

Nishida Kitarō and Chinese Philosophy: Debt and Distance¹

Michel DALISSIER

Dōshisha University, Kyoto, Japan

This paper is the second part of a general study on the relationship between Nishida and Chinese philosophy. In the first, I explored the extent to which Nishida's philosophy was influenced, directly and indirectly, explicitly and implicitly, historically and conceptually, by materials coming from the intellectual horizon of Chinese thought. I concentrate here on Nishida's own position toward what he understood by "Chinese philosophy." Is this philosophy, so suggestive for Nishida, promoted to a central place in his work or not, and if so, in what sense might we take this idea of "centrality" as specifically Chinese? In setting forth several archetypes of Chinese thought present in Nishida's philosophy, the focus of this article falls on the methodological, logical and metaphysical contrasts we can identify between the Japanese philosopher and Chinese philosophy as his underground intellectual sources.

Keywords: NISHIDA KITARŌ, JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY, CHINESE PHILOSOPHY, NOTHINGNESS, ONTOLOGY, LOGIC OF PLACE, UNIFICATION

有無相生

There is and there is not are born from one another

Laozi, II

Introduction

Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) used to say: "We have to refine in a new way the ore of Eastern culture that includes such precious metals.² I am a miner forever. I do not even have time to refine the mine stones."³ Cheung Ching-yuen 張政遠 comments that "mining and refining are two different processes. Nishida's philosophy may have its Eastern or Japanese origin, but it can be refined in a way to realize its full potential."⁴ In fact, these two processes of mining and refining seem to follow the intimate phenomenality of Nishida's own "logic of place." "To refine" can be understood as the act of giving shape to a pure, though "still not refined metal, dug out as such from a mountain;" or in topological terms, it might

be understood as extracting the essence of that which already exists condensed in place, and ontologizing the emptying suchness. By contrast, “to mine” would be to prospect infinitely in the emptying depth of reality. This being so, what is to be refined or mined here? How can we understand Nishida’s position regarding “Eastern culture”? And indeed what did “Eastern culture” mean for him? From the arguments given in the major essay he devoted to the question (Nishida, 1933), we can answer that a significant part of what he understood by “Eastern culture” was “Chinese culture.” So, the question arises: What is Nishida’s own position on “Chinese culture”? What kind of “ore” should be refined here, and why?

In the first part of this essay, I explore the extent to which Nishida’s philosophy has been influenced, directly and indirectly, explicitly and implicitly, historically and conceptually, by materials coming from the intellectual horizon of Chinese thought. In the conclusion to the first part, I demonstrate that a kind of dialectical relation concerning non being and being divided the positions of major Chinese thinkers, in relation to the theories of the Japanese philosopher. It appeared to Nishida possible then to go a step further and show that this relation possesses a wider philosophical range, if described through the categories of ontology (theory of being), “meontology” (theory of non being) and “neontology” (theory of absolute nothingness).

However, our inquiry reaches here a turning point. For we are now no longer simply analyzing influences in turn, we are interpreting one philosophy within the conceptual frame of another. For this reason, the study of Nishida’s own position toward “Chinese philosophy” acquires an urgency. So our problem is this: Is this “philosophy”—so suggestive for Nishida—promoted to a “central” place in Nishida’s work or not, and if it is, in what sense might we take this idea of “centrality” as specifically “Chinese”? In setting forth several archetypes of Chinese thought present in Nishida, I focus here on a growing contrast between the Japanese philosopher and Chinese philosophy as one of his underground intellectual sources.

I. Ontology or Meontology?

On a strictly linguistic level, we can note that the primitive meaning of *wu* 無 in Chinese is not “nothingness” but rather “(there) is not,” “negation,” and it refers to an opposition to “being” or rather “(what) there is” (*you* 有).⁵ Might we go further and claim that Chinese philosophy takes this opposition as its own vital operation?

1. A Paradox between Subordination and/or Opposition

A first intellectual conflict in China had already taken place in a kind of alternative space between meontology and ontology. Confucius stressed the originality of “nothingness” as sociality and “ritual reciprocity,” while Mozi claimed the primacy of what can be called “human beings,” that is, private individuals, who only secondarily take part in society, insofar as the analogy of the “social contract” can be used.⁶ We now face in the *Laozi* 老子 the unfamiliar idea that we have to “prefer the weak to the strong, non acting to acting, the underside to the top, ignorance to knowledge, etc.”⁷ “Preference” here does not mean “exclusion” but rather a choice within an already complementary couple. In a philosophy of action, the notion of preference refers to an existential act of individual adhesion, whose apparent contingency eventually turns into a testimony of liberty. The preference in question here leads in the end to the following “paradox”: that “fullness” (“there is”) opposes “void” (“there is not”), and that “nothing has more value than something, that void [has more value] than fullness, and that “there is not” (*wu*) surpasses the “there is” (*you*).⁸ This paradox encompasses, on the one hand, the

ideological and socio-political position of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (195–115 BC), who argued the “subordination of earth to sky, of yin to yang,”⁹ and, on the other hand, the cosmological position of Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53–18 BC), who argued for a non hierarchical, synchronized interchange between yin and yang (sky/earth, void/full, father/son). As Cheng would have it:

Cosmology in Yang Xiong integrates, as it must do, the four seasons (representing for time what the four orientals are for space) as well as the Five Phases and, as in many Han exegetes of the *Book of Changes*, numbers are perceived as *a principle of synchronicity that settles the correspondences between men and the cosmos*. This schematic representation of natural processes, contrary to the teleological vision of Dong Zhongshu, does not include any judgment of value. Yin and yang, for example, are not related as superior and inferior, but according to an interchange in equal proportion.¹⁰

This paradox returns later:

The inaugural statement [Laozi 28]: “Without ultimate, but (and/or) supreme ultimate!” (*wuji er taiji* 無極而太極) will become the object of a famous controversy in the twelfth century between Zhu Xi and his contemporary Lu Xiangshan, mainly centered on the particle *er* 而. Should we understand that the topless precedes the supreme ultimate (*wuji*, then *taiji*) according to the conception of the *Laozi* 40: “A thousand beings under the sky are born from the there-is (*you*), the there-is is born from the there-is-not (*wu*)”? Or is the topless rather simply appended to the supreme ultimate (*wuji* and *taiji*), as if it were all about the same thing under two different names?¹¹

However, the paradox itself in the *Laozi* seems polarized on the priority of the *wu*, logically, according to the idea of a “preference,” and practically, according to the idea of an efficacy of nothingness:

Thirty spokes converge at the hub. But it is precisely where there is nothing that the utility of the chariot lies. One kneads clay to make a vessel. But it is where there is nothing that the utility of the container lies. We open doors and windows to make a room. But it is where nothing is that the utility of the room lies. Thus the there-is shows some commodities, and the there-is-not transform these commodities into utilities.¹²

As A. Cheng comments, “The paradox reaches here its highest point: absence would have more presence than what is here; void would have an efficiency that fullness has not.”¹³

2. A Contradiction to Escape the Paradox?

It goes without saying that such a conception of the efficiency of void is crucial to an understanding of the depth of the speculations Nishida devoted to nothingness, which he identified firstly with a “snapping in” (*Einschnappen*), and then with “absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu* 絶対無); it is no less crucial to an appreciation of the scope of his “poiesistic” (*poieshisuteki* ポイエシス的) philosophy of “intuition in action” [or “intuition in the making”] (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観).¹⁴ Nevertheless, we ought to note that “fullness” and “void” appear as opposites within the frame of the above paradox, notwithstanding either the matter of primacy, or the essential dynamics of the yin yang couple in Chinese cosmological thinking.¹⁵ In other words, primacy exists only to emphasize the complementary nature of the opposites: “To set forth something is at the same time to set forth its contrary” in order to

discard “distinctions and oppositions we make following habit or convention.”¹⁶ The paradox is thus not a contradiction, but rather appears within the compass of a positive and circular principle:

When everyone takes beauty as beauty, then comes the ugly.
When everyone takes the good as good, then comes the evil.
There-is and there-is-not produce each other.¹⁷

“Produce each other” (or “are born from one another”) means that without the first, the second does not appear. In Chinese, *you* and *wu* are not simply words or verbs, but antonyms, dependent on each other, as are so many other key philosophical terms in Chinese philosophy. In meontological terms, being produces non being and non being produces being within the frame of an infinite reciprocal, to yield a “place of oppositional nothingness,” or a place where being is not determined alone, but opposes non being. In 1934, Nishida argued:

Even if we call Daoist culture a culture of non being, it is still imprisoned in non being (*mu* 無), captured in the form of non being. Its present was not a moving one but a simple infinite present.¹⁸

The end of Nishida’s statement shows that his “eternal now” (*eien no ima* 永遠の今) was not “a simple infinite present” (*tada mugen no genzai* 唯無限の現在), or a sort of eternal reciprocal pulsation staying in the same place. It operates rather as a transitive “moving present” (*ugoku genzai* 動く現在), because time itself is spreading from the intimate “trans-localisation” of reality.¹⁹ Now, the statement as a whole demands we rid ourselves of usual conceptions of nothingness as “pure nothing,” for instance in Parmenides, Pan ontologism, Nihilism, or as “non being,” as it is encountered in Platonism, Bergsonism, but also—as in the “alternative space” mentioned earlier—in a certain line of thought in Chinese philosophy, and in some expressions of Indian philosophy and religion.²⁰ Especially with regard to Daoism, the statement means that what Nishida understood as “absolute nothingness” remains “imprisoned,” restricted, and eventually transformed into a contrasting conception (“moral,” “ritual,” “practical,” “pragmatic”): a reciprocal and effective complementary opposition to being. This imprisonment corresponds “metaphysically” to the “spatiality” and eternal “solid organisation” that he considered as characteristic of ancient Chinese society.²¹ Already, we need to insist on the fact that this is much more a metaphysical and topological characterization of the essence of Chinese thought than it is a condemnation of it.

In contrast, and according to a crucial distinction in operation between “spatiality” and “place” (*basho*), Nishida’s “logic of place” (*bashoteki ronri* 場所的論理) searches for the “unity without form” (*katachi naki tōitsu* 形なき統一) of time that retreats from any (solid) spatial form left behind.²² The “void” (*kū* 空) is the “sky” (or the “sea”) in the sense of a depth so infinite that we might say that its blueness becomes blackness.²³ But doing so, we are once more approaching Chinese thought, rather than escaping from it. I think in particular of the following description by Cheng:

Yang Xiong is inclined to substitute for the notion of “mutation” (*yi* 易) the notion of *xuan* 玄, a term borrowed from the first chapter of the *Laozi* and generally translated as “mystery,” while denoting originally azure *so deep that it becomes black*. This notion is then preferentially associated with the sky, to such an extent that *taixuan* 太玄 could be nothing but another name, if not another form, of *taiyi* 太一, the “supreme one” to

whom the Han devoted an imperial cult.²⁴

To distinguish Nishida's position from the Daoist conception, one has to probe topologically deeper into this mysterious depth of an empty sky, somehow identified as a supreme unity, and as a place of nothingness hosting an infinite operation of unification. In other words, *kong* 空 deepens as "the fact of emptying" (*kū suru koto* 空すること). We might also use the image of a "black hole" from where the light of being cannot escape. Nishida described such a retreating, deepening effect as the "operation of emptying oneself."²⁵ In short, the subordination in Nishida does not follow the principle of complementarity as in Chinese thought. Instead, his space of complementarity stands and hangs problematically within the place of nothingness of complementarity that is being and non being.

In this context, we may usefully refer to Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1078), who interestingly refused any subordination that relied on preference or negativity, and thus defended a sort of parallelism. This parallelism can be expressed in the terminology of the *Laozi*: to have at the same time both "*wuji* or *taiji*" and "*wuji* and *taiji*." Zhang tried to reduce the opposition opened by Huilin (慧林, fifth century) between the Daoist *wu* and the Buddhist *xu*, and search for the "unifying principle" of the old controversy about "pure immanentism."²⁶ As A. Cheng explains: "In Wang Bi [the *qi*] is the undifferentiating fund [or ground] (*wu*), void (*xu* 虛), that enables the arising of all things, but at the same time, it is, as in Guo Xiang, all that there is (*you*)."²⁷

Zhang Zai argues:

The *qi*, originally in the void, is pure, one, and without form; under the effect of stimulation, it generates [yin/yang], and condenses (*ju* 聚) itself in visible figures.²⁸ The Dao of the Sky Earth is nothing more than making fullness from the extreme void As time goes by, even gold and the metals end up disintegrated, the highest mountains eroded (*cui* 摧); everything that has a form is destroyed (*huai* 壞). Only the Supreme Void, being immovable, is the highest point of fullness.²⁹

