

The Contribution of Overseas Japanese

ARISAKA Yōko

During the last seventy years there have been a number of Japanese scholars who have made contributions to the scholarship of Japanese philosophy abroad. Today the number of Japanese scholars abroad is not large, but they continue to make valuable contributions as mediators and as scholars with unique perspectives, as they continue to work and publish in languages other than Japanese while maintaining contact with scholarship within Japan.

Perhaps these scholars may be categorized according to the following three types:

1. Those whose primary contributions included introductions of either Zen or Japanese thought to the west (Suzuki Shunryū and D. T. Suzuki, Nakamura Hajime).
2. Japanese scholars who are based primarily in Japan but whose important works have been translated and widely read (Abe Masao, Nishitani Keiji, Izutsu Toshihiko, and Yuasa Yasuo in English, Ōhashi Ryōsuke in German, Nakamura Yūjirō in French).
3. Contemporary scholars who base themselves primarily outside Japan (Nagatomo Shigenori, Sakai Naoki, Yusa Michiko, and Arisaka Yōko in the United States, and Asari Makoto, Kobayashi Toshiaki, Matsudo Yukio in Europe).

The present essay focuses on those scholars with backgrounds in the United States.

AN OVERVIEW OF JAPANESE THOUGHT
IN THE UNITED STATES

In terms of introducing Japanese thought to the west, the earliest wave began as early as the 1930s with the works of D. T. Suzuki (1879–1966). During the years from 1897 to 1909 he was an assistant to Paul Carus, founder of Open Court Publishing, in La Salle, Illinois. It was during this time that Suzuki began his career of publishing works on Buddhism. His first publication in English, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, appeared as early as 1907. He returned to Japan in 1909 but continued to publish extensively in English. In 1921 (the year he became a professor at Ōtani University in Kyoto) he established the Eastern Buddhist Society and founded the journal *The Eastern Buddhist*, which remains to this day one of the main publication venues for Asian philosophy and Buddhism. His *Manual of Zen Buddhism* appeared in 1934 and for the next thirty years Suzuki continued to publish on Zen. His works include *The Zen Doctrine of No Mind: The Significance of the Sutra of Hui-neng* (1949), *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (in a 3-part series, 1949, 1953, 1953), and his most popular book, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1970, originally published in 1938 as *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture*), which was translated and published in Japan for the first time in 1940. After 1949 he returned frequently to the United States as a visiting scholar at Columbia University and lectured extensively on Buddhism.

While some scholars complain that Suzuki's treatment of Zen is simplistic and problematic both in terms of historical and scholastic content, for many students of Asian thought Suzuki's works have served as an important entry-point into the wider scholarship of Asian philosophy and his books continue to be used widely as textbooks in introductory-level courses in Asian Philosophy. As such, if not the technical scholarship, his contribution for popularizing Asian philosophy (particularly Zen) in the west should be acknowledged.

The “other Suzuki,” Suzuki Shunryū (1904–1971), moved to the United States in 1959 to become abbot at the Sōkō-ji Temple in San Francisco. He founded the San Francisco Zen Center in 1962 and wrote the widely read and much appreciated *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (1970). Although not in the strict sense a philosopher or Buddhist scholar, he had a tremendous impact in on the establishment of a culture of “American Zen.” Since the 1970s, the movement he inaugurated has taken on a life of its

own in the San Francisco Bay Area, resulting in several popular publications (such as the Tassajara monastery cookbooks) and spreading to other major cities in the United States.

Another influential author during this period was Nakamura Hajime (1912–1999). Together with the books of D.T. Suzuki, his *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan* (1964) represents one of the early comprehensive texts that helped launch the field of comparative philosophy and invigorated the “east-west dialogue” in the 1960s. A scholar of Japanese and Asian intellectual history in his own right, Nakamura’s *History of the Development of Japanese Thought: From 592 to 1868* was published by Columbia University Press in 2003.

These publications were integrated into the American intellectual world during the complex intellectual and historical developments of the past fifty years. During the 1950s and 1960s academia in the United States, especially in fields such as philosophy and political science, experienced the subtle but unmistakable influence of McCarthyism. For example, as John McCumber chronicles in his *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Northwestern University Press, 2001), in the field of philosophy, analytic philosophy (especially linguistic philosophy) came to dominate as the more pragmatically or socio-politically oriented philosophers—especially those having anything to do with Marxism—found themselves labelled as “dangerous” and were hard pressed to find a university that would hire them.

As academic philosophy became narrower and narrower in its pursuit of logical truth-claims, and as the general culture of xenophobia and eurocentrism spread, there was little interest in or room for Asian philosophy. In fact, it was not considered philosophy at all. Asian thought and comparative philosophy found themselves shunted primarily into departments of comparative religions or eastern religions (“religion,” especially those from the east, being considered “non-political” and therefore safe), or of Japanese history.

