

Preface

I first met Toshihiko Izutsu during a cold winter day in 1962 in Montreal where I had come from Harvard University to lecture at McGill University on the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā. During that visit I attended one of his classes in which he was lecturing on the semantic theories of European existentialist philosophers, the subject of semantics having been always dear to his heart. After hearing my lecture on Mullā Ṣadrā, however, he stated that henceforth he would change his field of research to later Islamic philosophy, a decision which became actualized in his later life. As a result of this common interest, we soon became close friends and I was to meet him in cities as far apart as Madrid and Kamakura. But with his increase of interest in Islamic philosophy, it was Persia that began to attract him more and more. His collaboration with Professor Mehdi Mohaghegh, who began to visit McGill regularly from the late 1960s onward, led to Izutsu travelling to Tehran often, where he met many of Persia's famous scholars such as Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī.

When I founded the Iranian Academy of Philosophy, I invited him to join its teaching staff on a permanent basis, an invitation which he accepted. He thereby spent much of the year from 1975 to 1978 in Tehran, a period of four years during which he interacted with numerous scholars including Henry Corbin as well as students of Islamic thought, not only Persian but also Japanese, European and American, the latter including now well-established scholars such as William Chittick and James Morris. With the tumultuous events of 1978 in Persia marking the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, he left the Academy to return to Japan where he spent the last part of

his life.

Toshihiko Izutsu is the greatest scholar of Islamic thought produced by Japan and a seminal figure in the realm of comparative philosophy. Combining a Buddhist sensibility and traditional Japanese discipline with an unbelievable gift for learning languages and an exceptional philosophical acumen including both analytical and synthetic powers, Izutsu was able to cross cultural and intellectual frontiers with ease and to penetrate into different universes of meaning with great insight. He was a master of not only the main languages of three civilizations, the Far Eastern, Western, and Islamic, but also of their intellectual heritage. He wrote with authority not only on Lao-Tze but also Ibn 'Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā not to speak of European philosophers.

As far as Islamic studies are concerned, the significance of the work of Izutsu lies precisely in that here we observe a mind molded by Zen Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism and Shintoism, the constituent elements of Japanese classical culture, encountering the world of the Quranic revelation and the Islamic thought which followed upon its advent. Since the 19th century, European orientalism has produced a vast body of works on Islamic thought which is the product of minds molded by Judaism, Christianity and the Graeco-Roman heritage as well as the secularizing currents of modern times. The works of Izutsu in the domain of Islamic studies with their own intellectual "flavor" reveal in fact how significant is the worldview with which a scholar undertakes the study of another intellectual universe and how shallow the claims of supposed "objectivity" preached by so many Western scholars (there being of course honorable exceptions) by which they usually mean, whether they are aware of it or not, the anti-metaphysical and secularized "reason" and rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment.

Izutsu is the first major figure in modern times to present serious studies of Islamic thought from not only a non-Islamic but also non-Western perspective. We say modern times because in centuries gone by there have also been Hindu, Buddhist and even Confucian studies of Sufism and Islamic philosophy to which in fact little attention has been paid in contemporary scholarship. In any case the

significance of Izutsu is not only in the field of comparative philosophy in general. It is more specifically in creating the first serious encounter between the more inward and central intellectual and spiritual currents of Islamic and Far Eastern thought in the context of modern scholarship.

Izutsu had the exceptional gift, rare in contemporary academic circles, of relating philosophical ideas to the written text going back to the original meaning of lecture as reading. It was this combining of philosophical insight and analysis with careful attention to the text, its language, sentences, words and even letters, that made Izutsu such a fine teacher in the manner of the outstanding traditional scholars of various civilizations for whom a traditional text always served as the basis and foundation from which ideas flowed and also took flight. In this domain he possessed an art lost to a large extent in modern university education where philosophical ideas are taught usually divorced from a careful analysis of the traditional texts on the basis of traditional commentaries. That is why his students found him so compelling as a teacher. He created a bond with his serious students much more similar to the link between a traditional master and his disciples than that between a professor in a modern university and those attending his classes.

