendations underline, translation into English takes place in an assimilatory regime and serves to uphold the existing order of discourse rather than to disturb it. The question is whether philosophy is best served by assimilation or by efforts to "deposit something resistant and Oriental beneath the skin of the Western tradition" (Williams 2002: 4).

### **3. Bringing the author home or sending the reader abroad?**

As the epigraph expresses, translation is an intersubjective encounter between author and reader mediated by the agency of the translator. The strategic choices are between different degrees of intervention in either direction: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him" (Schleiermacher 1813: 5; Venuti 2008: 84). Schleiermacher preferred to "leave the author in peace" and move the reader towards the author.

In articulating the dilemma and the choice in these terms, Schleiermacher was the first in a succession of mostly German-writing thinkers to propose what nowadays is termed a "foreignizing method" and theorized by scholars associated with the "cultural turn" in translation studies (Berman 1984, 2008; Lefevere 1990; Venuti 2008: 84–99). The argument for foreignizing and "sending the reader abroad" rather than "bringing the author home" has been a reaction against the tendency by

hegemonic cultures to assimilate subaltern texts at least since Roman antiquity. For Nietzsche, Roman translators of Greek poetry had:

no sympathy for the antiquarian inquisitiveness that precedes the historical sense; as poets, they had no time for all those very personal things and names and whatever might be considered the costume and mask of a city, a coast, or a century: quickly, they replaced it with what was contemporary and Roman. They seem to ask us: Should we not make new for ourselves what is old and find ourselves in it? Should we not have the right to breathe our own soul into this dead body? For it is dead after all; how ugly is everything dead! They did not know the delights of the historical sense; what was past and alien was an embarrassment for them; and being Romans, they saw it as an incentive for a Roman conquest. Indeed, translation was a form of conquest. Not only did one omit what was historical; one also added allusions to the present and, above all, struck out the name of the poet and replaced it with one's own-not with any sense of theft but with the very best conscience of the *imperium Romanum* (Nietzsche 1974: 137–138).

What Nietzsche warns against is the “desacralization” and “thick translation” which requires betrayal of the idiom of a text and its conquest by the target culture. Any act of translation is inevitably also an act of interpretation, but there is a risk that “thick translation” becomes over-translation, obscures the ambiguities of the source text and imposes too much of the translator’s interpretation. Translators should perhaps be less concerned with making it easy for readers and more with representing authors, with all their ambiguities, stylistic idiosyncrasies, historicity, and foreignness.

Where Heisig believes we should strive to translate Japanese as if written originally in English, Benjamin conceived of the task as that of intervening in and transforming the target language:

Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works.... The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be

powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language. It is not generally realized to what extent this is possible, to what extent any language can be transformed, how language differs from language almost the way dialect differs from dialect; however, this last is true only if one takes language seriously enough, not if one takes it lightly (Benjamin 2007: 80–81).

What Benjamin advocates comes close to Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (variously translated as alienation, distancing, or estrangement effect) as a dramaturgical device whereby the audience is prevented from losing itself in the narrative and is instead made a conscious, critical observer. To translate in such an alienating, distancing, or estranging way would work on transforming and pluralising Western-language philosophy rather than assimilating non-Western thought through “domestication”. Venuti argues in the spirit of Schleiermacher, Nietzsche and Benjamin that the ethical choice is “to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad” (Venuti 1995: 20), where Heisig holds that insufficient adaptation to the target language and culture can “frighten away the very minds that one wishes most to find a way into the dialogue” (Heisig 2010: 83). Both seek to further communication and productive dialogue, either by “bringing the author home” or “sending the reader abroad”. For Heisig, the reason we must bring the author home is to popularize the foreign philosophy. Miki Kiyoshi, a philosopher with great popular appeal as a public intellectual, asked in July 1932: “Can philosophy not be made easy?” 哲学はやさしくできないか (Miki 1967a: 477–487). His answer — “thinly” translated — was this:

Philosophy is lost in popularization, and a loss of philosophy does not make philosophy easy to understand. When using the pretext of making philosophy easy to understand, one should be wary of whether the philosophy itself will be erased or the philosophical spirit will be lost by popularization<sup>8</sup> (Miki 1967a: 486).

