10 Years of the Roche Chair

The upcoming 10th anniversary of the commencement of the Roche Chair for Interreligious Research provided an opportunity to invite former Chair holders to share some thoughts on their research experience.

Thomas P. Kasulis
April–September 2006

In spring 2006, I had the honor of holding for four months the Roche Chair for Interreligious Research at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. It came at a critical point in my own development as a scholar and it has profoundly influenced my academic research in the subsequent years. At the time I had recently published my book *Shinto: the Way Home* and I was looking forward to returning to a long-standing project that had been put on the back burner for some years, namely, writing a history of Japanese philosophy. At the same time, however, Jim Heisig, John Maraldo, and I were exploring the possibility of compiling a sourcebook of Japanese philosophy. So I used my time as the Roche Chair to do some preliminary research on both projects, the history and the sourcebook.

After a few weeks, it became clear that the sourcebook should be given preference over the history. At the time there was a paucity of translations in the field of Japanese philosophy, and I realized that my history would have to translate many excerpts for the first time. Yet, those excepts for the history would necessarily be very brief, running the risk of appearing to be short passages taken out of context. Furthermore, to be translating passages from some fifteen centuries of Japanese thought was an enormous project and would be best approached as a collaborative work.

As a result, I spent the bulk of my time as the Roche Chair working with the other two co-editors, laying out the parameters of the *Sourcebook,* deciding its structure, its principles of inclusion, and the types of supporting materials that would most serve its readership. All along the planning stage, however, I kept the history project in mind, thinking of how the materials in the *Sourcebook* could eventually be used in conjunction with the *History.* I always believed they would function best as complementary works. With the award-winning publi-

cation of *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook* in 2011, I am now finally preparing my *Engaging Japanese Philosophy: A History* for publication later this year (2015). The publication of the S*ourcebook* has enabled me to cross-link key discussions in the history with the translated materials in the earlier work even beyond the level I had originally hoped.

Even more importantly, however, has been the great synergy that has developed around the field of Japanese philosophy through the publication of the *Sourcebook*. Because of the efforts of the Nanzan Institute we now have a robust network of scholars—both senior and junior—working in the field of Japanese philosophy from around the world. It is no exaggeration to say that the comparative field of Japanese-western religious and philosophical thought has blossomed out of the projects started that first year of the Roche Chair program. The Nanzan Institute has long maintained that interreligious dialogue is enhanced by the ongoing exchange of philosophical ideas on their highest level. The Roche Chair program has played a major role in that exchange over the past decade. Both I personally and the field of comparative religion and philosophy are indebted to Robert Roche and his endowment for making this work possible. It has set a foundation for interreligious research that will continue for many decades to come.

Keel Hee-sung
October 2006–August 2007

For most of modern men and women, death is an abrupt ending of life, and with it a total breakdown of the meaning that has sustained their life. Since death is basically meaningless, life is also meaningless for them. Whatever meaning the resurrected "spiritual body" may have in St. Paul's vision of life with God after death, there must be no doubt that it indicates a form of life in a continuing personal relationship with God. The main problems people have with this traditional belief are twofold in my mind. On the one hand there is the difficulty of reconciling this personal immortality with contemporary physicalist views of the human being. The more serious problem, on the other hand, comes from the fact that Christianity has traditionally recognized only a single life on earth and no other chance to improve life for innumerable people whose lives have been unfortunate for no fault of their own. Life is unfair for too many people and God too cruel for them. This undoubtedly constitutes one of the main reasons which have led many, including a significant number of Christians, toward belief in Hindu and Buddhist doctrines of reincarnation and multiple lives.

During my privileged stay at Nanzan as the second holder of the Roche chair for interreligious research, I was preoccupied with the question whether it is

theologically possible to combine the concept of multiple lives with the Christian view, or to incorporate it into a Christian view of life and death. My research was mainly devoted to reading many materials not only in Christian theology but also many contemporary works in parapsychology and "near death experience" accounts—the sort of thing in which I would not have had serious interest previously, nor the time for it even if I had! To my disappointment I found no serious evidence that a theologian like Origen, contrary to common belief, believed in reincarnation; nor did I find much literature, traditional or modern, dealing with the details of the Hindu and Buddhist concept of reincarnation. Despite the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* or Stevenson's modern classic, *Twenty Cases of Reincarnation*, and other works like those by John Hick, I came to conclude that the problem of memory, an essential element for meaningful personal identity throughout multiple lives, cannot be solved in a satisfactory manner to be helpful for a new theological approach to the problem. Despite this negative result, however, I still have continuous interest in reading the growing materials in parapsychology and in a possible way to incorporate some of their insights into a Christian view of life after death.