Izutsu was a prolific scholar and produced a large number of important books and essays despite his many travels from Japan to Europe, America and the Islamic world. His early works on the language of the Quran and Islamic theology have not yet been surpassed in European languages. His writings on Taoism and Buddhism have been recognized for their high quality among scholars of the field. His studies of later Islamic philosophy and such figures as Sabziwārī were ground breaking when they appeared and quite astonishing considering that he turned to this subject only in the 1960s. His treatment of some of the most difficult Sufi doctrines such as the recreation of the world at every instant are among the most penetrating in European languages. But most of all his writings on comparative philosophy and especially this monumental opus *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts of Sufism and Taoism*, are unmatched for their masterly command of the original

languages involved and keen analysis of the morphological similarities and dissimilarities between the ideas involved in the texts in question.

Interestingly enough Izutsu was not only interested in the intellectual aspects of all of these and other subjects, but also in their aesthetic aspect and in fact in the aesthetic dimension of life itself. He was very sensitive to both visual and oral beauty. I shall never forget his penetrating comments upon the iconography of the Buddha image as we stood in 1970 before the great statue of the Buddha in Kamakura, nor his almost uncontainable joy and ecstatic state when we attended a performance of flamenco music and dance in Madrid a year later. After the performance which had moved him beyond my expectations, he uttered, "but this is Islamic art in one of its highest forms."

This aesthetic appreciation was not only personal. It also involved penetrating studies of subjects as far apart as *haiku* and Japanese screen painting, some of these carried out in collaboration with Mrs. Izutsu who is herself a writer and has been deeply involved in the study of art. It is of significance that Professor Izutsu showed great interest in both the plastic arts and literature not to speak of music. Who has given a deeper explanation of the subdued colors of Japanese and Chinese landscape paintings or the relation between the inner state of the poet and his poem in Japanese poetry than Izutsu? Often people in whom the power of abstract, philosophical thought is developed, do not pay much attention to the artistic aspect of reality. For Izutsu the intellectual and the artistic were combined in both his personal life and in his writings.

Izutsu has left behind works which are known the world over and have been translated into many languages. He has also trained numerous students in Japan, Canada, Persia and elsewhere many of whom are now themselves well-known scholars. It is therefore not only appropriate but necessary to publish this *Festschrift* to commemorate his memory and to celebrate his achievements.

This volume reveals in the diversity of its essays and perspectives of the authors the vast and multifarious influence of the scholar to whom it is dedicated and the different domains of knowledge to

which he was attracted and to which he contributed in one way or another. The contributors are from Japan as well as Persia, Canada as well as France, Switzerland as well as Tunisia, the United Kingdom as well as Malaysia. Their list includes his colleagues as well as students and friends and two generations of scholars ranging from those already retired and world-famous such as W. C. Smith, Charles J. Adams and Hajime Nakamura to eminent scholars nearing the end of their careers to younger scholars who are only now gaining prominence. It includes eminent Muslim scholars such as Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, Mehdi Mohaghegh, Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, and Nasrollah Pourjavadi and well-known Western Islamicists such as R. L. Nettler, William Chittick and Hermann Landolt as well as younger scholars from both East and West. It also includes philosophers such as Christian Jambet and practicing artists such as the architect Nader Ardalan. Most of the contributors are naturally Japanese and Persian reflecting the phases of the life of Izutsu.

Most of this rich collection concerns Islam and deals with subjects ranging from the Islamic religion to philosophy and Sufism. But as can be seen from the table of contents there are also essays devoted to Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, more general philosophical issues and psychology. Altogether the ensemble is a worthy tribute to the vast interents of the scholar whose memory is being commemorated and whose achievements celebrated here.

May Toshihiko Izutsu serve as model for the new generation of Japanese scholars of Islamic and comparative studies as well as for those elsewhere who are seriously interested in penetrating into a universe of discourse other than their own. The memory of this indefatigable scholar and thinker will continue to live in the minds of those who knew him personally. May this volume expand the awareness of the significance of the works of Izutsu to those who never had the opportunity to encounter him face to face and to turn them to the study of his writings which reflect the depth, precision and insight of one of the outstanding scholars and thinkers of this age.

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