

Editors' Introduction

This book was compiled from an International Conference entitled “Envisioning the Potential of Japanese and Chinese Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century,” which was held in Hong Kong from 13 to 15 December 2008. The event brought together experts from East and West for a fruitful and fascinating exchange.

Japanese philosophy has undoubtedly found an international platform over the last couple of decades. A growing number of translations of Japanese-language texts such as works by Japanese philosophers and scholarship on Japanese philosophy and the Kyoto School can now be found in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, and other languages. At the same time, except for a handful of Chinese and Korean translations and monographs, very little work on Japanese philosophy has been done in the “East.” Recognizing the need to take constructive steps in this direction, we attempted to focus on the relationship between Japanese and Chinese philosophy, a subject on which further research remains to be done.

From Nishi Amane’s translation of “philosophy” into *tetsugaku* 哲学 to the establishment of philosophy as an academic discipline at the University of Tokyo in the nineteenth century, philosophy has developed strongly in Japan. Courses in Western philosophy, Chinese philosophy, and Indian philosophy have been offered at the university level for some time, but until the establishment of a department of the History of Japanese Philosophy at Kyoto University in 1995, courses in Japanese philosophy were hard to come by. The debate continues over the question of whether there is indeed anything that might be called “Japanese philosophy” and whether Nishida Kitarō was in fact the first Japanese philosopher. What is more, there is little doubt that the philosophical movements that have occurred in Japan over the last century and a half have had a tremendous impact on Japanese intellectual history. Meanwhile, China has also put considerable effort into receiving and

confronting Western philosophy. Comparable to the “Kyoto School,” contemporary Neo-Confucianism or New Confucianism (新儒家) may be considered a philosophical “school” representing an important turn in the philosophical development of China during the twentieth century.

Unlike Chinese philosophy, however, Japanese philosophy has not yet received wide recognition in academia East or West as a formal discipline. While there are courses in Japanese philosophy offered in various universities around the world, they are rarely given equal status with Western, Chinese, or Indian philosophy. As John Maraldo has pointed out, “A sign of the predominant use of the term *tetsugaku* in Japanese academia today is the division of university departments. In addition to ‘pure philosophy’ and the ‘history of Western philosophy,’ there may be academic programs in ‘Chinese philosophy’ and ‘Indian philosophy’ (not in ‘Japanese philosophy!’); but these latter programs in fact comprise the philological and historical study of classics and require no training in Western philosophy.”¹ Maraldo’s exclamation mark is indicative not only of his own disappointment but of a growing dissatisfaction among academics who take Japanese philosophy seriously.

The same holds true in Hong Kong, a city that lies on the edge of “East” and “West.” Western, Chinese, and Indian philosophies are taught in departments of philosophy, but at present very few courses are offered in Japanese philosophy. If the present collection of essays aims to take a small step in the direction of addressing this imbalance, it does so self-consciously in the spirit of a wider concern that seems to be marking our turn to the twenty-first century: the desire to promote plurality within our growing symbiosis as a human community.

The essays collected in the following pages, all contributed by specialists in Japanese philosophy, fall into four sections, dealing respectively with the rationale for Japanese philosophy today, the philosophizing of Japanese tradition, the philosophical thought of Nishida Kitarō and

1. John Maraldo, “Tradition, Textuality, and the Trans-lation of Philosophy,” *Japan in Tradition and Postmodern Perspectives*. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Steven Heine, eds. (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 230.

efforts to move beyond it, and connections with Chinese and Korean philosophies.

In the first section, essays by John Maraldo and Ōhashi Ryōsuke remind us of the promise and potential of Japanese philosophy conveyed in the twentieth-first century. Section two comprises of papers by Nakajima Takahiro, Taguchi Shigeru, Kim Tae-ho, Gereon Kopf, and Carl Becker, and together give us a glimpse into an intellectual history not widely known outside of Japan or associated with “philosophy.” In section three, the focus is on the tradition surrounding the thought of Nishida Kitarō and its critique, with essays contributed by Noe Kei-ichi, Jacynthe Tremblay, Huang Wen-hong, Uehara Mayuko, Cheung Ching-yuen, and Sugawara Jun. Whether or not Nishida is the “first” philosophical mind in Japanese history, there is no overlooking his contribution and the stimulus it has given contemporary philosophy both inside Japan and abroad. In the final section, essays by Chen Wei-fen, Michel Dalissier, Lam Wing-keung, and Huh Woo-sung unveil a very different but important area in the study of Japanese philosophy, namely, its connections with Chinese and Korean philosophies. No serious student of Japanese philosophy can afford to ignore its connections, root and branch, with the thought of China and Korea.

As James Heisig has suggested, all of this belongs to the wider task of redefining philosophy itself for the twenty-first century.² The attention that philosophy has attracted in Japan over the last one hundred and fifty years cannot simply be brushed aside. Today, it can be said, “Japanese philosophy belongs to the world,”³ and we who live in this *world* need to work together to raise awareness of the fact. As Dominik Perler has noted, “Japanese philosophy is not simply one more field of specialization for experts. It poses a challenge for all Western philosophers to critically reflect on their own tradition.”⁴ To fulfill this role a place for Japanese philosophy must be found in academia alongside other philosophies of the world—not simply to challenge the West, but also to engage

2. See James Heisig, ed. *Japanese Philosophy Abroad* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2004).

3. James Heisig, “Foreword,” *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2006), XII.

4. Dominik Perler, “Preface,” *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, x.

in dialogue with the rich philosophical heritage of China, Korea, and other countries of the “East.”

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