Needless to say, all this is solely due to the wonderful research opportunity the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture kindly offered to me in 2006. May I close with my heartfelt gratitude to the Institute for this personally, and for its role as a leading institution promoting interreligious dialogue and research.

John P. Keenan
September 2007–May 2008

The period from fall 2007 to summer 2008 was a good year for me, thanks to the Roche Chair for Interreligious Research at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture. It was an opportunity to concentrate on my research and writing for a full nine months free of the obligations of employment. I was able to bask in the Institute's collegial atmosphere and easy access to its library while devoting myself to two ongoing projects. Primarily, I worked on a book that was published in 2011 by Peeters and Eerdmans as *I Am/No Self: A Christian Reading of the Heart Sūtra*. Co-authored with my wife Linda K. Keenan, this work applies the anthropology of the Heart Sūtra to the Gospel of John. While holding the Roche Chair, I also began a study of Philippians and its emptiness theme; that will be published this year by Wipf & Stock *as The Emptied Christ of Philippians: Mahāyāna Meditations.* Both of these books expand on my continuing effort to introduce Mahāyāna notions into Christian theological thinking, begun with my 1989 work *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahāyāna Theology* published by Orbis. Incidentally, that book also

spent much of its incubation period at the Nanzan Institute while I was working there in the mid-1980s.

Throughout its almost forty-year history, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture has made a tremendous contribution to interreligious understanding through its many and varied intercultural, interfaith endeavors, providing scholars from around the world with opportunities to do research, to meet and discuss with one another, and to share their work through publication.

John C. Maraldo
October 2008–March 2009

My time as a Roche Fellow, from October 2008 to April 2009, was truly a highlight of my career. I assumed the Chair just after retiring from nearly four decades of teaching. To have six months to think, write, and do research, with no other academic responsibilities was not only a great privilege, but a rare opportunity different from other fellowships I had enjoyed. That is because of the setting of the Roche Chair in the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture and, even more so, because of the wonderful people associated with the Institute. The Institute's and University's libraries were ideal for my research, and the city of Nagoya offered fewer distractions from work than Kyoto or Tokyo would have. A University apartment in a nearby mansion allowed me and my wife to live comfortably and within easy walking distance to the Institute. But the biggest advantage was due to the people, the Institute's director, members, associates, visiting researchers, and office staff, who provided material and moral support, expert advice, companionship, and ample prodding to get the work done.

My primary task was to work with Jim Heisig on the volume published in 2011 as *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, edited by the two of us together with Tom Kasulis, who had been the Roche Fellow in 2006. During my time at the Institute, Jim and I corresponded with many contributors, met in person with others, selected texts for inclusion, and did editorial work on translations and introductory sections. Most importantly for my own translations and writing for the sourcebook, Jim helped me unravel complicated Japanese texts, smooth out my tangled philosophical English, and keep on track in saying what needed to be said. On one especially memorable day we received permission to enter the University Library rooms that house books from the Edo Period and earlier and are always kept under lock and key. We wanted to look at book bindings that might serve as a model for the *Sourcebook*'s cover, and when we came across a volume with hand-stitched binding, a burnt orange cover and vertically printed title, we were convinced that we had found just right color and pattern to make

our own dust jacket one that would surely present the *Sourcebook* as worthy of being judged by its cover.

Along with the *Sourcebook* work, I was able to write some essays that are parts of another multi-year project. I have been engaged in using Japanese philosophy as a resource for alternatives to some standard oppositions in Western philosophy and religious studies. The idea is to work out a middle ground in problems traditionally defined by exclusionary opposites that restrict imagination and often skew solutions. During my tenure with the Roche Chair, I worked on alternatives to three pairs of opposites: practice versus theory, autonomy versus dependency, and normative versus descriptive. My in-house seminar gave Institute members a glimpse of this project and gave me much needed critical feedback. In December of 2008, I traveled to Hong Kong to present part of this work in a keynote address, "Alternatives: The Promise of Japanese Philosophy," at the conference on "Envisioning Japanese and Chinese Philosophical Potentials in 21st Century." Then in January, I was invited to give two talks at Tokyo University's Center for Philosophy on "Fact versus Value; Descriptive versus Normative: An Alternative," and "Autonomy versus Dependency, Agency versus Passivity: An Alternative." The Center's 2009 volume *Whither Japanese Philosophy* included my article, "An Alternative Notion of Autonomy," and a longer version was published in the anthology *Selfhood East and West* in 2012. Two other articles that resulted from the work on alternatives were published in 2009 in the Institute series *Frontiers in Japanese Philosophy*, one of them later in Japanese translation.

