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Neglected Themes and Hidden Variations

EDITED BY

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and
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CHISOKUDŌ

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Introduction

This book was born at a conference entitled “The Kyoto School: Neglected Themes and Hidden Variations,” held at McGill University on March 9–10, 2007. The conference theme, “Neglected Themes and Hidden Variations,” was meant to focus attention on the more marginal figures and less studied lines of thought in the Kyoto School. In the West, most of the scholarship on the Kyoto School has focused on the three main figures: Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962) and Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990), the scholars who held the chair in either History of Philosophy or Religion at Kyoto University during the first half of the twentieth century. Western scholarship has also focused on a familiar list of topics: the philosophy of nothingness, Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, nationalism, et cetera. This tidy focus has obscured the fact that the Kyoto School has never been sharply defined, either in terms of its membership, or in terms of the philosophical issues particular to it. The conference succeeded in its aim. In an unusually collegial and fruitful exchange, the participants threw the spotlight on scholars outside the inner circle and on issues outside the usual agenda.

Kuki Shūzō is the central focus of attention of three of our authors. If illness had not cut short his life, the quality of his published works strongly suggest that he would have become as well-known as the mainstream Kyoto School authors but would have developed a line of thought without obvious debt to either Zen or Pure Land Buddhism. Kuki spent eight years in Europe, studying at Heidelberg in 1921 with Heinrich Rickert and at Marburg from 1927 to 1928 with Heidegger and Karl Löwith. He also spent several years in Paris where he studied French philosophy and composed four collections of poems. He

was probably the person who introduced the young Jean-Paul Sartre to Heidegger's existentialism. After returning from Europe, Kuki was appointed a lecturer in philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University in 1929 on the recommendation of Nishida. He received his doctorate in 1932 with his dissertation on contingency. In the following year, he was appointed assistant professor and in 1934, professor. He remained there until his unexpected death in 1941, at age fifty-three. Nishida wrote the epitaph carved on Kuki's grave. Kuki published several works on quite diverse topics. In Western scholarship to date, he is best known for *Iki no Kōzō* 「イキ」の構造 [The Structure of *Iki*, 1930], a work on Japanese aesthetics. But in Japan, he is also well-known for producing one of the first works on Heidegger, *Haidegā no tetsugaku* ハイデガーの哲学 [The Philosophy of Heidegger, 1933], and for *Gūzensei no mondai* 偶然性の問題 [The Problem of Contingency, 1935]. Graham Mayeda, in his paper "Is There a Method to Chance? Contrasting Kuki Shūzō's Phenomenological Methodology in *The Problem of Contingency* with that of His Contemporaries Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert," first explains Kuki's methodology in the study of contingency; Kuki's approach was phenomenological as opposed to the scientific or rationalist approaches of Windelband and Rickert, contemporaries who also investigated contingency. Kuki's phenomenological approach allows him to talk of an ethics for taking responsibility for chance encounters. John Maraldo, in the conference keynote address "The Contingencies of Kuki Shūzō," takes elements of Kuki's theory of contingency and first shows how contingency is presupposed in a contemporary issue, the debate between evolution and intelligent design. He then shows how Kuki opposed an ethics modeled on science and universal laws of nature and instead advanced an ethics of taking responsibility for the contingent, for the possibility of not being. Michael Marra, in "A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer: Kuki Shūzō's Version," first begins with Heidegger's "Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer," a work which criticizes Kuki's aesthetics as misguided since aesthetics grows out of European thinking; Marra uses the poetry that Kuki composed in France to construct a possible answer that Kuki might have made to Heidegger.

