

Japanese Philosophy in Chinese-Speaking Regions

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As a discipline Asian philosophy was inconceivable in the age of Hegel, for whom no philosophic thought is to be found in the Orient.¹ In today's post-modern age, this sort of Eurocentrism is no more acceptable than an Asian-centered view of the world would be. We have come to see the sense in which "Western" philosophy is highly indebted to the East, beginning with the contribution of Arabic thought. At the same time, we are also aware that philosophical thought in countries like China and Japan are not purely Asian but more like a collage of Chinese thought, European philosophy, Indian religion, and so forth.

It should be obvious that philosophy is not something that can be restricted to the particular tradition beginning with Thales. It needs to be broad enough to include every act of philosophizing, of searching for wisdom—wherever it is to be found. One does not need to be a Westerner to philosophize.

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1. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 138–9.

TETSUGAKU AND ZHEXUE

Although there was no word for “philosophy” in traditional Chinese or Japanese culture, philosophical thinking has long gone on in these countries. When Western missionaries first introduced the term *philosophy* into Japan in the sixteenth century, it was a mere transliteration. During the *sakoku* period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, intercourse with foreigners was prohibited, with the exception of China and the Netherlands. As a result, the Netherlands was the only avenue to the Western world for the Japanese, as we see reflected in the discipline known as *rangaku* (蘭学), literally the study of the Netherlands. This was how the Japanese tried to import Western knowledge, at first science and medicine, but eventually also the “knowledge of all knowledges” as it was known in the West: philosophy.

The concept was completely novel to the Japanese and they struggled to find a vernacular term to represent it. Some tried to use Confucianism terms like *rigaku* (理学) or *keigaku* (經学) to translate *philosophy*, but these were not satisfactory. Eventually, in 1874, a *rangaku* scholar named Nishi Amane coined the Japanese term *tetsugaku* (哲学), combining the senses of *kitetsu* (希哲) and *gaku* (学). *Kitetsu* means the wish (*ki*) for wisdom (*tetsu*), while *gaku* means science or knowledge. Despite Nishi’s mastery of traditional Chinese (*kanbun*), his translation seems misleading in the sense that “love of wisdom” becomes “science of wisdom.” Nevertheless, Nishi’s term came into general use. His influence did not stop there. In addition to pioneering scientific development in Asia, Japan was also in the forefront of philosophical research. More than simply find a translation for the word *philosophy*, Nishi founded a new discipline that differed essentially from the tradition of Confucian thoughts pursued during the Tokugawa period.

Under the banner of *tetsugaku* numerous scholars set out to introduce Western philosophy into Japan, among them Nishida Kitarō. Unlike his predecessors who merely carried over Western philosophy, Nishida pursued his own philosophical problems. A seeker of the true, the good, and the beautiful in the deepest sense of the term, Nishida is rightly regarded as Japan’s first modern philosopher,

The Meiji Restoration saw an abrupt shift from the pursuit of “Japanese spirit and Chinese knowledge” (和魂漢才) to one of “Japanese spirit and Western knowledge” (和魂洋才). Something similar took place in

China as expressed in the political slogan “Chinese thought as body and Western thought as use” (中学為體, 西學為用). The influx of Western ideas made it inevitable that Chinese intellectuals would eventually find their way to the study of philosophy. And like the Japanese, they, too, were soon faced with the problem of having no suitable term in Chinese for *philosophy*. Rather than create their own neologism, they took over Nishi’s term, *tetsugaku* (哲学 is pronounced *zhexue* in Mandarin), and the practice continues to this day.

Although *tetsugaku* and *zhexue* appear to be merely different pronunciations of the same term, their cultural connotations are not the same. It has been suggested that *tetsugaku* refers to only Western philosophy while *zhexue* is broader and includes philosophical traditions from China, India, and elsewhere.² It is interesting to note in this regard that most departments of philosophy in Japan restrict their courses to Western philosophy, whereas it is common in departments of philosophy in China or Hong Kong to include courses on Chinese philosophy as well, and even on the philosophical thought of India and Japan.

