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FRONTIERS OF JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY 3

# Origins and Possibilities

EDITED BY

James W. Heisig

and

Uehara Mayuko



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## Editors' Introduction

The fourteen essays gathered together in this, the third volume of *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, represent one more step in ongoing efforts to bring the concerns of twentieth-century Japanese philosophy into closer contact with philosophical traditions around the world. As its title indicates, the aims are twofold: to reflect critically on the work of leading figures in the modern academic philosophy of Japan and to straddle the borderlands where they touch on the work of their counterparts in the West.

The immediate occasion for the book was a workshop on “The Origins and Possibilities of Japanese Philosophy” held at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in June 2008, the sixth in a series of international consultations on the forthcoming *Sourcebook of Japanese Philosophy*. Scholars from five countries gathered to discuss their current research and to offer suggestions for the project. In these meetings, as throughout the preparations for the *Sourcebook*, we have been struck again and again by the growing interest among scholars around the world in the rich mine of resources that the intellectual history of Japan has to offer to philosophical inquiry. It is our hope that this little volume will aid further in that direction.

In recognition of the lively discussions on Japanese philosophy that have been gathering momentum in the French-speaking world these past many years, much of which never reaches the attention of anglo-phone scholars, we have solicited six essays by representative scholars for inclusion in the volume.

The essays have been arranged into four groups. A first group deals with modern Japanese philosophers. Keta Masako takes up the idea of “imaging” in a late piece by Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990). Focusing on

the borderlines where stubborn fact meets poetic sentiment and expression, she compares Nishitani's metaphor of adjoining rooms to Huayan ideas of principle and phenomena in order to show the simultaneous conjunction and disjunction involved. She then correlates this model with the way in which Zen experience uses the "emptiness" of images as a point of entry for the reflecting self to the world.

Frédéric Girard sets out to show the similarities between Nishida's idea of place (*basho*) and Buddhist ideas of space, both of which are characterized as "absolute." If Buddhism's "unconditional" and Nishida's "infinite indetermination" bear comparison, it is in part due to the Buddhist inspiration behind Nishida's idea of *basho*. But, as Girard notes, despite Nishida's general familiarity with Zen and Huayan thought, his failure to wrestle with the original texts tends to restrict his use of Buddhist concepts to a rather commonsense level.

Saitō Takako treats the work of Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941) by focusing on his pivotal notions of the human person and the metaphysical absolute. The mutual dependence of these two ideas is seen, she argues, in their respective relationships to the "whole" of reality. The human person relates to the whole as a disjunctive contingency, such that the whole contains it metaphysically but does not coincide with it. The absolute, in contrast, is both necessary and contingent in the sense that it needs to contain all the elements that make up the whole, but only in the form of a process involving a "totality of disjunctive possibilities."

Odagiri Takushi takes up the idea of self-knowledge in Nishida Kitarō, showing how his writings around 1930 expose a major shift in thinking. In the attempt to present a coherent picture of the core notion of the "noumenal," he outlines Nishida's shift from his early notion of self-reflexivity to the fallibilism of his middle and late periods. In doing so, he clarifies the importance of contingency or indeterminacy in Nishida's theory of rational self-reflection, an essential part of his conception of exteriority and the historical world.

Curtis Rigsby presents an outline of what may be the first comprehensive study of the debate concerning irreversibility and reversibility that was prompted by Takizawa Katsumi (1909–1984) during the final years of his life. Takizawa had argued that the dependency of contingent beings (creatures) on the absolute (God) was one-way and irreversible.



This sparked an extended discussion among Buddhist and Christian thinkers, the range of whose opinions Rigsby outlines and evaluates.

A second group of essays includes three comparisons of twentieth-century Japanese philosophers with classical Western thinkers. Laurentiu Andrei offers a comparative study of Dōgen’s Zen and the philosophy of the Stoics from the standpoint of “self-reflection.” For the Stoics, the “self” is the power of reason, which in turn is part of the divine *logos*. This power and the self-transformation it enables at the psycho-physical level are not ego-centered but form a unity with one’s own true “nature.” Like Dōgen’s idea of the “Buddha-nature,” the Stoics saw nature as a harmony aimed at liberating the self from suffering. Unlike the Stoics, however, Dōgen’s self is not substantial but transcends the subject-object dichotomy to effect a detachment from mind and body.

Marcello Ghilardi takes a closer look at the idea of “seeing” in the work of Nishida Kitarō by contrasting it with the views of Nicholas Cusanus, whose images of the divine in its relation to the human influenced Nishida. At the same time, he shows how fundamental differences between Cusanus’s idea of God and Nishida’s idea of an absolute nothingness raise fundamental questions of relationship to the “other” that affect both aesthetics and ethical practice.