An unstudied aspect of the Kyoto School is its relationship to Marxist

thought. Nishida had several students who were strongly influenced by Marxism. One of them, the young Tosaka Jun, in fact went so far as to criticize Nishida charging that his was basically a bourgeois philosophy. Nishida kept up a conversation with his Marxist students and took these criticisms seriously; his writings in the last decade of his life reflect some of those conversations. Among those students was Miki Kiyoshi, whose Marxist-influenced writings may have caused him to lose his teaching post in 1930. Miki died in prison in 1945, leaving behind an unfinished essay on Shinran. In her paper, “The Subject of History in Miki Kiyoshi’s ‘Shinran,’” Melissa Anne-Marie Curley argues that Miki understood Shinran as taking the three historical stages of true dharma, counterfeit dharma and final dharma not as successive stages in the degeneration of the dharma but as a dialectical process, in which the age of the final dharma “sublates” the two previous ages. This gives a new meaning to Shinran’s realization of himself as a *bonbu* 凡夫, an abjectly ordinary person, for he realizes himself as a historically given subject at the center of history.

Watsuji Tetsurō is the main subject of three papers in this volume and is discussed in several others. Watsuji has not usually been treated as if he were a full member of the Kyoto School. It is true that he spent the latter half of his career at Tokyo University, but he started off in Kyoto under the wing of Nishida. At the invitation of Nishida and Hatano Seiichi, Watsuji was appointed lecturer in ethics at Kyoto Imperial University in 1925. He then left for study in Europe on a three-year scholarship, but returned early because of the death of his father. He resumed teaching at Kyoto Imperial University and in 1931, was appointed professor. In 1934, however, he departed for Tokyo Imperial University to assume a chair in the Faculty of Literature and there he remained until 1949. Watsuji was a prolific writer with a very broad range of interests. His many books run the spectrum from literature (he had a deep interest in Natsume Sōseki and a side interest in the Romantic poets), traditional Japanese culture, Western philosophy (he produced studies of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard), Zen Buddhism (he is credited with reviving modern scholarly interest in Dōgen) and existentialism (his *Fūdo* 風土 [Climate, 1935] was written as a response to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*). His intellectual interests clearly overlapped those of the Kyoto School

authors and just as clearly exceeded them as well. In “Transcendence of the State in Watsuji Tetsurō’s Ethics,” Bernard Bernier argues that although Watsuji explained that the Japanese imperial state was transcendent, the Japanese example was for him a particular instance of a more general claim that the state in general had a sacred and absolute character. David Dilworth, in “Guiding Principles of Interpretation in Watsuji Tetsurō’s *History of Japanese Ethical Thought*,” argues that Watsuji’s ethical system appropriated Western philosophy and transformed it into a “particularistic multiculturalism.” Ironically, for Dilworth, Watsuji’s premodern version of cultural hermeneutics presaged the postmodern version that we see around us today. Erin McCarthy’s paper, “Towards a Transnational Ethics of Care,” addresses a fundamental problem within feminist scholarship, particularly in the ethics of care: the very concept of care seems to be inconsistent with the widely accepted Western liberal notion of the self as individual and self-sufficient. Thus she finds in Watsuji’s concepts of *ningen* 人間 and *aidagara* 間柄—the human being and betweenness—as both individual and relational, a concept of self that supports the relational orientation essential for an ethics of care.

The Kyoto School has often been described as offering a bridge to the West. Its scholars are steeped in Asian thought and culture, especially in Mahāyāna Buddhism, yet they have also studied with Western philosophers and express themselves in the concepts and theories of Western philosophy. But the Kyoto School is a bridge to Asia as well. The essays by Lam Wing Keung and Xiaofei Tu show that the Chinese philosopher Mou Zongsan (1905–1990), like the Kyoto School philosophers, had seriously studied Western philosophy and had incorporated Western elements into his own philosophical writings. Mou Zongsan is considered a leader in the New Confucian movement that arose after the May 4th Movement of 1919 in China. The movement was influenced by a variety of foreign forces—European philosophy, American liberalism and Marxism among others—but its central mission was to recast and revive the values of Confucianism in the modern century. The New Confucian movement was in some ways historically reacting to the same intellectual forces as the Kyoto School, although China at the time was very different from Japan. The two movements are both engaged in an endeavor that might be called comparative philosophy. In his paper, “Subjectivity,