In spite of the adoption of the Japanese term for philosophy, Chinese intellectuals by and large have ignored the study of Japanese philosophy as such. Following Max Scheler’s typology, one might divide Chinese intellectuals into two types, namely, those with apostatical resentment and those with romantic resentment.³ The former pressed for radical reform through the introduction of democratic and scientific ideas, but their strategy towards the past was to reject it outright. Perhaps the best example is Lu Xun, who criticized traditional Chinese thinking and advocated promoting a change of mentality through the medium of popular literature. Like most of his persuasion, however, envy towards Japan’s success at modernizing kept from a positive appraisal of the achievements the Japanese had made in the field of philosophy. On the other hand, those driven by romantic resentment tried to disguise their weaknesses by drawing attention to China’s past glories. Typical examples of these are the nationalists, who refused to import new thinking, Japanese philosophy included, because it posed a threat to their nostalgia for their own tradition of thought.

2. H. Gene Blocker and Christopher I. Starling, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 4.

3. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3 (Bern: Francke, 1972), 57.

Given the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War, the study of Japanese philosophy in Chinese-speaking regions throughout the first half of the twentieth century was virtually nil. The situation changed in the 1950s when Mainland China resumed an interest in the contributions of Japan to philosophical thought. In what follows I will outline the different areas of Japanese philosophy that have been studied in the Chinese-speaking regions.⁴

RESEARCHES ON JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY IN CHINESE-SPEAKING REGIONS

Roughly speaking, the study of Japanese philosophy in Chinese-speaking regions during the second half of the twentieth century can be classified into three groups: (1) research carried out under the influence of Marxism, (2) research on Japanese philosophy and religion, and (3) research on Japanese philosophy and phenomenology.

Research carried out under the influence of Marxism

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Marxism has been the foundation for all philosophical studies in China. Thus, for example, Chinese intellectuals were obliged to apply Marxism—especially the materialistic dialectic and the materialistic view of history—to their study of specific philosophical problems as well as to the history of philosophy in general. With no exception, the study of Japanese philosophy fell under the shadow of this dogmatic approach.

On the positive side, Chinese intellectuals were aware that Marxism had been imported from Japan, where there were not only numerous translations of Marxist works but also a considerable body of solid research. The establishment of a group focused on education and research on the history of Eastern philosophy in the department of philosophy at the University of Beijing in 1958 marks an important milestone in the study of Japanese philosophy in China. The publications of the

4. For the sake of clarity I will limit “Chinese-speaking regions” to three main areas: the People's Republic of China (China), the Republic of China (Taiwan), and the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (Hong Kong).

results of their work in 1963 represents the first reference book on Japanese philosophy in China. Entitled *Japanese Philosophy*,⁵ it singled out a number of Japanese philosophical works for translation into Chinese. Each of its four volumes are dedicated to a historical period of Japan:

- Vol. 1 *Ancient period*. From Nara period to Muromachi period, on philosophical thoughts of Prince Shōtoku and monks such as Saichō, Kūkai, Shinran, and Dōgen
- Vol. 2 *Tokugawa period*. On the philosophical thoughts of Confucianism thinkers such as Fujiwara Seika, Hayashi Razan, Arai Hakuseki, Ogyū Sorai, and Miura Baien
- Vol. 3 *Meiji period*. On philosophers such as Tsuda Mamichi, Nishi Amane, Fukuzawa Yukichi, Katō Hiroyuki, Inoue Tetsujirō, and Nakae Chōmin
- Vol. 4 *Taishō and Shōwa periods*. Philosophers in this period are further divided into 2 sub-groups:
 - ◆ Marxism philosophers such as Katayama Sen, Sakai Toshihiko, Kawakami Hajime, Miki Kiyoshi, Tosaka Jun, and Nagata Hiroshi
 - ◆ Idealists, democratic thinkers and Fascists such as Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, Kuwaki Gen'yoku, Yoshino Sakuzō, Kita Ikki, Ōkawa Shūmei, Kōsaka Masaaki, and Kōyama Iwao