Void is superior to fullness while becoming fullness in the "condensation" process, with no "return" (*contra* Daoists such as Wang Bi) but rather a coming and going movement, which is real and not illusory (*contra* the Buddhists).³⁰ In brief, the supreme void (*taixu* 太虛) is not a finite void, complete in itself: it is an infinite void, so empty that it has to fill itself. Conversely, the supremely plain and true evanescent nature is the supreme void ("erosion" in time). There is only this "non duality" (*yi wu er* 一無二) of the "original nature" (*xing* 性) of *qi*. A human being, as a body, is both blood and bones; as an individual, both spirit and bodily "transformations" (*hua* 化); as a mortal, both death and life.³¹ This dialectic represents a "supreme harmony" (*taibe* 太和) that A. Cheng describes as

a double fundamental process, a kind of vital respiration in two moments: inspiration/expiration, expansion/contraction, dispersion/condensation. According to this binary rhythm, inherent in the complementary bipolarity of the yin (concentration) and the yang (dispersion), the undifferentiated *qi* crystallizes in visible forms and then dissolves itself again, as water solidifies while freezing and then spills while melting.³²

According to Zhang Zai:

Advent and collapse alternate according to a universally necessary cycle. . . Supreme void is pure. Being pure, it is without obstruction. Being without obstruction, it is spiritual. The contrary of the pure is the unclear; the unclear is obstruction and obstruction produces forms.³³

In this cycle, Zhang Zai is trying both to “unify the there-is and the there-is-not” and to unify nothingness itself as the unity that seems to encompass *wu* and *xu*.³⁴ At any rate, here again, the prevailing model, so to speak, becomes the synchronic coming and going cycle; in brief, the essential mutation. I have demonstrated that this is not logically the fundamental sense of the “absolute contradictory self-identity” in Nishida.³⁵ Why then is the self-identity “absolutely self-contradictory”? The answer is not because it is a simple alternation of contraries nor because it is an infinite graduating process, but rather because it represents both aspects, polarized not on the first but on the second. In some sense, this kind of performative contradiction is an attempt to escape the paradoxical place where Chinese thought seems precisely to blossom. How can Nishida pretend, then, that we have here a kind of imprisonment? What, more precisely, is his position regarding Chinese philosophy, given the influences he received from it?

II. Influences of Chinese Philosophy and the Philosophy of Classical Chinese Culture

Let us return to the distinction made above between “to refine” and “to mine”, and remember that the operation of refining was related to “Eastern” and Chinese culture. The “ore of Eastern culture” acquires here the face of a new precious metal. Indeed, ancient China was eager to recover through the “ritual spirit” (*li* 礼), the “very sinew of the universe,” as its intimate “organizing” process according to the image of “natural veins of jade.”³⁶ We can concur with L. Vandermeersch when he writes:

Chinese thought is characterized by the spirit of the lapidary, in which one experiences the resistance of the jade and uses all one’s art only to take advantage of the meaning of the layers of rough matter, in order to isolate from it the pre-existing form within, unconceivable before discovering it.³⁷

This ritual aspect of Chinese culture (*wen* 文) is reflected in its language and writing. Compared to Western philosophy, it refers admittedly to a philosophical style based more on canonicity, “the literature of commentaries” on the Classics, than on “personal expression,” “research of originality” or “clear expression of ideas.”³⁸ Chinese characters do not define an “algebra” for a “universal language” adequate to thinking (as Leibniz thought), but rather a system of signs that can be read and pronounced distinctively by different populations.³⁹ Thus, the genuine signification of rituality is cultural. As M. Granet explains: “The function of human thought is not pure knowledge, but a civilizing action: to secrete a total and active ordering.”⁴⁰ This point seems to have been determinant for the scope of Nishida’s understanding of Chinese culture.⁴¹ Nishida argued that all culture, and not only Chinese culture, possesses this ritual aspect and so “conserves” (*iji suru* 維持する) itself. There are some grounds for defining “culture” as a living link with the past. He argued that the past is somehow joining and merging with the present. In one direction, this can be understood as the possibility of “transforming” the past, as in moral and religious “repentance” for instance. In another, it can be understood in the idea that ancient cultures (such as the Greek and the Indian) can still return to modify the present.⁴² Philosophically speaking, a leading condition for the emergence of historical science

is not only the ontological existence and epistemic testimony of the past, but the topological inherence of the past in the present. For Nishida, something like historical science would be impossible if past, present and even future were isolated from one another: “In history, if a period is conceived as a center, innumerable periods are conceived as simultaneously existing.”⁴³

Nevertheless, Nishida sought a philosophical reason to explain why this ritual aspect was especially present in Chinese culture. So, while celebrating the greatness of Confucianism, he underlined at the same time in his numerous lectures this dominant “ritual social” aspect of Classical thought:⁴⁴

Chinese culture was something extremely special. . . Its source for many thousands of years, the culture of the Zhou dynasty [eleventh century to 256 BC], was one in which human affairs, from ceremonial occasions to the slightest human relationships of daily life (kankon sōsai kara ōtai inshoku made 冠婚葬祭から応対飲食まで), were as a whole imbued with a religion of ritual. . . Probably the cultures of every nation [minzoku 民族] assumed the form of Sitte [ritual customs]. As they developed, some of them deepened and enlarged philosophically [Greek, Christian], others religiously [Indian, Jewish]. However, [the point is that] in China, we can think that Sitte developed itself as Sitte... Xunzi said “The sage kings considered human nature as evil. They regarded it as one-sided [self-interested, partial], greedy, and perverse, and as rebellious and not peaceful. Therefore, they created rituals and established systems of law in order to reform and improve man’s emotions; and thereby to rectify man. . .”⁴⁵ To the very end, the Chinese attached themselves to ritual teachings.⁴⁶

For Nishida, classical Chinese culture was “moral,” “ritual,” and “urban,” grounded in an “immanent worldview” (*toshi naizaiteki sekaikan* 都市内在の世界観) in which a principle deepens and develops in itself, as Hegel had already argued:

The Chinese build an old empire. In all their institutions, their constitution, their culture, we find something very ancient that has developed from a barbaric beginning up to a certain level of culture. However, they do not possess here *the sense of the development of Spirit*, but only a culture that *merely keeps standing within its own principle*, and so their philosophy is something *to be considered as coagulated and solidified*; for that reason, we know of it and cannot but quote abstractions and generalities about it.⁴⁷

In other words, in one direction, this culture assumed ritual form at the level of everyday “practice” (*xing* 行, *wei* 為), and in another direction: “Ritual must be rooted in heaven,”⁴⁸ heaven being the constant moral “model for the sage king.”⁴⁹ Moreover, Nishida seems to contrast “Chinese culture,” “Confucianism” and “rituality” with its reception in Japan:

The influence of Chinese culture on my country’s ancient culture was not Confucian, but rather institutional and literary. It seems to me that Confucianism became rather a social force in the Tokugawa period. I shall not belabor the point that even though Japanese art and literature were influenced by Chinese culture, they finally took a specific Japanese form. Even the [Neo] Confucianism that developed in my country’s later history was not ritualistic, but had rather the character of learning in the China of the Sung. This was linked to *bushidō* 武士道. Moreover, I think that it, too, was a Confucianism of pure feeling.⁵⁰

