

# ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY 1862—1962

Gino K. Piovesana, S. J.

A few years ago a massive *Philosophical Encyclopedia* began the article on Japanese philosophy with the blunt statement that little original thought was to be found in Japan and that the Japanese people have little speculative power. Requested to write for the second edition of this work, I made the condition that this unqualified statement had to be stricken out, with which the editor willingly complied. I refer to this personal detail because of the common belief among connoisseurs of Japan that this country has never produced any real philosophical school worthy of the name, be it Buddhist thought or Confucian ethics. I am not an expert on Japanese thought of the past but what I know of recent Occidental-type of thinking in Japan obliges me to cast a dissenting note to the above *cliche*.

Recent Japanese philosophy started just one hundred years ago when Nishi Amane (1829—1897) and Tsuda Mamichi (1821—1903) prepared, in the early part of 1862, the first draft on Western philosophy at the Center of Western Studies (Bansho Shirabesho). The term *tetsugaku* for philosophy came to be known in 1874 when Nishi Amane published his *Hyakuichi*

---

\* The author, a professor at Sophia University, has been in Japan since 1949, and has just published *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought 1862—1962, A Survey* (Enderle Shoten, Tokyo).

*Shinron* ( *A New Theory on the Hundred and One Doctrines* ). Nishi studied in Leyden and upon his return, although serving in different capacities, was the main source of Western philosophy in Japan. Nishi is credited with the creation of a great part of the philosophical terminology, much of which is still in use today. He did translation work ( Mill's *Utilitarianism* ; J. Haven's *Mental Psychology* ), adaptation ( *Hyakugaku Renkan* : *Encyclopedia* ); and also original works such as the above-mentioned book and others which are not to be considered here.

The term *tetsugaku* for philosophy was coined to indicate a new type of thinking, which other and more familiar terms, like the *rigaku* proposed by Miyake Yūjirō, a philosopher by education and a famous journalist by vocation, did not convey. *Tetsugaku*, or *kitetsugaku* as originally intended by Nishi, means learning related to the quest for wisdom in the sense of Aristotle, while *rigaku* or the learning of *ri* ( reason, law, cosmological order ) was too Confucianist for Nishi. It is true that both terms—others too were used for a while—could be made to express Western philosophy. However, Nishi's terminology prevailed, the reason being it was better that a new term be used for a new type of thinking, which since then has permeated the Japanese academic world.

More specialized philosophers were to come after Nishi, especially from 1893 when regular chairs of philosophy were established. Inoue Tetsujirō (1854—1944) was the first Japanese to hold a chair at Tokyo Imperial University. Inoue became

nationally known for his essay on *The Conflict between Religion and Education* (1891), in which he attacked Christianity as a religion placing Christ above the Emperor. His philosophical contribution was his special brand of German *Identitätsrealismus* through which he tried to overcome the naive realism and materialism of Haeckel and Katō Hiroyuki (1836—1916), the latter being the most famous exponent of materialistic evolution in Japan. Inoue, who compiled the first philosophical dictionary *Tetsugaku Jii*, 1881, and therefore ranks second only to Nishi in the formulation of Japanese philosophical terminology, became more and more known for his scholarly works on Japanese Confucianism. He was an ardent advocate of National Morality (*Kokumin Dōtoku Gairon*, 1911) and other nationalist causes. With Inoue at Tokyo Imperial University was Raphael von Koeber (1848—1923), who educated several generations of Japanese philosophers and is still remembered today. The successor of Inoue was Kuwaki Gen'yoku (1874—1946) who was the most faithful Kantian in Japan. Kantianism, or rather neo-Kantianism, became the general trend during the Taishō period (1912—1925), while Husserl's phenomenology was introduced already in 1921. Heidegger and soon after him Hegelianism became the prevalent trend during the years preceding the last war.

