

Ng Yu-Kwan 吳汝鈞, 京都學派哲學: 久松眞一 [The philosophy of the Kyoto school: Hisamatsu Shin'ichi]. Taipei: Wenjin Publishers, 1995. 257 pp., 270元. ISBN 957-668-286-X.

THE KYOTO SCHOOL, which traces its origins to Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), represents a stream of twentieth-century religious and philosophical thought whose influence has reached beyond Japan to scholars in the West. In addition to generally accepted figures such as Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962) and Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990), there are a number of peripheral figures, such as the illustrious Buddhist thinker Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889–1980), who are commonly associated with the school. Dedicated to the deepening of mutual understanding and communication between the two great culture systems, the aim of the Kyoto school thinkers has been to seek out answers to spiritual problems confronting modern society both East and West and, in this capacity they have attracted attention from many quarters, particularly among those engaged in the ongoing inter-religious and inter-philosophical dialogue.

Sino-Japanese cultural interchanges have enjoyed a long history, dating from the T'ang Dynasty, and have been concerned with a wide range of issues—political, economic, social, and cultural. The cultural interchange was interrupted nearly fifty years ago, however, which has served to make Chinese academic researchers unfamiliar with the religious and philosophical developments in our neighboring nation, Japan. Indeed, a great many Chinese scholars have no knowledge of even the existence of an academic circle called the Kyoto school, a group that has played such an active role in both the Japanese and Western religious-philosophical world. Needless to say, this means that China has had to take a back seat in international culture exchanges, an area in which China, as the cradle and resource of oriental culture in the past, should have taken a relatively important role. This lack of knowledge, therefore, is exceedingly unfortunate for the Chinese academic world, and it naturally follows that China has an urgent need to understand what has taken place culturally in various parts in the whole world, if it intends to join in these cultural developments. The appearance, then, of *The Philosophy of the Kyoto School* by Ng Yu-Kwan, the first book in Chinese on this philosophical circle, should be taken as a significant starting point. Although focused on only one thinker, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, one hopes that it marks the reentry of China into the ocean of international cultural exchange, in a

mutual search to resolve the common spiritual problems of our age.

This book consists of two parts. The latter section is a translation of a collection of Hisamatsu's writings, including the records of some of his dialogues with Paul Tillich. This is preceded by commentaries on the philosophical thought of Hisamatsu, which manage to retain a narrative character. The commentaries are comprised of five essays, as well as the record of a dialogue held by Ng with Abe Masao. The five essays are entitled: 1) FAS and Oriental Nothingness; 2) Hisamatsu's "Formless Self" and its representations; 3) Hisamatsu on the ultimate antinomy of the human being; 4) Hisamatsu Shin'ichi's historical view of Absolute Nothingness; and 5) Hisamatsu and Zen.

In the first essay, "FAS and oriental Nothingness," Ng tries to introduce two of Hisamatsu's main concepts, FAS and Nothingness, as interpreted by the philosopher. Classifying the major characteristics of Nothingness according to the six categories of transcendence, spirituality, subjectivity, immanence, absolute freedom and dynamism, Ng points out that Hisamatsu Shin'ichi's understanding of Nothingness can be traced back to the oriental philosophical tradition, especially to the Buddhist tradition of Zen. Zen treats Nothingness, without any attachments, as a transcendence of both exterior and interior limitations. Nothingness is also treated here as a creative dynamism, which has manifested itself in all things of the universe. The FAS, as described by Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, is an abbreviation of three terms: "Formless Self," "All Mankind," and "Superhistorical History." By combining these terms Hisamatsu means to indicate that the human being is evolving into a whole—mankind—in superhistorical history through the awakening of the "Formless Self" that exists deeply within the human being. It further means that man can live an active, creative, world-directed life after his fulfillment of the transcendent self, already in this world and not in some future world. Comparing the six characteristics of Nothingness with the three dimensions of FAS, Ng points out the fundamental similarity in meanings of Nothingness and FAS. He also points out Hisamatsu's emphasis on the A and S dimensions of FAS, which he takes as indication of Hisamatsu's intention to enlarge the concept of Nothingness from a primarily religious, philosophical term of transcendence in the oriental tradition, into a practical, effective method that can not only direct people to awaken the transcendent self, but also serve to direct man towards intervention in real life on the basis of awakening, and thereby to create a superhistorical history in favor of all mankind. In one word, FAS is fundamentally the same as Nothingness, although it places more emphasis on the motive, creative aspect as compared to Nothingness' emphasis on the steady, quiet aspect.