Already from the first, one notices the prejudice built into the classification of philosophers in Vol. 4. On the one hand, the importance of Marxism in Japanese philosophy is overstated; on the other, influential philosophers like Nishida and Tanabe are erroneously listed as nationalists, fascists or even class-A war criminals.

At the same time, there is clear agreement among Chinese scholars that there *was* philosophy in Japan since ancient times, an obvious rejection of Nakae Chōmin's assertion that "there was no philosophy in Japan."⁶ The reason for their position is all too obvious: the majority of Chinese intellectuals at the time were influenced by the materialistic view of his-

5. See the "Preface" to *Japanese Philosophy* 日本哲学 (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1963), Vol. 2, 1–2. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of bibliographical material are my own and do not indicate an existing translation in English.

6. Nakae Chōmin, *Ichinen yūhan* 一年有半, in *Nakae Chōmin zenshū* 中江兆民全集, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1983–1986), Vol. 10, 155.

tory, which suggests that all culture has a distinctive philosophy embedded in its history of social conflicts. Japanese philosophy is therefore a perfect example of the materialistic viewpoint of history: it began from a naïve naturalism, evolved into a form of feudalism, reached its crisis in capitalism, and will finally flower into an ideal world of communism.

Today this kind of historical teleology is, of course, regarded as a *metarécit* and lacks all creditability. But at the time many Chinese scholars subscribed to just this sort of teleological narrative. We should, however, note that this way of reading Japanese philosophy was strongly influenced by the Japanese Marxist Nagata Hiroshi, the author of *Nihon tetsugaku shisōshi*. That said, there is a major misunderstanding in the Chinese translation of this work, the term *idealism* (觀念論) in the original text having been incorrectly rendered as *spiritualism* (唯心主義) (NAGATA 1983, 5) It seems that Chinese researchers at the time were accustomed to divide all philosophical thinking into two types: spiritualism and materialism (唯物主義). Not surprisingly, the reasons for the labels are far from purely academic. In any case, it was standard practice for Chinese scholars to classify Japanese philosophy as belonging to one of two opposing ideologies:

Spiritualistic Japanese philosophy, represented by philosophers such as Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, and Watsuji Tetsurō

Materialistic Japanese philosophy, represented by philosophers such as Nishi Amane and Nagata Hiroshi

This categorical scheme can be found in other introductory works of Japanese philosophy, for example in Liu Ji-chen's *Nishida's Philosophy* (1963), the first work on Nishida's thought in China. I would also mention in this regard the name of Zhu Qian-zhi, one of the editors of *Japanese Philosophy*, and the author of *Japanese shushigaku* (1958), *Japanese kogaku and Yōmeigaku* (1962), and *History of Japanese Philosophy* (1964). From a Marxist point of view, Zhu claims that Nishida's philosophy is a "Japanese style capitalist philosophy," that it "is the representation of modern Japanese spiritualistic philosophy," and that "the construction of Nishida's philosophy amounts to a declaration of the establishment of Japanese capitalistic philosophy" (ZHU 2002, 316). Zhu also describes Nishida's philosophy as "the most radical subjective spiritualism, the most ridiculous prayer of a believer.... His later thinking reflects the fascist situation in Japan." (Zhu 2002, 319) From the position of materialistic view of history, Zhu thus arrived at the following conclusion:

Nishida's philosophy follows the development of the monopolization of capitalism in Japan. Later it becomes more and more reactionary. The emperor system is based on the unification of the Emperor, the imperial household, the military, the bureaucrats, the nobility, parasitic landlords, and monopoly capitalists. Nishida's is a philosophy that defends this emperor system. (ZHU 2002, 342)