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<sup>8</sup> 俗流化は哲學を失ふ、哲學をなくすることは哲學をわかるやうにすることではなからう。哲學をわかり易くするといふ口實のもとに、俗流化によつて、哲學そのも

Where Heisig wants to save philosophy by making it accessible to a wider audience and add value in translation, the most publicly engaged Kyoto School philosopher warns against loss of “the philosophical spirit”.

#### **4. A proposition in lieu of conclusion: Philosophical translation as specialized translation**

Many fields of human endeavor routinely rely on translation, and translating philosophers might learn from the practices of specialized translators in such fields as technology, medicine, law, and financial services. This rests on a widespread, but by no means universally agreed, theoretical distinction between literary and specialized translation, where the latter requires specialist knowledge of a subject field. Specialized translation is carried out by translators, such as Heisig and other philosophers, who in addition to mastery of the source and target language have “the knowledge, the competence, and the recognized status of an expert” in their field (Scarcevic 2006: 10).<sup>9</sup> Literary translation, on the other hand, often tends towards the seamless assimilation that Heisig advocates. On the further assumption that the activity of translating philosophical texts does not in principle differ substantially from that of specialized translation and that the task of the philosophical translator is more akin to that of the specialized than the literary translator, then the theoretical work informing their practices could be of value. Without explicitly considering any applicable lessons that could be learnt from the translation industry, the translations in the special issue on “Japanese Philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” (*Philosophie japonaise du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*) edited by Jacynthe Tremblay similarly emphasized conceptual accuracy over target language conventions (Tremblay 2008: 242). And as suggested above, Tremblay and her collaborators follow a foreignizing rather than domesticating strategy to transform French-language philosophy:

À la façon des philosophes de l'ère Meiji qui transformèrent leur propre langue (création de néologismes et de distinctions à partir des caractères chinois, nouvelles significations données aux vieux vocables, altération de la

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のが抹殺されたり、哲學的精神が失はれたりすることがありはしないかを警戒せねばならぬ。

<sup>9</sup> For a problematization of the distinction, see Rogers 2015.

syntaxe, bref, extension des limites de la langue), les traducteurs actuels de la philosophie japonaise doivent accomplir le même type de travail au niveau de leurs langues maternelles respectives, ainsi qu'on le constatera aisément dans les traductions qui suivent. Étant donné cette tâche herméneutique imposante à laquelle ils ont dû faire face, leur langage pourra présenter parfois des discontinuités avec le langage séculaire de la philosophie occidentale (Tremblay 2008: 242).

Instead of Heisig's proposed "radical liberalization", bringing practices more in line with the disciplined conduct of professional translators and with the reception history of modern philosophy in Japan might be worth considering. Philosophical translation should strive for accurate transmission of concepts and arguments, without undermining philosophy in the process, as Heisig suggests is happening at the hands of translator-philosophers in Japan (Heisig 2003: 47).<sup>10</sup> He believes that, "in Japan's academic world, translation is seen as a technical issue, not a proper philosophical question", but it should be seen as both, and neither aspect taken lightly. Rather than being philosophically deficient, many academics in Japan and abroad lack the technical skills to translate accurately. In the worst cases, they are too weak both as translators and philosophers and lack "disciplinary preparedness" (Sakai 2009:190; cf. Williams 2004: 47).

