



Furukawa Yūji 古川雄嗣, 『偶然と運命：九鬼周造の倫理学』  
[Contingency and Destiny]

Kyoto, Nakanishiya Shuppan, 2015, 342 pages. ¥5,200. ISBN: 978-47-795-1044-1.

It was by mere coincidence that I came across Furukawa Yūji's 『偶然と運命：九鬼周造の倫理学』 (Contingency and Destiny: Kuki Shūzō's Ethics). I had gone to get a haircut in Kichijoji and was walking along a shopping street on my way back to the station when I stopped by an old used book store I knew to browse the philosophy section. For some reason, a volume entitled *Contingency and Destiny* caught my attention. It was written by a young scholar whose name I had never heard of, published by a small publisher in Kyoto that I had never heard of, and despite its status as “used,” cost me nearly as much as the haircut. The image of the pile of books standing untouched on my desk for the past few months came to mind. I quickly put the book back on the shelf and left the shop empty-handed.

Still, the title *Contingency and Destiny* lingered in the back of my mind. I knew a little about the notion of contingency in the works of Kuki and for some time had been thinking that more solid philosophical work needed to be done on the subject. But what of the notion of “destiny,” which does not at first seem to fall under the scope of contingency? How could it help us rethink Kuki's understanding of ethics (without reducing it to mere aestheticism as is often the case with specialists writing on the structure of *iki* いき)? Does Kuki have an overarching theory of ethics that could serve to synthesize seemingly fragmentary writings on themes as varied as the theory of time and Japanese culture? These series of questions continued to pester me until, before I knew it, I was headed back to the bookstore.

Can we somehow “necessitate” the contingent encounter of this book about Kuki and myself as a reader? Dare we call it “destiny”? As far as my reading of Furukawa's

understanding of Kuki's notion of contingency and its relation to the notion of destiny goes, I think we can, and part of writing this would be owing up to the significance of the apparently contingent encounter that prompted it and of celebrating it as more than mere coincidence. I hope to demonstrate the point in what follows.

Truth be told, *Contingency and Destiny* is one of the best secondary sources on Kuki's philosophy and should be consulted an indispensable resource for those writing about Kuki's ideas from here on in. Aside from a few Japanese commentators on the works of Kuki (e.g., Tanaka Hisafumi 田中久文 and Obama Yoshinobu 小浜善信), most scholars tend to work on different aspects of his philosophy. In Western academia, many of us tend to see Kuki in conjunction with others like Heidegger and Watsuji. The problem, however, is much of this fails to capture Kuki's philosophical work as a whole or to shed sufficient light on meaningful connections between different aspects of it. For instance, I have always found it extremely difficult to find a meaningful link between all the attention given to Kuki's idea of *iki* and the relatively less explored "problem of contingency," not to mention the developmental relationship between Kuki's dissertation on contingency and his 1935 magnum opus, *The Problem of Contingency*. Furukawa's work is particularly noteworthy for encompassing the whole of Kuki's philosophy in comprehensive fashion while paying close attention to each of the specific themes it contains. Allow me to elaborate.

Kuki's philosophy is normally characterized by three main philosophical themes: (1) the theory of time, (2) the theory of art, including reflections on *iki*, and (3) the theory of contingency. These themes are reflected in and overlap with the four principal categories of his writings: (a) time, (b) contingency, (c) Japanese culture and aesthetics, and (d) miscellaneous essays and poetry. One of the biggest challenges for Kuki scholars is not only to acquire an appropriate understanding of each of these themes and categories but also to tease out an underlying principle that allows us to interpret them individually without losing sight of the meaningful connections between them. Without cultivating this hermeneutic consistency, it is impossible to avoid (mis)representing Kuki as an ultimately fragmentary thinker or successfully to identify the originality of his philosophy. Furukawa's *Contingency and Destiny* does an excellent job of presenting each of these themes categories and highlighting their relationship one to the other.

Still more impressive is Furukawa's ability to maintain this comprehensive approach to Kuki's philosophical writings by drawing attention to an additional theme that, as far as I know, no scholar before him has discussed explicitly or attempted to explore in depth: the concept of "nature" found in his writings on Japanese culture and the unique characteristics of Japaneseness. The texts in question are sensitive points in Kuki studies. Because of their tendency to talk about the philosopher's love of his own nation, they have been widely used and abused to dismiss

him as just one more ultranationalist thinker connected with the Kyoto School. With judicious fairness and scholarly rigor, Furukawa questions that assumption by uncovering the notion of nature that underlay them and brings to the surface their philosophical significance in his work as a whole. On this score alone, Furukawa's reading of Kuki rises above the rest of scholarship in the field.