At the same time, there was a growing interest in area studies, including Asia and the Pacific. One of the chief reasons was that it was deemed necessary to “strengthen understanding of and relations to other cultures in all their aspects” for security reasons (the basis for the establishment of the East-West Center in Honolulu by the U.S. Congress in 1960). As research into these questions was encouraged, comparative philosophy, the “east-west dialogue,” and Buddhist studies flourished. Within this

framework the study of Japanese philosophy in the United States was in effect removed from the field of philosophy.

These historical circumstances helped shape subsequent academic developments as well. As is evident from the kinds of books published during this time, “understanding the eastern mind,” or comparative thought within an “east vs. west” framework, and “dialogue” between east and west dominated the intellectual discussion until the 1980s. Throughout it all Japanese philosophy continued to be viewed as a part of eastern religious thought.

With the end of the Cold War postmodernism became more fashionable in academia, and led to the viewing of certain disciplines as promoting cultural essentialism. This cloud fell over area studies and the underlying framework of “east-west” research. This trend grew stronger throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s with the introduction of post-colonial studies and the critiques of orientalism. Needless to say, the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978 had a profound effect in how issues related to the “east” were presented in academia. In fields such as cultural studies and comparative literature, where the influence of deconstruction was strongest, so-called monolithic cultural designations like “the west” or “the east” came to be regarded as intellectually suspect. The previously dominant east-west comparative framework lost its dominance or was outright rejected in some circles, and in its place attention shifted to discussions focused on globalization and internationalization. At present we remain in a transitional stage in which solid research is still being done in comparative thought and at the same time the foundations of this research is being subjected to criticism.

Another important development in the United States that influenced the way in which Japanese philosophy is understood and the place it is given in the academic world has to do with critiques of Japanese nationalism. In particular academically influential intellectual historians specializing in Japanese history, such as H. D. Harootunian, T. Najita, and their students from the “Chicago School” of East Asian History (Harootunian has since moved from the University of Chicago to New York University), classified the members of the Kyoto School as right-wing supporters of Japanese imperialism, and this judgment affected intellectual historians of Japan and East Asia across the board. In addition to the already tenuous relationship of Japanese philosophy to the field of philosophy, even historians of Japanese philosophy fell under suspicion and

the academic study of Japanese philosophy as *philosophy* became still more difficult (the University of Hawai'i being an exception) on the grounds that interest in the history of such thinkers without an accompanying political critique amounts to an indirect defense of their political views.

The study of Japanese philosophy continues for the most part to be restricted to departments and programs of comparative thought, although during the last several years there has been a gradual shift within philosophical circles. As more and more university programs have come to require diversity components, Japanese philosophy has begun to appear as an elective and to be represented in introductory texts (usually consisting of excerpts from Watsuji, Nishitani, or Nishida, or secondary sources). To all appearances this is more than a temporary adjustment and there will be further interest in Japanese philosophy in the years ahead as the demographical makeup of the United States continues to change and as ties to Asia and the Pacific become more important.

TRANSLATIONS OF WORKS BY SCHOLARS IN JAPAN

Against the historical background sketched above we may place a number of Japanese scholars who are based in Japan but whose works have been translated and read widely abroad. The two-volume anthology *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (1958, 1964), marks an important milestone in the introduction of Japanese philosophy to the west. It includes translations from the writings of Nishida Kitarō, Watsuji Tetsurō, and others of the Kyoto School, such as Shimomura Toratarō. The collection as a whole brings together a wealth of primary sources, many of them for the first time in English, and has proved invaluable for students of Japanese thought and history (the first volume goes up to 1600 and the second up to the present day).

Along this same line, though still located primarily outside mainstream philosophy in the United States, are figures like Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) and Abe Masao (1915–), who carried on the tradition of the Kyoto School and Buddhist philosophy as well as elaborating their own philosophical positions. Many in the English-speaking world who found Nishida too difficult to understand in translation welcomed the translations of Nishitani's works as an alternative way into Japanese philosophy, and indeed his books went a long way towards making the key ideas of

Kyoto School philosophy accessible. Due in part to the translations of his students abroad, Abe's writings are widely available in English and have earned him respect in the United States for his contribution to Buddhist philosophy, to the understanding of the philosophy of the Kyoto School, and to the growing field of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

Another extraordinary scholar who made significant contributions to comparative thought was Izutsu Toshihiko (1914–1993). During his illustrious career Izutsu was professor at the Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies in Keiō University, the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy in Tehran, and McGill University in Canada. In 1958 he translated the Koran into Japanese but his researches extended beyond Islamic and Sufi studies to Hindu Advaita Vedanta, Mahayana Buddhism (particularly Zen), and philosophical Taoism. His works in English on Islamic mysticism are widely renowned for their scholarship, as are his comparative studies of Zen and Islamic thought and of Taoism and Sufism.