Giancarlo Vianello contrasts the ideas of two contemporary thinkers, the Japanese philosopher Ueda Shizuteru (1926– ) and the Catalan philosopher and theologian, Raimon Panikkar (1918– ). In particular, he looks at the role of language and the limits of language in each of the two. In Ueda’s case, what is decisive is a mixture of Zen and the mysticism of Meister Eckhart that defines his view of the apophatic, whereas for Panikkar it is a blend of Hindu nonduality, the ontological silence of Buddhist, and his own original reading of Christian theology.

A third group of essays focuses on comparisons with contemporary Western philosophy. Bernard Stevens demonstrates how the crisis of eurocentricism that Husserl spoke of can be approached by way of the “logic of place (*basho*)” developed by Nishida. The phenomenological aspect of this *basho* gives it a richness lacking in a mere philosophy of subjectivity. As a comprehensive philosophy of “non-subjectivity,” it seeks to penetrate to the bottom of individual consciousness, and in this

sense suggests a complement to Husserl's phenomenology that awaits discovery in the philosophy of the twenty-first century.

Shimizu Takashi breaks new ground by reading the theory of predicates in Nishida Kitarō through the lens of contemporary semiotics, beginning with Charles Sanders Peirce and proceeding to the contemporary philosopher Michel Serres. In so doing he tries to show how Nishida's critique of the subject-object dichotomy is reinforced and refined by these thinkers, opening yet another door to a reassessment of the central notion of "self-awareness."

Silja Graupe likewise ventures into new territory by showing the overlap between Nishida's understanding of the process of knowledge and current theories of the creation and acquisition of knowledge being developed at the fringes of economic theory. Centering on the writings of the contemporary scholar of management theory Nonaka Ikujiro, she argues that Nishida's conjunction of the knowledge of objects and knowledge of the workings in self-consciousness can aid economists trying to break down the myth of objectivity that dominates economic theory.

The final group of essays focus on the aspects of the notion of "philosophy" in a Japanese context. Britta Boutry-Stadelmann suggests that to tackle the question of the meaning of Japanese philosophy today, we need to examine the development of technical jargon, beginning with the word *tetsugaku* (philosophy) itself. Further, the connections between traditional Japanese thought and contemporary ways of thinking suggest that we pursue such questions by following Nishida's ideas from 1916 in order to lay out the "philosophical methods" at work in Japan.

Sylvain Isaac's contribution seeks to present, in systematic fashion, Nishitani Keiji's ideas of "Japanese philosophy." In its ingestion and digestion of the "difference" of Western philosophy, Japan is in a position to offer a perspective broader and more global than Western culture, something needed to tackle questions such as the loss of "humanity" and the alienation from the natural world among people dominated by Western science.

The concluding essay, by Uehara Mayuko, takes a look at the connection between the process of modernization and translation in Japan. Taking up the translation of philosophical texts from the viewpoint of translation study, she finds a similarity in the two that enables us to think

of the mediating work of translation as a dynamic for creating both new ideas and new modes of linguistic expression. Taking Nishida as an example, she suggests how assigning Sino-Japanese equivalents to technical vocabulary and the creation of modern Japanese have both been indispensable in the creation of new philosophical thought.

The past decade has seen a marked increase within Japan of interest in distinctively “Japanese philosophy.” In 1999 the publication of a series of volumes entitled *Selections of Kyoto Philosophy* 京都哲学撰書 was begun by Tōeisha in Kyoto. To date the series has reached thirty-one volumes, each devoted to a particular thinker. 2000 saw the inauguration of the journal *Japan Philosophy* 『日本の哲学』. This was followed in 2003 by *Studies in the History of Japanese Philosophy* 『日本哲学史研究』. Around the same time, the Nishida Philosophy Association was founded and in 2004 inaugurated an annual journal to publish its proceedings, 『西田哲学会年報』. Meantime, the publication of individual monographs on Japanese philosophy, many by younger scholars, continues at a pace that would have been difficult to imagine a generation ago.

If there is a sense in which this flurry of activity can be seen, at least in part, as a reaction to interest in Japanese philosophy from abroad during the 1980s, the significance of that stimulus has been all but eclipsed by the work of contemporary Japanese philosophers and students of philosophy. This is not to say that the study of Japan’s native philosophical tradition has retreated back into a closed world. On the contrary, there is every indication that the mood has shifted to one of an “open forum” in which scholars from around the world can participate as equals and pursue together a love of wisdom that recognizes the boundaries of culture and language without being imprisoned in them.

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James W. Heisig  
Uehara Mayuko  
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