Zhu was hardly a sympathetic reader of Nishida's writings and left no doubt of his reservations about the potential of Nishida's "capitalistic philosophy." In particular, he saw Nishida as a *bourgeois* philosopher and supporter of the Pacific War, all of which stained the philosophical significance of his thought. Regarding Tanabe Hajime, Zhu sees him as "the second representative of Japanese spiritualistic philosophy. Like Nishida, he develops his own philosophical system by incorporating the idioms of German capitalistic philosophy" (ZHU 2002, 342).

Zhu was a pioneer and one of the most respected scholars to introduce Japanese philosophy into China, but his interpretations are too one-sided and open to misunderstanding. In a word, Zhu is dissatisfied with the thought of Nishida and Tanabe because they are "capitalistic philosophers" and hence enemies of the communist world. Behind this judgment lies the more fundamental assignation of all of Japanese philosophy as either spiritualism or materialism. Unfortunately, many scholars took over Zhu's stereotypes in their reading of Japanese philosophy.

A few years after the publication of Zhu's work, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) took place in China. These were dark and tragic years during which not only Japanese philosophy but most philosophical research in China was interrupted. Philosophy became the study of the writings of Mao Ze-dong or other Marxist philosophers singled out personally by Mao.

When the Cultural Revolution ended, the study of Japanese philosophy began afresh, but the influence of Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism or even Maoism was still in evidence. The *Textbook on the History of Japanese Philosophy* is a good example. The preface states that the study of Japanese philosophy needs to focus on "the history of the origins and development of spiritualism and materialism and the conflicts between the two, as well as the history of dialectics and metaphysics in Japan." From such a standpoint, Nishida's philosophy once again comes in for criticism as a Japanese-style spiritualistic philosophy, a product of the "capitalistic period of the history of Japan (1868–1945)" (WANG 1989, 3–4).

I would also mention the introductory works of Bian Chong-dao, one of the editors of the *Textbook on the History of Japanese Philosophy*. Bian studied Japanese philosophy in Japan and is a prolific writer and editor of numerous works on Japanese philosophy. Like Zhu, his interpretations subvert the stereotypical division of the history of thought into spiritualism and materialism. This is clear in the preface of his *Introduction to Postwar Japanese Philosophical Thought*, where he writes:

From the Taishō to the early Shōwa period, Japanese spiritualistic philosophy, whose representative figure is Nishida Kitarō, became the dominant trend.... Throughout the development of modern Japanese philosophy, spiritualism was the always at the forefront. This is because modern Japanese thinking has its roots in the importation from abroad of positivism and German spiritualism, and is further bolstered by the fact that the reestablishment of the nation after the Meiji revolution has been dictated by wealthy landlords and capitalists. It only stands to reason that spiritualism would become the ideology of the ruling powers and that government would follow suit in promoting spiritualistic philosophy. The traits of such a philosophy reflects the social status of the autocracy and the aggressive pursuit of expansion abroad by the Japanese emperor. (BIAN and KATŌ 1996, 21)

Similar interpretations can be found in other recent works on Japanese philosophy. For example, in the preface of *Critical Biographies of Famous Eastern Philosophers*, Wang Shou-hua states that “after the Meiji revolution, Western philosophy was imported to Japan in accord with the needs of Japan’s capitalistic system” (WANG 2000, 59). Clearly the materialistic view of history posed an obstacle for the Chinese intellectual when it came to understanding the contributions of Japanese philosophy.

Today students of Japanese philosophy in China are less influenced by Marxist ideology, but Marxist-oriented thought from Japan continues to hold interest. Philosophers such as Hiromatsu Wataru, Funayama Shin’ichi, Takeuchi Yoshitomo, and Takeuchi Yoshirō are still read and discussed in China (BIAN 1992).