Nishida also highlights a form of academism and intellectualism in Chinese Huayan 華嚴

and Tiantai 天台 Buddhism, claiming that Saichō 最澄 (767–822), the founder of Japanese Tendai, as well as the great figures of Japanese Amidism, Genshin 源信 (942–1017), Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), and Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) made it more “simple and practical, going from the principle to the facts” (*ri kara ji e* 理から事へ).⁵¹ In Japan, Buddhism took on a strong “emotional” (*jōteki* 情的) aspect, as can be seen in the True Pure Land (Jōdo shinshū 浄土真宗) and Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) sects, where a ritual sect such as Ritsu 律 disappeared and “the Shingon 真言 sect was transformed into something Japanese” by Kūkai 空海 (774–835).⁵² Perhaps we can refer to Chan Buddhism (*chanzong/zenshū* 禅宗) as the “summit of the Buddhist adventure in China” and “the quintessence of the Chinese spirit.”⁵³ Nishida, however, claims that Chan ceased its evolution after the Tang dynasty (618–907),⁵⁴ as if the “ritual” and “spatial” culture of China would have hindered its expansion, while “maintaining itself alive” under other forms in Japan, according to his theory of a conservative unification of “religions.”⁵⁵ Maybe forgetting too hastily the tribute his logic pays to Chinese thought, he conceived of Chinese culture in the direction of the noematic “condensation” (*koka* 固化) of the noetic fluctuation of absolute nothingness, a conception most probably influenced by Hegel.⁵⁶

Chinese as well as Indian cultures had something magnificent at their foundations. However, because they lacked that spirit that searches endlessly [*doko made mo* 何所までも] for the truth, they became solidified and fixed in themselves.⁵⁷ Only my people within Asia, while receiving these influences from Eastern cultures, have digested Western culture, and might be considered to have initiated novel creations in Eastern culture. Might we take this fact as grounded in this Japanese spirit of going right to things as such, without hindrances?⁵⁸

Nishida’s metaphysical and topological description juxtaposes here three things: a Chinese classical culture ritually “developing” (*hatten* 発展) itself in its own place, in contrast to the Hegelian position of pure “stabilization”; a Japanese classical culture “going right to things, without hindrances” (*torawareru koto naku mono sono mono ni yuku* 囚れることなく物そのものに行く); and a contemporary Japanese culture suddenly developing itself through its contact with other cultures of the world.

From an historical point of view, Nishida’s approach to Chinese classical traditions of thinking echoes the pro Asian ideology and the intellectual atmosphere of the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, especially after the Manchurian Incident of 1931, Japan’s Kwantung army was becoming increasingly aggressive in China. Nishida wrote his essay on Eastern culture in 1933 when the relations between the two countries were turning to violence and war.⁵⁹ Yet, as this essay will demonstrate below, Nishida’s position is not to be understood integrally as chauvinistic or nationalistic.⁶⁰ It is more about a philosophical difference relating to space and time, not only in classical Chinese and Japanese cultures, but also in Greek and Roman cultures, rather than about the superiority of certain cultures to others.

We see things through acting. The actual world determines itself expressively. Our social and historical world must have such significance. Various social forms of culture are constituted (*kōsei serareru* 構成せられる) in it. The culture of the intellectual nation of Greece was, as it were, spatial and geometrical. *Eidos* can be thought of as spatial. But even the pragmatic culture of China did not regard highly the significance of seeing things [in the sense of the afore mentioned “intuition in action” or *kōiteki chokkan*]. It too was spatial and exhibited a three dimensional nature. Roman culture was also that

way. Ritual and law suggest a three dimensional organisation of society. However, the culture of the Japanese nation can be said to be temporal. Emotions flow in time. The Greeks wrote epics and tragedies; the Japanese were already writing lyrical poetry as early as the Man'yō period [fifth to eighth centuries]. This is the reason why the tanka verse developed in Japan. The haiku too captures the world from the perspective of a fugitive moment of time.⁶¹

This is all very well, but if Chinese philosophy considers nothingness (*mu*) spatially in the depth of practice (*kōi no soko* 行為の底), Japanese aesthetic sensitivity to time can only “express” *formally* an absolute nothingness (*zettai mu*) identified as a formless, symbolic, and generative unity. Nishida writes:

A culture of feelings [such as Japanese culture] is the form of the formless, the sound of the soundless. It is symbolic. It is, like time, a formless unity. A culture of formless emotion is, like time, generative; like life, it is developmental. It receives various forms, but at the same time advances while developing them according to a certain form. Time is not merely a passing and disappearing flow. If it were so, the unity of time as a unity would never take form. As I have often written, time is the determination of non-determination, the form of the formless (*gentei naki gentei, katachi naki katachi* 限定なき限定、形なき形). In time, the formless determines form. In such a sense, time is the mirror surface of eternity. This is why time takes form (*seiritsu suru* 成立する) as the self-determination of absolute nothingness.” In other words, Japanese sensibility cannot but feel the noematic determination of absolute nothingness. If Indian religion “negates knowledge by knowledge,” and Chinese culture “negates practice by practice,” we can add that Greek aesthetic intuition negated time in a spatial direction, while Japanese aesthetic intuition negates time in the depths of time itself. . . . Greek aesthetics saw the formless within the form (*yūkei no naka ni mukei o mita* 有形の中に無形を見た). Not only the distinctive quality (*tokushoku* 特色) of Japanese aesthetics, but also that of all Eastern aesthetics grounded in the thought of nothingness lies in employing form to express the formless (*katachi ni yotte katachi naki mono o arawasu* 形によつて形なきものを表す).⁶²

In other words, within the opposition of Eastern and Greek cultures, Chinese and Japanese cultures belong to the first as cultures of nothingness; but within Eastern culture, Chinese culture is a thought of nothingness (*mu*), while Japanese culture negatively feels absolute nothingness. Such an expression occurs, indeed, within the discourse of a Japanese philosopher sensible to the notion of absolute nothingness. For sure, this solidification, also defined as a “spatial fixation,” recalls the solid images of the “veins” and the “spirit of the lapidary.”⁶³ However, this topological account is not a radical condemnation of “classical” Chinese culture, but rather an attempt to define its metaphysical characteristic, in the light of a typology. As M. Yusa explains in her intellectual biography of Nishida:

Nishida’s essay, “The forms of ancient cultures, East and West, seen from a metaphysical perspective,” is his attempt to formulate a cultural typology. According to Nishida’s characterization, Western culture is imbued with Christian spirituality and “sustained by being.” In contrast, Oriental—and especially Japanese—culture is sustained by “the determination of nothingness.” This particular way of contrasting “Christian West and Buddhist East” by way of being and nothingness became a locus classicus for those who,

in the name of the Kyoto school of philosophy or otherwise, uphold the “supremacy” of Oriental Nothingness over Western Being. Nishida’s intention, however, was far from that sort of crude taxonomy and dichotomous apologetics. Rather, his was the attempt to formulate a cultural typology from a metaphysical perspective. Nishida had always held that “each culture must maintain its uniqueness in the global society, even though it originally developed itself by interaction with other cultures. Only that way can it contribute to the formation of a truly global culture.”⁶⁴

It must be remembered that in this essay, Nishida begins by saying that he wants to cast light upon “essential differences between these forms,” that is upon how each of them grasped the problem of reality (*jitsuzai no mondai* 実在の問題). He continues:

Cultures must be the self-awakening content of the world of historical actuality, where the individual determination is the universal determination and conversely; originally, *they cannot be simply reduced to unity. To lose one’s originality is to lose culture.* While at the same time, the act of going on developing an original culture from the point of view of an original culture is not only to progress abstractly towards an individual direction. That would be no more than negating culture. *A true world culture forms and goes about forming itself only when different cultures develop themselves as mediations of the world, while maintaining their own respective standpoints.* Firstly, we must deeply consider the very place where each culture takes its ground and stands, and then clarify what standpoint it takes and what relation it entertains with respect to other cultures. How do Eastern and Western cultures differ in their roots? What significance does Japanese culture have in Eastern culture? Its strong points are at once its weak points. We can learn the path along which we should truly advance only as we both deeply fathom our own depths and attain a profound understanding of other cultures.”⁶⁵

Hence, it is clear that such a typology is not a racist or xenophobic classification of cultures. Nishida is even critical here towards the weaknesses of Japanese culture itself. The typology in this text is based on a topology we will explain below: in the “place of determinate being,” we have to “consider the very *place* where each culture [including Japanese culture] takes its ground and stands.” In the “place of oppositional nothingness,” that is of relations, we need to “clarify what standpoint it takes and what *relations* it entertains with respect to other cultures.” Absolute nothingness represents the place where these positions and relations take place, including those of Japanese culture. In other words, Japan should not to be conceived of as the ultimate place of realization of absolute nothingness, as Germany was conceived as the historical locus of the realization of Spirit in Hegel. Absolute nothingness is rather an infinite depth referring to no particular culture, but providing the place for different cultural expressions. Nevertheless, it is true that Nishida’s later discussions about the role of the Imperial Household in Japan would make his position more difficult to interpret and appreciate, and provoke many debates about his commitment during these troubled years. We need to stress his prudence, however, and read again the above passage, in which he is quite careful in his appreciation of contemporary Japanese culture:

Might we not think, that the fact that only my people within Asia, while receiving these influences from Eastern cultures, have digested Western culture and might be considered (*to omowareru* と 思われる) to have initiated novel creations in Eastern culture, is grounded in this Japanese spirit going right to things as such, without hindrances?⁶⁶

The essence of Nishida's notion of place is not a closed unity (*gōitsu* 合一), in which the Chinese character 合 refers to both "unity" and "closing," excluding all differences;⁶⁷ nor is it a pure reciprocal unity, nor yet a unity within a process of *différence* (in Deleuze's sense). Rather it must be understood as a unifying operation of "hospitality," although not in Derrida's meaning of that word.⁶⁸ At this point, let us return to the typology referred to in the above passage. Once more, it is explicitly presented as a topology in an effort to enlighten the "problem of Chinese culture" as distinct from the "problem of Japanese culture." The vocabulary and conceptuality used here belong to the logic of place: "The very place where each culture takes its ground and stands" (*yotte tatsu tokoro* 拠って立つ所), "on what standpoint it stands" (*tachiba ni tachi* 立場に立ち, and "in" (*ni oite* に於て) Eastern culture. The kind of solidification specific to Chinese culture is no more that a genuine mode of the cultural formation (*keisei* 形成) of the historical world itself, along its endlessly creative path. Such a path does not end with the supreme creation of Japanese culture as a summit, a perfect and final unity. In other words, as is shown by the emphasis on time in the next quotation, Japanese culture is not only keeping alive the cultures of the past but also waiting for the culture to come.

Now, if we probe into the topological dimension of absolute nothingness, we need to ask: more generally, is not the vein a part of the jade and this nervure only conceivable *within* something? Is not this idea of rituality an ontological-meontological statement, according to which ordering and organization of *something* here and now invalidates the necessity of any deeper place such as absolute nothingness? To sum it up in a question to be answered in the following section: Does not the notion of suchness still refer to suchness of a pre existing being?

Nishida's fundamental metaphysical argument about the specificity of Chinese philosophy is at the same time a spatial restriction concerning the absoluteness of nothingness.

Time has neither a place from which it comes into being, nor a place toward which it passes away. It arises from and returns into non being. Time must be considered to be the self-determination of absolute nothingness. Thus, [it is here that]⁶⁹ non-being was considered as the beginning of heaven and earth (*mu ga tenchi no hajime to kangaerareru* 無が天地の始めと考えられる). This is not to say that Laozi and Zhuangzi consciously entertained such a meaning. *However, reality, not only in Laozi and Zhuangzi, but in Chinese philosophy (Shina tetsugaku 支那哲学), was considered to exist in the depths of practice.* The fact that they conceived of non being in the very heart of practice must have such significance. This would seem also to be the reason why, while Legalist philosophers emerged in ancient Chinese culture, there was ultimately not a development of the law as in Roman culture.⁷⁰

Here again, Nishida's point is not to conceive of Chinese philosophy as inferior, but to reveal its dialectical nature which it shares with all cultures: fundamentally spatial, it nevertheless unconsciously approaches time. What is more, the practical absolute is not a form of moral obligation incarnated in the act; nor it is it a kind of noumenal being, which is at the same time the very non being (as it is for Kant). The practical absolute is nothingness as an open poiesistic depth of creative action reflected in the infinity of ritual practice.⁷¹

Still, it might rightly be objected to Nishida's theory of condensation that the whole history of Chinese thought itself denounces the idea of "coagulation,"⁷² especially in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 where we are able us to see a condemnation of "attachment" of spirit to things and "reification."⁷³ But in response, Nishida in his topology of nothingness sought to point out the

very coagulation of the operation of liberation from coagulation, as an endlessly “imprisoned” movement of coming and going. Is it then possible to claim that, while the Chinese have “this concern of avoiding the risk inherent in the dualism of coagulating the circulation of the vital breath” (as Cheng argues), then it is the very circulation itself that coagulates into a non-dual form in Chinese thought?⁷⁴ The problem is: Are we “free” when we realize the alternative nature of reality or when we escape from it? Are things such as they are in the “mutations” and changes?