Rinrigaku and Moral Metaphysics: Watsuji Tetsurō and Mou Zongsan,” Lam Wing Keung points out that where many of the Kyoto School philosophers had studied Heidegger and strove to recast a Mahāyāna Buddhist outlook, Mou Zongsan had studied Kant and strove to recast a Confucian outlook. He compares Mou Zongsan with Watsuji Tetsurō and compares their conceptions of subjectivity as applied to their ethical positions. Xiaofei Tu, in “The Comparative Philosophies of Mou Zongsan and Nishitani Keiji,” compares Mou Zongsan with Nishitani Keiji and responds to contemporary critiques of the comparative approach, arguing for an understanding of twentieth-century Asian philosophies as necessarily “philosophies of contact.”

Studies on the Kyoto School’s philosophy of nothingness usually focus on ontological issues and the nature of existence. In her essay, “Hidden Aspects of Temporality: From Nishida to Watsuji,” Jacynthe Tremblay focuses on a less researched theme: time. She shows that all the main Kyoto School thinkers—Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani, as well as Watsuji and Kuki—grappled with the nature of rectilinear time, the status of the past and the future, and the nature of the “eternal now,” the “other” of time. In the end, with the exception of Kuki, they resolve their issues with past, present and future by locating them in the *basho* of the present, ultimately in the eternal now. The very notion of *basho* 場所, or “place,” has a spatial connotation which until now has partly obscured its temporal dimension.

We are also pleased to publish two papers from Japanese scholars which we received after the McGill conference; both have been skillfully translated by Robert F. Rhodes. These essays deal with Nishitani’s theory of the imagination, a part of Nishitani’s philosophy which has not to date been discussed in Western-language scholarship. In “Sensation and Image in Nishitani’s Philosophy,” Hosoya Masashi explicates Nishitani’s theory of sensation as set forth in one of his last essays *Kū to soku* 空と即 [Emptiness and Immediacy, 1982], showing its links with Kant and Hegel on one side and illustrating it with reference to Bashō and Dōgen on the other side. Ono Makoto, in “Nishitani Keiji’s Theory of the Imagination,” traces it back to Aristotle’s notion of *sensus communis*, the fundamental unitary power of mind to sense one single thing despite the fact that each of the senses individually contributes sight alone, sound alone, touch alone, taste alone, odor alone.

For the last several decades of his life, Nishitani Keiji was considered the dean of the Kyoto School philosophers. But when he died in 1990, the mantle passed to Ueda Shizuteru. Little of Ueda's work has been translated into Western languages so he remains a figure largely unknown to Western scholarship. In this volume, Bret Davis, in "Letting Go of God for the Sake of Nothing: Ueda Shizuteru's Non-Mysticism and the Question of Ethics in Zen Buddhism," sets out Ueda's interpretation of Eckhart. In a pattern familiar to readers of Nishitani, this interpretation emphasizes a double negation—a first negation that turns us to an experience of absolute nothingness and a second negation that returns us to direct engagement in the here and now of daily activity.

We would like to acknowledge the support of all the people who made both the conference and the present volume possible. First of all, we very much appreciate the participation of all the presenters who made the conference an unusually friendly and enjoyable meeting of minds and persons. Katherine Narraway led a wonderful team of organizers, including Cindy Bentley, Alnis Dickson and Julian Menezes. In Kyoto, Mizuno Ayumi, a graduate of the philosophy department at Kyoto University, and Mizuno Tomoharu, a doctoral student at Kyoto University working with Professor Fujita Masakatsu, provided many kinds of invaluable assistance. We thank Mr. Brian Nagata and Mr. Yasuo Honjo of the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) for their continuing support of this and other projects. Several of the papers submitted for this volume were first reviewed by anonymous readers, and we owe a great debt of gratitude to these readers. Inevitably in a volume like this, which works in several languages and rests on so much previous scholarship, there is much detail that needs to be checked and verified. For any mistakes or omissions, the editors take full responsibility.

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