The translation of philosophical texts ought to be subject to similar demands of conceptual rigor, consistency and accuracy as the medical, legal, and financial texts upon which lives and livelihoods often depend. Rather than maximizing its aesthetic appeal to ease reading, translation should aim to accurately transfer the meanings of the source text. As Miki argued, philosophy should not be unnecessarily complicated, but it should not popularize itself out of existence. The monolingual student or philosopher is in principle no different from the banker making an investment decision or the lawyer interpreting a contract. The practical need is to understand the text and to work productively with it. Similar

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<sup>10</sup> If that were the case, modern philosophy would never have taken off in Japan, as the style of translation and writing he so deplors has characterized academic philosophy since the 19th century. Modern Japanese philosophers (and many novelists) have always translated and written in "foreignizing" ways. The crisis Heisig perceives must have other sources than translation, and the view that philosophy suffers from "academicism" is nothing new, as some of Tosaka's and Miki's writings from the 1930s attest to (Steffensen 2016; Miki 1967b). Furthermore, the abovementioned "philosophy boom" suggests that the reading public in Japan has a voracious appetite for philosophy. If philosophy did not appeal to the public in 2003, the crisis seems to have blown over by 2017.

intersubjectively verifiable quality standards should apply as to other fields that rely on textual transfer of meanings between languages.

The needs of the target audience of philosophical translation are not principally aesthetic, as Heisig seems to think when writing that “the idea that texts are more beautiful, or at least richer, in the original is a truism that no translator of philosophy would dare challenge in public” (Heisig 2003: 48). Its beauty has no bearing on whether a translation serves its purpose of representing the author’s ideas, including his or her possibly awkward or downright ugly style. Philosophers in Japan write in very different styles and often have the soundness of the philosophy as the main concern. This can result in technical, complex texts that are also difficult for native readers to follow, just as Heidegger is challenging for German-speakers.<sup>11</sup> Following Heisig’s advice “to err on the side of creativity and rhetorical elegance” runs the risk that the resulting “thick translation” gives “a very bad idea of the linguistic character of the original” (Heisig 2003: 48; Beard 2013: 33). Because interpretive choices are involved, there can be no direct equivalence between the source and target text, but the translator must remain as invisible as possible and have the stylistic flexibility to represent the author.

Following basic quality control procedures ought both to produce readable texts and transmit ideas more accurately. This is easily achieved if translators, publishers, and peer reviewers ask themselves standard questions posed in the translation industry. Too many academic translations fail basic tests encapsulated in questions like: “Have all the contents been translated?”; “Have specialist terms been translated accurately?”; “Have terms been translated consistently?” and so forth. In striking the balance between “domestication” and “foreignization”, between “thick” and “thin”, it may be better to follow the author than the translator’s “creativity and rhetorical elegance”, even if this is more demanding on the reader and sends her “abroad” into intellectually unfamiliar territory. The “butchery” of the author’s “sacred cow” of a text will be less severe, and the reader might learn more by being challenged.

The task can be seen as a technical rather than artistic exercise that inevitably interprets the author’s words but prioritizes loyalty to his or her style of writing and argumentation. “Thin” translation combined with Geertzian thick description would invite non-Western philosophy to join the party dressed as it is, not dressed up as

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<sup>11</sup> Sakai rightly notes that being Japanese is no guarantee of comprehension and that pre-war Kyoto School philosophy is as alien to Japanese educated after 1945 as it is to non-Japanese with the required combination of linguistic and philosophical skills.

something else. Respecting the author and challenging the reader will have a stronger transformative effect than familiarizing and assimilating the non-Western. Employing a family metaphor, it would be less like adopting a child and more like an encounter between equal adults. Translators should, obviously, not write unintelligible gibberish, and Heisig's complaint that bad translators often blame the author for their failings is valid. Nevertheless, words written in one language can be recomposed in another in a way that preserves their character and does not overly impose the conventions of the translator's language and culture on it. Applying the tested common-sense procedures that professional translators follow and striking a sensible balance between author and reader that treats the source text with due respect and strives for the ideal of perfection would reciprocate what modern Japanese philosophers did in their "fateful encounter" with the European tradition. Ideally, the translator should not have to mediate between author and reader, but since some degree of butchery is involved, the translator has to decide on how to serve the beef. Something philosophically new might emerge if *gyū sashi* is put on the menu instead of well-done steak.

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