I also learned much from the in-house seminars, presentations, and conferences held at the Institute, on science and religion, for example. The Institute has become a kind of mecca for people with interests like mine, and I was able that half-year to have extended conversations with other scholars who visited, among them Victor Hori, Joseph O'Leary, and Mark Blum. I know that the Roche Fellowship was invaluable for my own work, and I regard the Chair as a precious opportunity that allows interreligious research make an impact on the world.

Victor Hori
June–December 2009

I am pleased to have this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Nanzan Institute for appointing me the holder of the Roche Chair in Interreligious Research from June to December in 2009. The Chair position allowed me to complete a first draft of my manuscript *Little Jade: Language and Experience in Zen*. The Nanzan Institute had supported my previous publication *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Zen Kōan Practice* patiently allowing me

to come to the Institute multiple times over several years to do my research. Without the support of the Nanzan Institute, I could not have written that earlier book. And with the invitation to be Roche Chair, the Nanzan Institute was once again extending me its support.

The Nanzan Institute is quite the best place for the Roche Chair. Interreligious research is the air one breathes at the Nanzan Institute. As befits a world class institute, at any given time there are scholars in residence from around the world—Korea, Thailand, Mexico, UK, Canada, China, and many other countries—investigating everything from Japanese folk religion to Buddhist philosophy, anything from new religious movements in China to religiosity in animals. If you need to know something about some specialized arcane topic in Asian religion, all one needs to do is walk down the hall and usually in one of the offices there will be someone knowledgeable about that topic and ready to share his or her insight. The Institute's good name attracts the scholars. I remember a researcher telling me that there were five other scholars specializing in his particular topic, and during his year in residence at Nanzan, all five of those scholars visited Nanzan.

In addition to providing material resources such as its excellent library, the Nanzan Institute holds scholars to a high research standard. Before the Institute would consider my manuscript for publication as a Nanzan series text, it asked me to present a series of in-house seminars. Thus during my time as Roche chair, I presented three chapters of my manuscript under the titles, "What Can and Cannot be Understood through Language in Zen?," "A Performative Theory of Zen Language," and "Recent Critiques of the Concept of Zen Experience." My audience consisted of the permanent research fellows—Okuyama Michiaki, Ben Dorman, Jim Heisig, Kim Seung Chul, Paul Swanson—and the visiting research fellows who were in residence at the time, as well as a few outside visitors. These were trained scholars from a variety of academic backgrounds Japanese and Western, and they constituted an excellent audience on which I could test my ideas.

I have many good memories of Nanzan. Sometimes in the evening or on weekends, I would walk up from the Paulus Heim to my office in the Institute. After regular hours, the rear gate from the road would be closed, so I would climb up over the gate to get into the Institute. And of course, to return to Paulus Heim, I would climb over the gate from the inside to get out to the road. In so doing, sometimes I would inadvertently disturb a couple parked beside the rear gate. Every now and then the evening quiet in the building was broken by the gentle sounds of shakuhachi music wafting down the stairwells from the third floor. One of the researchers up there was quite an advanced student of shakuhachi. With other Nanzan researchers, I took trips to Seto to buy pottery, to Kanazawa to visit the Nishida Museum and the D.T. Suzuki Museum, to Tagata

to see the fertility festival, to Ise to see Ise Jingu. All of this was interreligious research in the broader sense.

May I commend Mr. Robert Roche, the president of Oak Lawn Marketing, whose foresight and generosity created the endowment that supports the Roche Chair. I am much honored to be in the illustrious company of the other scholars who have held the position of Roche Chair: Tom Kasulis, Keel Hee-Sung, John Keenan, John Maraldo, Åasulv Lande, Graham Parkes, and Jim Heisig. Thank you.

Åasulv Lande
May 2010–April 2011

I had the privilege of coming to Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture as a holder of the Roche Chair from 4 May 2010 to 30 April 2011. My wife accompanied me. We shared an office in the Institute building and rented an apartment in Yagoto Park Mansion under the auspices of Nanzan University. Ascending and descending daily the steep hill between the Mansion and the Institute kept us well fit during the year.