Research on Japanese philosophy and religion

As clearly distinct as philosophy and religion are as academic disciplines, they remain closely related to each other. In Western Christianity, philosophy was long seen as the handmaiden of theology, while in China “Chi-

nese philosophy” owed an immense debt to Confucianism and Taoism as well as to Buddhism. The close ties of philosophy to religion are particularly evident in Japan, where philosophical thinking has been influenced not only by Shintoism and Japanese Zen, but also by Chinese *Ch’an*, Confucianism, and Taoism, as well as by Western Christianity and Indian Buddhism.

If the position of Japanese philosophy in the philosophical circles of the Chinese-speaking world is somewhat marginal, the attention it receives by students of Japanese religion is greater by comparison. Even those Japanese philosophers whose thought has been criticized as “capitalistic” are still admired as philosophers of religion and their works discussed in detail. Thus in his *History of Japanese Philosophy* Zhu dismisses Nishida’s philosophy as a form of irrationalism, but not without noting that there are three levels to be distinguished in it: “first, it is a religious philosophy; second, it is an ‘Eastern style’ religious philosophy; and third, it is a religious philosophy based on the theory of ‘nothingness’” (ZHU 2002, 320). Zhu’s position is not without ground. He is one of the first Chinese scholars to have studied Nishida’s last essay, “The Logic of *Basho* and a Religious Worldview.” He may have gone too far in claiming that Nishida’s philosophy is too religious ever to become a “scientific philosophy” (ZHU 2002, 324), but there is no denying his pioneering efforts to come to grips with the relationship between Japanese philosophy and religion.

In their study of Japanese philosophy and religion, not a few Chinese researchers have gone beyond properly philosophical texts to familiarize themselves with the thought of Zen Buddhism. This has led to a particular interest in the writings of the thinkers of the Kyoto School, one of Japan’s most important philosophical movements. One of the first to study the Kyoto School has been Ng Yu-kwan, who studied Buddhist philosophy at Kyoto University and at the University of Hamburg, and later offered courses on Kyoto School philosophy at Hong Kong Buddhist College. Taking up one of the key notions of the Kyoto School thinkers, that of absolute nothingness, Ng has focused on the varieties of meaning this idea has among different members of the school. In his *Philosophy of Absolute Nothingness*, Ng claims:

Obviously, the members of Kyoto School emphasize the absolute nothingness, and refine it as an ultimate concept of idea. It is based on Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism. (NG 1998A, VII)

Absolute nothingness is one of the most important concepts in the philosophy of Nishida, the founder of Kyoto School (or, as he also refers to it, the “Nishida School,” NG 1998A, 1). As for membership of the School, Ng lists seven thinkers and divides them into three generations:

First generation: Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime

Second generation: Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, Nishitani Keiji

Third generation: Takeuchi Yoshinori, Abe Masao, Ueda Shizuteru (NG 1998A, v)

Ng’s understanding of the Kyoto School is based on the way absolute nothingness is understood by these thinkers. The identification of the members is itself a matter of some controversy. Ng has clearly consulted the works of Fritz Buri, Frederick Franck, Ōhashi Ryōsuke, and James Heisig, among others, but when it comes to deciding who qualifies as a thinkers of the School, he basically follows Abe Masao’s view. In fact, Ng’s interpretations of Kyoto School thought are strongly influenced by Abe, who reads it in the context of Buddhist philosophy. Needless to say, Ng is also familiar with the writings of Abe’s teacher, Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, as evidence in his first work on the Kyoto School which is devoted to Hisamatsu, whom he calls “the most comprehensive thinker” in the Kyoto School (NG 1995, 2).