Contemporary authors who may be placed in this same company of Japanese thinkers who have been translated and read abroad are Yuasa Yasuo and Karatani Kōjin in English, Nakamura Yūjirō in French, and Ōhashi Ryōsuke in German. Yuasa is professor emeritus at Ōbirin University. Among the works that have been translated by his students, his texts on the body have become an important representative of philosophical elements from Asian traditions.

Primarily a literary critic but also considered a philosopher, Karatani blends the fields of literary criticism, Marxism, and postmodern thought as well as philosophical reflections on Japanese literature, architecture, culture, and global politics—all of which are reflected in works translated into English. Standing outside the traditional east-west framework, Karatani has come to be associated with deconstructionist critiques.

Nakamura Yūjirō's publications on Nishida or the "theory of *topos*" in French are some of the first original texts by a Japanese scholar to become available to a French-speaking audience and, as such, have served as a valuable resource. In a similar way, Ōhashi's works in German are an accepted voice of authority among the German-speaking public on the philosophy of the Kyoto School. A philosopher in his own right, Ōhashi has published philosophical perspectives on Japanese aesthetics and intellectual history.

Important articles have also appeared in English on the philosophy of the Kyoto School and Nishida's thought by Matsumaru Hisao, Murata

Jun'ichi, Nitta Yoshihiro, Noda Matao, Noé Keiichi, Ogawa Tadashi, Sakabe Megumi, and Ueda Shizuteru. All the papers, except for Noda's, focus more on philosophy or contemporary analyses of culture than on the east-west dialogue. Among recent publications, *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (1994) contains valuable articles by contemporary Japanese scholars Hirata Seikō, Horio Tsutomu, Kirita Kiyohide, Minamoto Ryōen, Mori Tetsurō, Ueda Shizuteru, and Yusa Michiko. This book is also the first comprehensive publication in English to discuss the political issues surrounding the Kyoto School.

JAPANESE SCHOLARS ABROAD

Among Japanese scholars currently working in the United States are Nagatomo Shigenori, Sakai Naoki, Yusa Michiko, and Arisaka Yōko. Each of them represents a distinct approach to representing Japanese philosophy abroad. Nagatomo came to the United States at age twenty in 1969 and studied philosophy in Iowa, later receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Hawai'i specializing in comparative philosophy and Jungian depth-psychology. He currently teaches in the philosophy department at Temple University. In addition to a monograph on Miki Kiyoshi, Nagatomo has been instrumental in bringing Yuasa's works to the attention of the English-speaking world, in particular his theories of the body. In connection with psychology east and west we may also mention Murakawa Haruhiko, who recently submitted a dissertation based on Yuasa's work to the California Institute of Integral Studies.

Sakai is currently professor of Asian Studies and Comparative Literature at Cornell University. Unique among contemporary Japanese scholars working in the United States, his work is broadly cross-disciplinary, encompassing literary criticism, theories of globalization, intellectual history, theories of nationalism, racism, and philosophy. Sakai continues to keep a presence in the scholarly community of Japan. A former student and colleague of Harootunian, he is a leading representative of the recent critical (deconstructionist, postcolonial, postnationalist) approach to national or racial essentialisms, including certain aspects of Japanese philosophy and the underlying assumption of east-west questions.

Yusa is professor of Japanese and East Asian Studies in the department of Modern and Classical Languages at Western Washington University.

She moved to the United States in the mid 1970s and received her Ph.D. in Religious Studies at the University of Santa Barbara. She stands in the forefront as a dedicated and consistent representative of the Kyoto School in the west. Her massive intellectual biography of Nishida, *Zen and Philosophy* (2002), as well as her translations and numerous articles have been a valuable resource for scholars and students of modern Japanese philosophy alike.

Arisaka came to the United States in 1982 and received her Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of California, Riverside, in 1996. She is currently associate professor of philosophy at the University of San Francisco. Her research areas include Japanese philosophy (with an emphasis on Nishida), phenomenology, feminism, and critical theory. Along with others like Andrew Feenberg, John Maraldo, and Bret Davis, she is interested in integrating Japanese philosophy into the western philosophical tradition from within, rather than seeing it as a mere appendage or view from the outside. She also analyzes the various ways in which Japanese philosophy or questions related to Asia become situated and represented in intellectual disciplines.

Japanese philosophy has yet to shake free of the historical circumstances of its birth and is still lodged uncomfortably in the academic world, straddling the apolitical disciplines of comparative religion and philosophy on the one hand and the over-politicized approaches of modern intellectual history on the other. Compared with Chinese philosophy, the number of active scholars and publications produced is relatively very small, leaving it on the sidelines of mainstream philosophy in the United States. If, as suggested above, the philosophical academy is beginning to open its doors to contributions from the non-western world and rid itself of its anachronistic attachments to the west, there is much that discussions going on in the circles of Japanese philosophy can contribute to the process.

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