I had chosen "Shinto and 'the other'" as my study program. As a previous missionary in Japan focusing on interreligious dialogue, this study provided an opportunity to deepen earlier experiences and insights. It proved an interesting, challenging, and demanding study. I had since my first arrival in Japan in 1965 participated in several dialogues—between Christians, Buddhists, and new religious movements. These dialogues aimed at mutual understanding and co-operation in society. Although carrying academic dimensions, they were strongly oriented toward personal contacts. During the year as Roche Chair holder I had the opportunity of further reflection and deepening of the dialogue activities. It was a demanding task. I became to a larger degree aware of problems connected with interfaith dialogues, particularly when the East-West dimension was implied and when there also were political interests involved. In dialogue with Shinto both these questions surfaced.

To put it straightforwardly, the Christian Shinto dialogue contained two sides. Personal friendships and positive mutual interactions emerged and they were inspiring. The painful sides were above all connected with the Pacific war—the role Shinto played in the war and the implied relations to Christian Churches. Such is life, and painful communication is not necessarily meaningless communication.

Pursuing the item of "Shinto and 'the other'" revived my missionary experience and connected to my twelve years work as professor at Lund University (1994–2005). It was really no surprise to find that Shinto, like Christianity and Buddhism, had a missionary perspective—reaching those "outside." The form of

"mission" was, however, conditioned by contextual circumstances and expectations.

I visited numerous shrines during the year. I frequently visited Atsuta Jingu in Nagoya, which lies near the Nanzan establishment. I also visited Meiji and Yasukuni Shrines in Tokyo, and of course Ise shrines in Mie Prefecture. But I devoted most of my time for visits in nearby Atsuta. I contacted the two Shinto universities, Kōgakkan in Ise and Kokugakuin University in Tokyo, and participated in seminars on Shinto questions. It was moving to contact Kōgakkan, where I had attended courses forty years before, under the tutorship of professor Tani Seigo. I met Professor Tani in his Ise home; he was approaching the age of ninety years, still a vital and impressive personality. Last but not least, I enjoyed a creative and supporting fellowship at Nanzan Institute during the year.

After 2011 I have worked on a booklet on my Roche experiences. I widened my guiding question to: What can be found "beyond the Shinto Gate"? By this approach I added *Shinto basic thought* to my original problem of the *Shinto attitude to "the other."* I have looked more for Shinto thought than Shinto praxis. My booklet is mainly a reflective report on experiences and reading concerning Shinto. The reflection matured during and after my year as Roche chair-holder, and I am most grateful!

Graham Parkes
January–June 2012

One day, on my way to my office at the Institute, as I turned the corner into the main gate of the Nanzan University campus I was confronted by a slow explosion of white cherry blossoms along an avenue of trees that had stood bare all winter. Even though I knew from the news that the advancing "sakura front" was about to reach Nagoya, the sudden onset was still a surprise. The sight was breath-taking: the blossoms were such pure white that against the dark bark of the trunks they looked like billows of snow, or cascades of silver sand sprinkled with pink against the bright blue sky. The blossoming had burst on the scene without any harbingers in the form of green buds or leaves, which began to appear only later, when the blossoms had begun to fall. I felt the experience was an apt metaphor for my six-month occupancy of the Roche Chair: a beautiful event, but one that would all too soon come to an end.

What a fortunate event it was—especially in the context of the dismal situation at my home institution before and after, where my days were filled with unfulfilling administrative and bureaucratic busy-work, leaving next to no time for thinking or writing. In the arid desert of my life as a university professor, as it had come to be, the Nanzan Institute was an oasis of calm and refreshing creativity. Not only the ideas that were constantly bubbling up through the

minds of the permanent research staff, but also the insights from the steady stream of visitors who passed through, some of them old friends and others new acquaintances. What a joy it was to have a quiet place to work, in the company of congenial colleagues, far from the distractions of the business that the modern university has come to be.

The unique feature of the office I occupied at the Institute was the row of photographs of former Roche Chair occupants—some of them old friends—on the wall by the door. I would always on entering the room acknowledge those illustrious predecessors, silently thanking them for the fine work they had done and hoping I'd be able to contribute something that could measure up to that.

There was also the view from the office window. What a joyful relief it was, when the words in the book on the desk, or on the computer screen in front of me, had ceased to inspire or had run up against a block, to swivel the chair and rest the gaze upon the luxuriant foliage outside. Not long after my arrival an unusually heavy snowfall transformed the scene into a forest of ice crystals; and with the advent of spring, the tableau of bushes and trees turned tropical. This all in the space of a few months.

The story of the wonderful pedagogical relationship between James Heisig and the young Robert Roche, and the eventual establishment of the Roche Chair, is one of the most heartening to emerge from the halls of academe. The former occupants are surely grateful that it turned out this way—and that the story will continue, not to end for years to come.