It is not my intention to enter into the debate over who the members of the Kyoto School are or who might be its “most comprehensive thinker.” Instead I would like to focus on Ng’s merit for having introduced the School to the Chinese-speaking world. In this connection, one of Ng’s most important contributions is his clear explanation of the relationship between the philosophy of Kyoto School and Zen Buddhism. Although the members of Kyoto School take difference approaches to the idea of absolute nothingness, they share in common the view that absolute nothingness is not only the ultimate ground of all beings but also religion’s ultimate reality. Ng’s grasp of the ultimate concerns of the philosophers of the Kyoto School has influenced a number of students of Japanese philosophy, among them Lam Wing-keung, who studied first with Ng and later moved to Kyoto University to work under Fujita Masakatsu on the philosophy of Kyoto School in general and its impact in South Korea.

Although many scholars have shown the connections between the Kyoto School thinkers and Buddhist philosophy, this is by no means the

whole picture. True, Nishida practiced *zazen* and was directed in the study of the Zen *kōan*, but he was also interested in the Christian notions of God and *agapē*. He did not put himself into the position of having to decide on one religion to the exclusion of others. After all, he was neither a Zen monk nor a Christian priest, but a professor of philosophy. He himself did not deny the affinities of his thought to Zen Buddhism but strongly resisted the confusion of his philosophy with Zen.⁷

Buddhist is not the only religious tradition to influence modern Japanese philosophical thought. Most Meiji and Taishō philosophers, it may be noted, had a solid knowledge of Confucian and Taoist texts,⁸ and this has piqued the interest of young scholars. Wu Guang-hui studied philosophy in Kyoto University and is pursuing the relationship between Nishida's philosophy and *Yōmeigaku*, a Confucian philosophy of historical importance in Japan. Xu Shui-sheng has written a dissertation on the relationship between Nishida, Confucianism, and Taoism. Mention may also be made of a large-scale research project on Tokugawa Confucianism spearheaded by Huang Chun-chieh, professor of intellectual history at National Taiwan University, and including comparative research on Chinese and Japanese Confucianism.

As was the case with Heidegger, the thinkers of the Kyoto School were not only devoted to purely philosophical pursuits but also became entangled in the political events of the day, all of which has left behind numerous questions about their role in justifying Japan's wartime aggressions.⁹ As Lin Chen-kuo, chair of the department of philosophy at National Chengchi University, has noted, these questions have to be considered in tandem with the philosophical issue of overcoming modernity, and argues that bridges can be built between the Kyoto School and Neo-Confucianism in order to deepen the Sino-Japanese philosophical dialogue. Unlike many Chinese scholars take it for granted that the Kyoto School is related at its core to Buddhism, Lin rejects this as too limited a basis for dialogue between Japanese philosophy and religion.

7. Nishida, *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* 西田幾多郎全集 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987–1989), Vol. 19, 224–5. To be abbreviated hereafter as NKZ, followed by volume number and page number.

8. For example, Nishida uses the Taoist notion of “the butcher's knife” when discussing his philosophical concept of acting intuition (NKZ 10: 355).

9. On the relationship between Kyoto School and nationalism, see J. W. Heisig and John Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995).

Japanese philosophy and phenomenological studies

Apart from the Kyoto School, Japanese philosophy is also associated in recent years with phenomenology. There is an entry on “Nishida” in the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*,¹⁰ reflecting the fact that he was one of the first to speak of the phenomenological movement in Japan. Some even consider Nishida’s philosophy the origin of the Japanese phenomenological movement, given that in his day he studied the works of thinkers like Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger.¹¹

Whatever historians of the phenomenological movement may think in this regard, he himself never thought of his own philosophy in those terms. Unlike other Japanese philosophers like Kuki Shūzō and Takahashi Satomi who studied phenomenology in Europe under the directions of phenomenologists such as Husserl or Heidegger, Nishida has never been involved directly in the phenomenological movement. It would even appear that he had failed properly to distinguish phenomenology from other philosophy schools. For example, in his essay “Epistemological Assertions of the Pure Logic School” (1911), regarded as the first work on phenomenology in Japan, Nishida referred to Husserl as a Neo-Kantianism along with Hermann Cohen and Heinrich Rickert.¹² Elsewhere, in a lecture titled “Idealistic Philosophy Today” (1917), he placed Husserl in “Brentano’s school.”¹³