With the passing of the Taishō era, Japanese philosophy passed from a stage which still smacked of dilettantism to the genuinely academic plane. At the same time we see the beginning of the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō, who is justly considered the greatest Japanese thinker of recent times. Nishida (1870—1945) established himself with *A Study of Good* (*Zen*

*no Kenkyū*, 1911), a work to be followed by other writings which eventually formed the eighteen volumes of his complete works. Nishida's originality consists in his logic of place or field (*Basho no Ronri*) which tries to combine elements of Oriental nothingness with Western categories. Nishida's followers are called the *Kyōto-ha*, or the school of philosophy of Kyōto University, which was until few years ago the leading philosophical trend in Japan. Tanabe Hajime (1885—1962) became Nishida's most famous successor at the University of Kyōto. Tanabe became known as a philosopher of mathematics, and later on for his logic of species (*Shu no Ronri*), a development of Nishida's logic of place. Tanabe, at the end of the last world war, was the exponent of *Philosophy as Metanoesis* (*Zangedō-tōshite no Tetsugaku*) in which a defeated ideology tried to make a clean sweep of former positions. The post-war years, though, showed a revival of Marxism which as a philosophy entered Japan about 1926. Miki Kiyoshi (1897—1945) was a purveyor of Marxism, although from 1932 his books on *Philosophy of History* (*Rekishi Tetsugaku*) and *The Logic of the Imaginative Power* (*Kōsōryoku no Ronri*) manifest no particular Marxist tendencies. Miki, who was a pupil of Nishida, was rather for an idealistic conception of history and of the creative power of man. He was much attracted by Pascal, and at the same time by Shinran.

Real Marxist philosophers were Nagata Hiroshi (1904—1946), Fukumoto Kazuo, both communists, and more liberal materialists, like Funayama Shin'ichi, Saigusa Hiroto. In post-war times the adhesion to communism of a scholar in Greek phi-

losophy, like Ide Takashi, and of Yanagida Kenjūrō, a former pupil of Nishida, made quite an impression upon academic circles as well as on the public at large. The above list is far from being complete, and there is no country outside the Soviet bloc where Marxism and Soviet philosophy have been studied as in Japan. This is said deliberately, because not only German idealism has been cultivated in Japan, as it is often said. The Kyōto school of philosophy can be so characterized, but this simplification—because it is such—cannot be applied to Tokyo University, nor to other leading universities. Waseda, for instance, can be mentioned as a center of Anglo-American thought, and of pragmatism in particular. Pragmatism was quite flourishing during the Taishō period and in post-war years logical positivism, analytical philosophy, not to speak of existentialism have been widely studied. Many other trends, and almost all the great thinkers of the past and the present, have been introduced into Japan and have followers. In this sense, the last hundred years of Japanese philosophy reflects all too well the leading trends of the philosophical world at large.

Still some characteristics can be detected and first of all we must dispose of the common *cliche* of little originality and creativity of recent Japanese philosophers. However, a premise is necessary for readers not familiar with recent studies of cultural anthropologists and students of cultural patterns. Namely, if we exclude very few creative centers, real original traits are few and scarce in every culture. Cultural “borrowing” is the most common feature of every culture and not a peculiarity of Japan. Borrowing nowadays has no pejorative sense at all.

Such an expert as A. Ferguson tells us, peoples “borrow often that which they are disposed to invent.”

This being granted, a sort of creative thought and originality must be admitted in the case of philosophers like Nishida, Tanabe, Takahashi, Satomi, Watsuji Tetsurō, Hatano Seiichi. The logic of place or field of Nishida, the logic of the species of Tanabe, Takahashi's “pandialectic” and the “new Humanism” of Mutai Risaku are no doubt original contributions and not just repetitions of Western philosophical ideas.