In the second essay, "Hisamatsu Shin'ichi's 'Formless Self' and its representations," Ng pays special attention to the practical significance of "Formless Self" as depicted by Hisamatsu. This is categorized according to three aspects: the significance of "Formless Self" in real life; its significance in making a new history transcendentally; and its penetration of literature and art. As described by Ng, the "Formless Self" awakened by individuals can alleviate the overwhelmingly negative side-effects of modern civilization in real

life, especially through a change in viewpoint to reflect social realities, but also through a change in the interior mode to face the exterior life. This means such a fulfillment of the Ordinary Mind that individuals can treat society, full of dualities, antitheses, and contradictions, in a most ordinary, sober way that would free them from irritations, anxieties, and frustrations. It is this fulfillment of the Ordinary Mind that would allow people to confront calmly life and the world in a way without any purposeful chase of attainment and abandonment, and that would further make possible a splendid life of meaning and value. In this case, individuals would break through the dual limitation of time (history), refusing to recall the past or visualize the future by being engrossed in the present instant. In this way "Formless Self" exhibits its significance in creating a new history, a transcendent history. Ng further points out that Hisamatsu also applied the "Formless Self" to the aesthetic field, especially such arts as tea ceremony, painting, and calligraphy, where he thought the "Formless Self" would provide a feeling of beauty (or the beauty of Zen) in ordinary life, and would conversely be the best way to show the beauty of Zen outwardly. In other words, Hisamatsu thought "Formless Self" and its applications was capable of creating a poetic, aesthetic life out of ordinary existence, for any person who has fulfilled the "Formless Self."

In a third essay, "The ultimate antinomy of the human being," Ng deals mainly with the religious questions raised by Hisamatsu. Hisamatsu argued that sin and death, the realness as well as the limitations of human life, were the major factors that contributed to the emergence of religion, as people seek a religious resolution to transcend those limitations connected to actual life. Death contrasted with birth forms an absolute antinomy of being and nonbeing, which exists deeply in the core of the human being. This develops as well into the antinomies of sin and virtue, ugliness and beauty, truth and falsehood, all of which can be judged with human reason and so can be empirically divided as the antitheses of reason and unreason, value and unvalue in the dual ideological world. It is these ideological antinomies that generate all human suffering, and are the cause of every possible spiritual crisis for mankind. Nevertheless, these antinomies cannot be separated into absolutely contrary aspects, as we often are apt to suppose. In fact, they always identify themselves with each other, both in the deep layer of reality and in the superficial layer of real life. Consequently, the reality of life is such an integral unification of contradictory antinomies that it is only in the ideological realm they can be thought to be absolutely dividable. Therefore, there is but one way left to us if we are to break through those antinomies and lead ourselves through the suffering of life to the culmination of awakening, and that is the religious way that transcends over the value and unvalue, reason and unreason, and even being and nonbeing. This is also the traditional way of religious activities practiced in Zen Buddhism.

In the fourth essay, "Hisamatsu Shin'ichi's historical view of Absolute Nothingness," Ng constructs a summarization of Hisamatsu's historical view that is every bit as ambiguous as it was in Hisamatsu's own mind. Hisamatsu considered history, with idea—or in a relatively equal sense Absolute Nothingness—as its subject, a construction of two contradictory, opposite

poles, just as all ordinary things. It is such a contradiction that it will finally negate itself completely, negating itself on one pole in order to develop into the other, opposite pole. This has led to the development of human history, and has shown itself in actual historical activities in an active, positive way. However, this development has caused a crisis for itself, accompanied as it is by unsteadiness, sadness and the antinomy of the actual history of the human being. Therefore, history must be overcome, be transcended, which history cannot do by its own methods, because of their contradictory characteristics. The resolution exists only in religious methods, for through them the coverings of dual contradictions will be finally stripped away, and history will be turned back to its original source, Absolute Nothingness, which will conversely create a transcendent history through the revelation of itself into transcendent recreations. Here Ng concurs with Hisamatsu's conclusion that it is Absolute Nothingness that can not only transcend but also recreate history.