III. Three Points of Discord

1. The Suchness of What?

This question of rituality brings us to the topic of the suchness of things. Nishida pointed to a famous critique of the relativity of language in the *Zhuangzi*.⁷⁵ As A. Cheng explains:

Language cannot tell us something about *the reality of things* because it sets before us not only the names we give to things, but at the same time the things themselves. While laying out both “names” (*ming* 名) and “realities” (*shi* 実), language is nothing but an artificial and arbitrary carving-up of reality, in which a vain claim to represent if not a medium of knowledge then at least a grasp on reality, can be seen in such affirmations as: “this is that” *shi* 是) or “this is not that” (*fei* 非).⁷⁶

In the *Zhuangzi*, then, there is the following argument:

I consider the fact of affirming “this is that,” “this is not that” as a human characteristic. For me, to be devoid of it means not letting oneself become internally affected by likings and dislikings, taking as a rule of life the fact of following the natural course without pretending to bring something to life.⁷⁷

The sage must “forget the discourse” referring to “being” (“there is”) and “not being” (“there is not”). A. Cheng comments: “We still do not know, what [there] really is or is not, from within the there-is or the there-is-not.”⁷⁸

We know “it” only by “listening and letting things reflect such as they are.”⁷⁹ Zhuangzi is said to have stopped crying over the death of his wife because he understood that to know the vacuity of forms was at the same time to know the fact that there was no thing or nothing to cry about.⁸⁰ This is expressed in the *Zhuangzi* as *ci zhong wei de xiao yao you* 此中未得逍遥遊. The end of this expression is known as *shōyōyū* 逍遥遊, or “the act of conforming oneself to things such as they are, without attachment.” In Nishida’s words, such a refusal of a determinate being (*gentei serareta yū* 限定せられた有), corresponding here to the statement “this is that” made from the perspective of a fixed locator, represents an attempt to criticize a human tendency to ontologize words, things and persons. At the same time, such a refusal of an “indeterminate being” (“this is not that”) condemns any reduction of nothingness to a simple non being. Human beings cry for the paradise lost of being or non being, until they realize the fact that this is crying for no thing or nothing; this realization represents a transition from *mono* もの (things) to *koto* こと (facts).

Thus, we might find a point of convergence between Chinese thought and Nishida philosophy in the idea that the alternative between either being or non being, illustrated for example in European medieval scholastic philosophy (realism or nominalism), is not the real fundamental problem.⁸¹ From one side, this alternative can hinder a real “comprehension of

the Chinese debates concerning language in its specificity.”⁸² And from other sides, it hides “the place of absolute nothingness” approached by philosophers of the Middle Ages, East and West, such as Buddhist thinkers (Dōgen, Shinran) and Christian mystics (Boehme, Eckhart, and Nicholas of Cusa).⁸³ But the real difference between the two perspectives surely dwells within the creative aspect. For the *Zhuangzi*, the ideal of practice is conformity with the operation of reality: “Following the natural course without bringing something new to life...” (常因自然, 而不益生也).⁸⁴

Nevertheless, is not the fact itself of putting aside being and non being in order to conform to reality, a kind of return within the frame of being, whether you call it nature, reality, or suchness? This perspective eventually aims at something. Yet if this something takes place beyond words, being and non being, it still refers to the idea of a kind of thing, substance, nature. But does not the notion of being return here? For this something must be at least such as it is, and it must imply a kind of suchness. Such a suchness is not independent from our thoughts and words; rather it has to be recovered. This kind of fundamental reality which is not a foundation is dynamically expressed in Chinese by several words: *wei* 為, *ye* 也, and *wu* 物. In occidental languages, though, we can only express it as: “things such as they are.” Yet, to forget the self, and reflect things such as they are as a faithful (non distorting) “mirror” (*jing* 鏡),⁸⁵ is not identical to the operation of a “mirror reflecting itself” (*jiko jishin o terasu kagami* 自己自身を照らす鏡) to reveal the thing as such.⁸⁶ But might we conceive of a meaning (*yi* 意) apart from things themselves? Can we seriously consider the possibility of leaving any form of existence behind?

For the later Nishida, the ideal of acting is rather a creative operation; it coincides with, and does not simply conform to, the productive operation of reality. Acting stands in the suchness of things as such, in the ungrounded operation of making, and not the ontological suchness of things as they are. The problem faced by Zhuangzi seems to be this: It is not possible to know rationally if being (*wei*, *ye*, *wu*) is real or a dream; we must therefore let things reflect as they are.⁸⁷ Nishida’s point would be rather: What does this “are” itself mean? Where does it take place? Is not being itself the dream we make about a reality that is in fact nothing but a “place of absolute nothingness,” thus a place of becoming, of creation? Might we find here the reason why Nishida considered Chinese culture as concentrated mainly on the ritual imperative of recovering the real nature of things? For Zhuangzi, the destiny of man is to suppress the will, but Nishida always maintained as central the notion of a creative will, expressed in actions activating the ideas of beauty, unity, goodness and purity in art, politics, morality and religion.⁸⁸ And this creative will eventually prevents Nishida philosophy itself from being something definitely created. In other words, it prevents the place of absolute nothingness from filling completely either with being or non being. Furthermore, this distinction between tality (*talitas*) of being (such as it is) and pure suchness (as such) matches to a certain extent the difference between normative and pure suchness.⁸⁹

Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) identifies in the idea of principle *li* 理 an intelligible and descriptive part conceived as the natural principle. This part is expressed in his description about the reality of things, namely their *qi*: “What makes a thing what it is [What makes a thing operate as it operates] (*suo yi ran* 所以然).” For example, this reality is the fact “that a tree is blossoming in spring and drying out in fall,” or that the sovereign is higher than the minister. However, there is also a normative counterpart to the expression *suo yi ran* conceived as an ethical principle. This part is expressed in the following description about the ritual function of

things: “What must be like this (*suo dang ran* 所当然).”⁹⁰ For example, a tree needs to blossom in spring and dry out in fall. This transformation of the tree must be as such; or “the sovereign should be in a high position and the minister in a subordinate position,” this hierarchy must be as such.⁹¹