*Contingency and Destiny* also offers a philosophical reflection on Kuki's intellectual biography. Kuki is often seen to have lived the charmed life of an aristocrat. As is well known, his family tree goes back to the famous navy general, Kuki Yoshitaka 九鬼嘉隆, who served Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 and Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 in one of the most decisive moments in the history of premodern Japan. Thanks to the past glories of the family, Shūzō's father bore the title of baron and managed to marry a geisha from Gion. Far from the happy ending of "Pretty Woman," his father's life was more like a Shakespearean tragedy. Shūzō's mother fell in love with her husband's best friend and the celebrated philosopher of art, Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心. The baron abandoned his wife who, later estranged from her one true love, gradually lost her mind and died. Torn between two father figures, the young Kuki saw his mother's tragic death not as a result of anyone's deliberate action but of a series of contingent events. Far from the image of a Kyoto philanderer that is often associated with Kuki's name, Furukawa argues that his dark family history propelled the young philosopher to delve into the nature of contingency and its impact on human life.

As difficult as it is to describe Kuki as nothing more than a dandy with the spirit of *iki*, it is equally to determine his position in relation to the philosophers of the Kyoto School. Furukawa's text demonstrates the decisive impact Tanabe's criticisms had on Kuki's dissertation on contingency and explains how it led to a later monograph whose full-fledged treatment shows notable differences from the dissertation. Once again, as far as I know, this is the first book to examine the link between Kuki and Tanabe by referencing their correspondence. Furukawa also shows how certain of Nishida's defining concepts—such as eternal presence (永遠の今), continuity of discontinuity (非連続の連続), and inverse correspondence (逆対応)—are indispensable for understanding the notion of circular time, contingency, and its dialectical relation to necessity (the existential notion of "destiny") in Kuki's works. It is certainly impossible *theoretically* to equate Kuki with the mainstream thinkers of the Kyoto School like Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani. But Furukawa's interpretations of Kuki's theories of time, contingency, and the like are correct, as I believe they are, we cannot grasp them without an accurate understanding of Nishida. In this sense, Kuki's philosophy is inseparable linked to the Kyoto School.

Furukawa has a talent for making difficult theoretical concepts accessible to a general academic audience through his effective use of concrete examples and illu-

minating charts. The philosophical questions he raises in his response to Kuki's arguments are breathtaking. A few drawbacks of the book, remain however, Its is straight out of the dissertation and lacks the author's own philosophical outlook on the issues discussed. Just as Kuki expanded his dissertation in the process of responding to Tanabe's criticisms, I have to question why Furukawa opted not to develop his own position based on his critical interpretations of Kuki. His brief reflections on the significance of Kuki's philosophy in the "Conclusion" and on the significance of living as a philosopher in the "Afterword" suggest that he has the makings of an original thinker in his own right. Besides being the best scholarly work on Kuki's philosophy as a whole, I have no doubt *Contingency and Destiny* holds out the promise of future contributions of equally high caliber.

It may seem out of place to end a book review with the complaint that the author has not been philosophical enough when his scholarly achievement is more than capable of standing on its own merits. Lest I appear like Kierkegaard's "assistant professor" who, out of a Nietzschean sense of *ressentiment*, criticizes others for not doing what they never set out to do, I would like to close with a hasty sketch of my own philosophical thoughts on the subject matter at hand.

By setting the notion of contingency against the background of its negative intermediation with necessity as the structure of the (immanent) absolute in Kuki's metaphysics, Furukawa argues that we can make sense living one's contingent life as a "destiny." The structure of reality for Kuki is a continuous and dynamic movement from future possibility to realized contingency in the present and then to necessity in the past. At the same time, however, this very movement is determined by its opposite: past necessity dictates the ways in which the future possibility is actualized in the present contingency. It was possible for me, for instance, to come across *Contingency and Destiny* in any number of bookstores in Japan, but the past context of the discovery, namely, the fact that I had gotten my hair cut at the same place for years, made all but impossible for me to come across it anywhere other than that small used book store in Kichijoji.

The process of becoming—of moving from the possible future to the actual present and then to the necessary past—is thus often dictated by past necessity. But on Furukawa's reading of Kuki, our recognition of the circular dynamic of future-present-past/possibility-contingency-necessity in self-awareness, allows us to conceive the "potential purposiveness" in contingency as a possibility; and once we realize this potential purposiveness at work in active engagement, contingency becomes destiny as a matter of necessity. Simply put, destiny is a kind of praxis in which each of us makes the inexplicable, often unexpected and almost always uncontrollable, movement from future possibility to present contingency our own.

What would it be like, then, for me to transform my contingent encounter with

Furukawa's book (which as I said, was dictated by past necessity) into my destiny? There are any number of ways to answer that question. For me, the transformation came through reading the text carefully, allowing myself to be swept up in it with a hermeneutics of generosity, and then composing a review for fellow scholars in Japanese philosophy. This active engagement with contingent reality was, I believe, a way for me to make my encounter with the text something more than mere contingency. In recommending *Contingency and Destiny* as major scholarly contribution to the field of Kuki studies, I hope that many readers will find their own way to make their encounter with this text their own. What more can one hope for than to open a door for destiny!

MORISATO Takeshi  
*Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, Japan*