As a representative of the oriental religious position in the course of dialogues with the West, Hisamatsu often took Absolute Nothingness or Zen as his standpoint, although he usually transliterated it as FAS when he tried to introduce it to the West, in an effort to aid understanding. Nevertheless, Zen and its practice played a very important role in Hisamatsu's thought. Therefore, in his last essay, "Hisamatsu Shin'ichi and Zen," Ng focuses on Zen, with which Hisamatsu had a sound relationship throughout life. Comparing Zen as understood by Hisamatsu with that expressed by Hui-neng, the sixth patriarch of Zen Buddhism, Ng points out both the general similarity of understanding found there, as well as the further interpretative evolution of Hisamatsu in terms of Absolute Nothingness or FAS. This in turn implies Hisamatsu's realization of the union and indivisibility of the essence and its usefulness, or the theory and practice of Zen. Ng also points out interpretations of Zen by Hisamatsu that are in need of further discussion. For example, he argues that the "Formless Self" is questionable as a concept used to explain Absolute Nothingness or the spiritual subject of Zen. For this he offers two reasons. The first is that "formlessness" is only one of three methods of Zen, and Ng maintains that the other two, "non-abiding" and "non-conceptualization," are more important and of the essence of Zen. Second, the concept of "Self" is open to misconception, since the Westerner would probably think of himself having a unique Self that exists on a deep level as his essence in the substantial world, and this would be contradictory to teaching of Zen Buddhism.

From the above, we can see that Ng intends to construct a complete, thorough introduction to the religious-philosophical thought of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, accompanied by some objective, fair, and corresponding comments. He has succeeded in fulfilling this intention by concentrating on the five topics listed above—a fine summary of what Hisamatsu thought, talked and wrote about—as well as by his fair discussion of Hisamatsu's work. The introductory nature of this volume is especially appropriate for those with some sympathy for Hisamatsu's thought but still making the initial step in the study of a foreign thinker, particularly those who cannot avail themselves of that foreign language. Since this is precisely the case of Hisamatsu in China,

the significance of this volume is apparent. We can also take pleasure in noting Ng's sound knowledge of philosophy and religion—East and West—that enables him to discuss Hisamatsu's work by the way of comparison; the acuteness of his philosophical insights that allows him to penetrate to the core of Hisamatsu's thought; and the clarity of reason apparent in these essays. In addition, Ng also expresses his deep concern for the human being, with its frustration and final resolution, just as Hisamatsu had done. His criticism of Hisamatsu Shinzichi concerning the application of FAS to interpret oriental nothingness indicates the clarity of his apprehension of the different ways of thought and expression in East and West. All those factors contribute to a book filled with philosophical contemplations, in addition to the general introduction of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi's work. This work should help in attracting attention in China to this Japanese philosopher, to the influential Kyoto School in general, and to the main trends of contemporary cultural dialogue between West and East.

There are some points on which we must disagree with Ng, however. What we need to understand is that Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, like most oriental philosophers, built a unified theoretical system based so strongly on Nothingness or FAS that all other questions are centered around these concepts and have been integrally woven together with them. On the one hand, this means that in developing their thought, oriental philosophers often do no more than paraphrase those central concepts—in Hisamatsu's case Nothingness or FAS—without submitting them to critical reflection. On the other hand, this strategy allows them to encompass and explain a wide range of questions precisely by seeing them as expressions of those central concepts. This explains the difficulty of applying Western analytical deductive methods to the work of an Eastern philosopher. This method is used by Ng when he encounters some difficulty in his interpretation, especially when he attempts to explain the historical view of Hisamatsu, and in the end he is left with an ambiguity, which is, in fact, one characteristic of Hisamatsu's philosophy. Furthermore, because of the special quality of unity in Hisamatsu's thought, Ng had to return again and again to the concepts of Nothingness or FAS in his essays on the five topics abstracted from that thought. This led to some unnecessary repetition in his explanations and comments, following from the method he had chosen for this work.

These shortcomings, however, in no way take away from the success of this effort. As Ng himself explains, his motive in writing this book was to stimulate in China attention to and contemplation of the contemporary meaning of Eastern philosophy—especially that of Zen—in its encounter with Western thought. In this field, Japan has already achieved a great deal through the efforts of the Kyoto School, and China should be able to make its own contributions, if it responds to the stimulus provided by Ng in this book.

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