This being so, we face a hermeneutical problem. Tality of being can be likened to both the natural part (“what makes a thing be what it is”) and the normative part (“what must be like this,” “what it should be”). But if we suppress the reference to being, pure suchness can be expressed at least by the first part, by taking only the second translation given in brackets, i.e. “what makes a thing operate as it operates.”⁹² In this expression, pure suchness is operation (*sōsa* 操作) or operationality at work.⁹³ Pure suchness shows itself when we suppress the verb to be in the other expressions, i.e. the fact “that a tree blossoms at spring and dries out at the fall,” or that the sovereign stands higher than the minister.⁹⁴ We have already stressed the natural expression of this pure suchness in *Laozi*, the “as such” (*ziran* 自然),⁹⁵ and Wang Bi’s logical expression: “the reason why everything stands as such (*suoyiran*)”⁹⁶

Maybe pure suchness can also be expressed in the second part, if we translate 所当然 as “what must stand like this” or “what it should stand for.” With Cheng Yi, we can understand suchness as also normative. The problem is whether suchness implies a reference to some normative reality, whose existence cannot then be completely excluded. Nishida’s expression for as such (*sono mama ni* そのままに) seems to be closer to the first part, precisely because he considers that the ritual, moral and normative (*tōi* 当為) levels have to be transcended into some kind of creation in science, art, technique, and religion.⁹⁷ He highlights such a creative suchness in Buddhism as the “natural spontaneity according to the law,” which consists in letting the productive nature of things reveal by itself (*shi* 自), in its factuality, as tality (*zen* 然).⁹⁸ How then might we grasp the thing really as *such*? And where might we grasp the thing when it is no more such as it *is*, *perceived*, *acted*, or *produced*, but where the as such refers to nothing other than its own productive suchness? The answer is: only where the as such. . . is neither a being nor an essence nor a non being, but an eternal self-creating operation of producing (*tsukuru* 作る), and, thus, void, empty, emptying or suchness-less.

2. Synthesis and Unification

From this point of view, notwithstanding the aforementioned influence of Chinese thought on the doctrine of unification in Nishida, we might also underline a difference between synthesis and unification.⁹⁹ Ancient and modern Chinese thought seems to follow the maxim of Confucius: “I convey without creating anything new (述而不作).”¹⁰⁰

Of course, everyone who knows the remarkable discoveries and techniques of China will understand that this does not mean the absence of a whole history of progress,¹⁰¹ or a kind of sterility, as Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) showed.¹⁰² Rather, “Chinese thought” ritually and medially creates itself by realizing a positive and original re actualization and re interpretation of a traditional cultural fund or stock, although, again, it is historically reductive or insufficient to draw a straight line from Confucius to contemporary thinkers. Even in the case of contemporary thought, we can note that the very word for philosophy (哲学) was adopted in 1900 to mean both Western and ancient Chinese philosophies, especially by Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988) and Chang Chunmai 張君勱 (1887–1965).¹⁰³ This offers a striking contrast to the way the Japanese term *tetsugaku* was at that time reserved for Western philosophy. Such a semantic fusion seems to reflect in history itself the centralizing power

dwelling in the very image of the middle (*zhong* 中).¹⁰⁴

Thus, it might be argued that Chinese thought is synthesizing itself gradually and seamlessly, either in a progressive or a conservative way.¹⁰⁵ In history, we might refer to the holist vision of the world of the Han (202BC–220BC) in *Huainanzi*, Dong Zhongshu, Yang Xiong, recovering the lost unity of sky and man,¹⁰⁶ the “great synthesis of Song of the south” (twelfth century, Zhu Xi 朱熹 [1130–1200] and Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 [1139–1192]), the “compilations” of the thirteenth century and several movements of “return” to the Han, and, indeed, modern thinkers such as Liu Fenglu 劉逢祿 (1776–1829), Fang Dongshu 方東樹 (1772–1851) and Liu Shipai 劉師培 (1884–1919).¹⁰⁷ We might consider also the integration of Indian Buddhism into Chinese philosophy (1–11th centuries), especially in Neo Confucianism from the eleventh century,¹⁰⁸ and the attempt to transpose Western thought in the twentieth century.¹⁰⁹ Still, integration and transposition cannot completely escape from this impressive “labor [of Chinese consciousness] to radically rethink tradition,” this “care to reveal in the multiplicity of things a fundamental unity,” showing another kind of synthetic tendency.¹¹⁰ Eventually, we can distinguish in this trend at least two features. Firstly, it is grounded in practical learning, as J.-F. Billeter states about Zhuangzi: “Gesture is a synthesis.”¹¹¹ In other words, a gesture can be explained as the synthesizing act that gives us the ability to master a traditional art, such as making a plough, and by extension to master the very art of thinking. Secondly, the trend is to be related to the synthesizing implications of one of the core metaphysical concepts of Chinese thought and culture, the middle. As the Korean philosopher Pak Tong-hwan explains:

The second attitude toward the impact of incommensurability is an approach that attempts to juxtapose, compromise and synthesize constituent factors in conflict. This attitude seems to be effective in seeking harmony. East Asians, the Chinese in particular, have valued highly the logic of “reversion” ([*fan*] 反 or return) and the “mean” ([*zhong*] 中 or center). Such Chinese classics as the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), *Daodejing* (Book of the Way), and *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean) alike hold that *dao* (or the Way) is the movement of reversion from the extreme of *yin* (陰 or negative), to the extreme of *yang* (陽 or positive), and it is, therefore, wise to maintain the position of the mean (or the center). According to this logic, the utmost wisdom lies in the timely mean and harmony that avoid taking sides with any of the extremes. Such wisdom may have been conceived from a concept that does not see the extremity or the periphery as a motive of further development.¹¹²

This is not to say that a tendency to return to traditional soil while reinterpreting foreign influences was not present in Japanese culture and philosophy. Ōshima Hitoshi 大島仁 refers to this as “mythical thinking.”¹¹³ Yet with Nishida, we find a preoccupation to conceive of creation at the level of an infinite unification of Western, Chinese and Indian philosophies. Here lies the core of his famous 1940 essay *The Problem of Japanese Culture*. In history, Japanese culture is characterized by a receptive (*juyōteki* 受容的) attitude, expressing the logical nature of the place through poesis. And this unification cannot be confused with the result of a “great” political unification, quested for in Chinese and Japanese cultural histories.¹¹⁴ Unification (*tōitsu* 統一), for Nishida, is indeed a unity (*ichi* 一) placed in the ruling or mastering (*tō* 統) position, but in the sense of an endless postponement of a final unity that can neither be nor not be since it is ever in the making. This creation of unity in Nishida clearly contrasts with the actualizing synthesis pursued by Chinese thought.