The main interest of recent Japanese philosophy can be epitomized as the search for a philosophy of culture, a keen inquiry into ethics as anthropology, and the effort to found an identity (selfhood, *shutaisei*) for the individual. Philosophy of culture and also world philosophy is a theme which Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834—1901) began in his *Outline of Civilization* (*Bummeiron no Gairyaku*, 1875) and became a trend with Tsuchida Kyōson (1891—1934) who coined the term “Culturalism” (*Bunkashugi*) and has been a subject of long debates in pre-war years as well as now. Culturalism obviously was and is a subject taken up not only by philosophers, but by critics and writers at large. Today it is cultivated in a much more positive way by the group lead by Tsurumi Shunsuke and his *Shisō no Kagaku* or the Science of Thought, while in the past Abe Jirō (1883—1959) and the Kyōto School made important contributions. Ikegami Kenzō (1900—1956) was supposed to give a sound epistemological basis to this field of enquiry but cancer cut short his brilliant career. Ethical an-

thropology is the main result of Watsuji's efforts, but ethical problems have been dealt with by a host of thinkers and not all along the lines of old Confucianist or nationalistic tenets. Ōnishi Hajime (1864—1900) must be here remembered as a pioneer and as a non-conformist. Fujii Kenjirō (1872—1931), Amano Teiyū, and Ōshima Yasumasa were or still are moral philosophers who put ethical principles first, and did not bend to social pressure.

The question of indentity or selfhood (*shutaisei*) is another perennial quest of contemporary Japanese thought which is very much concerned with man and the individual who in past as in the present has been submerged in social and cultural bondage. This tendency to highlight *shutaisei* can be noticed in Nishida, Tanabe, Watsuji and Miki Kiyoshi. Today at least three views can be discerned: the existentialist, the Marxist, and the socio-pacifist of Mutai Risaku.

Negative aspects, however, should be indicated of recent Japanese thought as, for instance, the *penchant* for dialectical thinking, the relativism and eclecticism of many thinkers, the complete separation between old Buddhist thought (with the exception of Nishida) and contemporary philosophical categories.

However, as a concluding remark I shall only point out that the main task of Japanese philosophers has been to introduce and understand Western philosophy, a task in which they have succeeded, in spite of the barriers of language, religions, and socio-ethical background.

Kanji Glossary

- |                              |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Amano, Teiyū 天野貞祐            | Nishi, Amane 西周              |
| Bansho Shirabesho 審所調所       | Nishida, Kitarō 西田幾多郎        |
| Basho no Ronri 場所の論理         | Ōnishi Hajime 大西祝            |
| Bummeiron no Gairyaku 文明論の概略 | Ōshima Yasumasa 大島康正         |
| Bunkashugi 文化主義              | Rekishi Tetsugaku 歴史哲学       |
| Fujii, Kenjirō 藤井健治郎         | Ri 理                         |
| Fukumoto, Kazuo 福本和夫         | Rigaku 理学                    |
| Fukuzawa, Yukichi 福沢諭吉       | Saegusa, Hiroto 三枝博音         |
| Funayama, Shin'ichi 船山信一     | Sensei 先生                    |
| Hatano, Seiichi 波多野精一        | Shisō no Kagaku 思想の科学        |
| Hyakugaku Renkan 百学連環        | Shu no Ronri 種の論理            |
| Hyakuichi 百一                 | Shutaisei 主体性                |
| Ide, Takashi 出隆              | Taishō 大正                    |
| Ikegami, Kenzō 池上謙三          | Takahashi, Satomi 高橋里美       |
| Inoue, Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎       | Tanabe, Hajime 田辺元           |
| Katō, Hiroyuki 加藤弘之          | Tetsugaku 哲学                 |
| Kitetsugaku 拓哲学              | Tetsugaku Jii 哲学学彙           |
| Kokumin Dōtoku Gairon 国民道德概論 | Tsuchida, Kyōson 土田杏村        |
| Kōsōryoku no Ronri 構想力の論理    | Tsuda, Mamichi 津田真道          |
| Kuwaki Gen'yoku 桑木嚴翼         | Tsurumi, Shunsuke 鶴見俊輔       |
| Kyōto-ha 京都派                 | Waseda 早稲田                   |
| Miki, Kiyoshi 三木清            | Watsuji, Tetsurō 和辻哲郎        |
| Miyake, Yūjirō 三宅雄二郎         | Yanagida, Kenjūrō 柳田謙十郎      |
| Mutai, Risaku 務台理作           | Zangedō toshite no Tetsugaku |
| Nagata, Hiroshi 永田広志         | 熾梅道としての哲学                    |