More important, however, are the fundamental differences between Nishida’s approach and Husserl’s phenomenology. The most obvious of these are Nishida’s notions of *noesis* and *noema*. While they often appear as paired concepts in his writings, his philosophy did not develop into a transcendental phenomenology. Without wishing to jump to the conclusion that Nishida had misunderstood Husserl’s phenomenology, it is no exaggeration to say that Nishida had failed to see the potential of the phenomenological movement.

It is surprising to see how many themes—like body, life, and world—phenomenology and Japanese philosophy have in common. In the Chi-

10. See Lester Embree, ed., *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 494.

11. In Nishida’s diary, it is written that he began to read Husserl around Meiji 44 (1911). See NKZ 17: 401.

12. NKZ 1: 222.

13. NKZ 14: 59–60.

nese-speaking world, research on Japanese philosophy and phenomenology is a relatively recent development. Nishida's phenomenology is receiving more and more attention in China due to the efforts of Nitta Yoshihiro, the leading figure in the "Society for Sino-Japanese Philosophy" (中日哲学交流会). At the Society's inaugural symposium held in Beijing in 1994, Nitta delivered a talk on "Phenomenology and Nishida's Philosophy" (BIAN 1997, 334) in which he suggested a new approach to the study of Nishida's philosophy. Since that time Nitta has continued to pursue the relationship between Japanese philosophy and phenomenology in his academic writing. Similar efforts have been made by other Japanese scholars such as Tatematsu Hirotaka, Noé Keiichi, and Tani Tōru. The translation and publication of these papers has given Chinese scholars a valuable resource for their study of Japanese phenomenology.

Of particular interest to the Chinese-speaking regions is Nitta's basic position that interpretations of Nishida's philosophy have been too strongly biased in the direction of religious philosophy, eclipsing the other possibilities that his thinking opens up.¹⁴ For example, Nishida's notion of pure experience does not follow empiricist's notion of experience but rather questions the fundamental ground of seeing, hearing, touching, and so forth. Nishida argues that pure experience refers to a prereflective state prior to the constitution of subject and object.¹⁵ This is consistent with the phenomenological approach of bracketing the "subject-object" way of seeing the world (*epoché*). In this connection I would mention the research of a Taiwanese scholar, Huang Wen-hong. After completing doctoral studies at the University of Freiburg, Huang published a series of papers on Husserl and Nishida. Also worth of note are the phenomenological researches of Lai Shen-chon, a scholar of Buddhist philosophy who did higher studies at the University of Munich. Lai has also published on phenomenology and Kyoto School philosophy.¹⁶

Despite the presence of certain phenomenological elements in Nishida's philosophy, there are those who argue that his philosophy is

14. Nitta Yoshihiro, 現代の問いとしての西田哲学 [Nishida philosophy as a question for today] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), v.

15. NKZ I: 9.

16. Lai recently presented a paper on "Heidegger and Zen: Related Questions in the Kyoto School, in Particular Nishitani's Discussion on Nihilism" at a symposium on "Phenomenology and Buddhist Philosophy" held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004.

not phenomenological. Writing in the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, Ogawa Tadashi argues that “Nishida’s philosophy is ultimately not phenomenological but dialectical.”¹⁷ It seems to me, however, that even if we grant a strong dialectical ingredient to Nishida’s philosophy, this is not sufficient cause to ignore its phenomenological elements and the new directions they suggest. Nishida may never have been involved directly in the phenomenological movement or used the word *phenomenology* to refer to his thought, but this does not preclude the possibility of detecting affinities with phenomenological thought in his writing.

The discussion is far from over, but I conclude my remarks here with the suggestion that affixing the label of “Japanese phenomenologist” to Nishida is counterproductive. Indeed seems little reason to prefix *any* nationality to phenomenological thought. It is not a national, cultural, or language-based movement in the way, say, German idealism was. It makes no more sense of speak of a Japanese phenomenology than it does to speak of an American or a German one. Merleau-Ponty is French and is a phenomenologist, but putting the two together adds nothing of philosophical importance to the word *phenomenologist*. In the end phenomenology is not to be understood as a closed school but as an open movement.¹⁸ One may claim that Japanese philosophy and phenomenology have as a common point of departure the maxim, “Back to the things themselves!” but this is neither exclusively phenomenological nor exclusively Japanese. As Max Scheler has said, “one really should no longer use the word ‘phenomenology.’ After all, it does nothing but what philosophy has always done.”¹⁹ The important thing is that the study of Japanese phenomenology gives us a new standpoint from which to Japanese phi-

17. See Ogawa Tadashi’s comments in *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 494.

18. As is suggested by Herbert Spiegelberg, the writer of *The Phenomenological Movement*, phenomenology should be regarded as a “moving” philosophy, in contrast to a “stationary” philosophy that is determined by its intrinsic principles. He argues that phenomenology is like a river, in which “it comprises several parallel currents, which are related but by no means homogeneous, and may move at different speeds.” More importantly, “they have a common point of departure, but need not have a definite and predictable joint destination.” See Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 1–2.

19. Quoted by Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 303.

losophy without having to subscribe to the presuppositions of a dogmatic school or a religion background.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing is not meant to give the impression that there are only three types of researches being conducted on Japanese philosophy in the Chinese-speaking regions of the world, nor even that the scholars named in the course of this paper can be classified as belonging to only one of them. The wide range of topics being pursued by Chinese-speaking philosophers relative to Japanese philosophy argue against so simple an account of the present situation. As more and more Chinese scholars come to Japan to study Japanese philosophy, and as more and more of their Japanese counterparts scholars make efforts to introduce Japanese thought into Chinese-speaking regions, the traffic across the bridges cast by some of the pioneers mentioned here is bound to increase and to stimulate deeper understanding.

Improvements in the quality of research on Japanese philosophy will obviously require more academic exchange and collaboration among Chinese and Japanese scholars. The joint research project of “pursuing of symbiotic thinking,” involving Bian Chong-dao, Ozeki Shūji, Yoshida Masatoshi, and others, is worthy of note in this regard, as is the international symposium, co-sponsored by the department of the history of Japanese philosophy in Kyoto University and the research institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, under the title “The Meaning of Modern Japanese Philosophy in East Asia.”

No less important is increasing the number of Chinese readers with direct access to the original texts of Japanese philosophy. Although Chinese characters are used in Japanese language, scholars who lack the facility of modern Japanese remain handicapped in their study of Japanese philosophy and have no choice but to rely on the disappointingly meagre body of materials translated into Chinese. The only available translation of Nishida’s work is his first book, *Zen no kenkyū*, published in Chinese in 1965. Despite the branding of Nishida as a “Japanese spiritualist” in the preface, the translation is reasonably accurate and smooth. Not only are there no translations of his mature works, but the texts of other twentieth-

century Japanese thinkers like Watsuji, Kuki, and Miki have yet to be made available in Chinese.

As for the availability of secondary literature on Japanese philosophy, I would mention the Chinese edition of Gino Piovesana's *Contemporary Japanese Philosophical Thought* as well as Bian Chong-dao and Liu Wen-zhu's translation of Nakamura Yūjirō's *Nishida Kitarō*. The translation of philosophical works is never an easy task, but the fact that the more than thirty volumes of the *Gendai shisō no bōkenshatachi* series published by Kōdansha have been issued in Chinese between 2001 and 2002 is a promising sign. We can only hope that more works will follow in the near future so that the riches of Japanese philosophy can reach a still wider audience.

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