3. Intuition in Action

Nishida's logic of creative unification within a vanishing place to reveal pure operative and creative suchness (less) is eventually expressed in the poiesistic paradigm of "intuition in action," that is, action as the place for speculation. We intuit in acting; we see what we have created.¹¹⁵ What precisely is his debt to Chinese thought from this perspective? To begin with, his own philosophical style, quickly becoming abstract or at least very unfamiliar, was influenced to a certain extent by a distance from science that was a mark, not only of Chinese thought but also of Japanese thought.¹¹⁶ Nishida comments:

It is not possible to reduce Western culture to knowledge (*gaku* 学). But Eastern culture, especially Chinese culture, was doctrinal (*kyō* 教) and cannot be called a knowledge in the actual sense of the word. In no way do I despise doctrine [wisdom]. But I think that, whereas we can find precious elements at the ground of Eastern culture that are not inferior and in fact surpass [those of] Western culture, its weak point is not to have developed this knowledge.

I refer to metaphysical standpoint to mean how each culture considered the question of reality. It may be said, of course, that in China, and especially in Japan, the question of reality was not considered scientifically (*gakumonteki ni* 学問的に); it may even be said that metaphysics was not especially developed. But the fact that there was no distinctive science of metaphysics does not necessarily mean that there was no metaphysical thought. Inasmuch as a specific culture has developed, it can be conceived in metaphysical terms. Where there is a culture, there must be a view [conception] of life (*jinseikan* 人生観). At the root of a view of life must be included some kind of metaphysical thought, even though it is not consciously realized.¹¹⁷

Passages such as this show the extent to which Nishida sought to read in the "laboratory" of ancient Chinese culture in order to think philosophically. However, as Japanese culture represents a part of Eastern culture, Nishida philosophy itself can be said to have kept close ties with a certain Chinese way of thinking. So, though Nishida criticized the ritual aspect of Chinese (Confucian) thought, and though he tried numerous ways to get closer to a scientific method, it might be objected that he himself fell into a form of ritual and doctrinal writing.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Nishida's style generally shows a certain lack of interest in definitions, even though he tries to define metaphysics in the above quotation. This constitutes a noteworthy trait of Chinese thought, too, which is open to the fluidity of meaning and the free use of words, by contrast to the logical and rational ideal of Greek philosophy.¹¹⁹ In Chinese thought, however, this kind of floating of semantic interest is grounded in the importance given to pragmatic and normative function. For instance, on a linguistic level, the leading interrogation is not "What is a word?" but rather "How must a word be lived and applied?"¹²⁰ I have shown the extent to which this functional aspect is present in Nishida's writing style, for his vocabulary is not fixed; it is rather in evolution and finally topologically distributed according to the different "places" and positions of reality.¹²¹ In fact, Nishida's relative lack of interest in definitions is directly grounded in the logic of the place, for which definitions can only take place in determinate being.

Now, in relation to the debt of Nishida's practical philosophy to Chinese thought, we might call on Confucius for his famous critique of purely bookish learning. We might

remember as well the critique of knowledge in the *Zhuangzi*. The famous cook Ting saw at first the massive “whole ox in front of him.” After three years of training, he was seeing no more than “some parts of the ox.” Then, reaching his perfect skill, he was just “finding the ox with his spirit, without seeing it with his eyes.” This spirit (神) is “the perfect integrated activity of the actor,” or more precisely, his most incorporated activity, where even spirit disappears as a source of error and defeats, and the body becomes “the totality of capabilities, resources, and strengths, known or unknown to us, carrying our activity.”¹²² Thus, knowledge is not conceived as prospecting what can I know (Kant’s first question), but rather showing how we [rightly] know, and how does knowledge rightly fall (*dang* 当).¹²³ The socio-ethical level of the how is prior to the scientific level of the why. Cheng explains:

Rather than “to know what” (i.e. a propositional knowledge that would aim at truth as its ideal content), knowledge—understood as what, still not being an action, tends to action—is above all “to know how:” how to make distinctions in order to direct one’s life and wittingly arrange the social and cosmic space.¹²⁴

Of course, to know how represents in Confucius an emptying of the epistemological perspective: not to possess knowledge, but to feel oneself as a void, so as to try to go to the bottom of the question.¹²⁵ But this void, as we saw, is effectively practical, not topological.¹²⁶ Hence, Nishida considers that in Plato, philosophy and politics were unifying according to “pure intellectuality and logic,” while in Confucius, this unifying activity was rather coming from a kind of practical intellection.¹²⁷ We might in this sense understand Nishida’s proposition that Chinese culture was (relatively) “poor in pure intellectuality and logic,”¹²⁸ even if it is true that it might also echo a commonplace in the judgment of some Japanese thinkers about China.¹²⁹ Chinese thought for Nishida was noetically active at the level of action (knowledge in action), and not absolutely poor in intellectuality and logic.¹³⁰ Nishida rejects both an excess of logic and an absolute lack of logic, as exhibited in the vain ideological and nationalistic unity of politics and philosophy in times of in war time Japan that he seemed to criticize.¹³¹ He writes:

Since Confucius in the East and Plato in the West, philosophy has not been separated from politics. However, when a philosophy idly subordinates itself to a certain politics, it cannot escape becoming a perverted and flattering science. Politics without ideas is not the true politics. Ideology must include ideas.¹³²

The expression Nishida used to condemn the contaminated official philosophy, namely “a perverted and flattering science” *kyokugaku ase* 曲学阿世, actually comes from a Chinese classic, the *Historical annals* 史記 of Sima Qian (司馬遷). So twice, with Confucius and with Sima, he takes the authority of ancient Chinese thought to criticize the modern contamination of politics and philosophy. Nevertheless, Nishida reverses the hierarchy of the why and the how.¹³³ The level of the how is characterized as an explanatory scientific level that cannot reach the philosophical level of understanding expressed by the why. Obviously, up to a point, the essence of practical knowledge lies in the idea of knowing how. P. Ricoeur puts it this way: “How do you know that you are doing what you are doing? The answer is: ‘You know it by doing it . . . Knowledge of the gesture is in the gesture.’”¹³⁴

However, Ricoeur’s intention is to criticize here the disappearing of the self as ipse-ity (“an agentless semantics of action”) from within an event (in the sense of E. Anscombe): *Whose* gesture is it?¹³⁵ And from Nishida’s position, we might ask: What is this “in” in the expression: “in the gesture”? Is it spatial according to an analogy with spatial space, or according to a

phenomenology of action, or should we conceive another kind of practical spatiality? In order to know how, we need a deeper knowledge of the very what of this place of knowing how itself. In this sense, the place reveals the why. Intuition in action does not mean only intuition while acting, but intuition *within* the very fact of acting. It is topological. It is not concerned by the closure effect of the action, that is how the action will end practically.¹³⁶ It is concerned rather with the infinitely emptying place of actualization of the action, that is why actions can start, spring, jump, and—in other words—act.¹³⁷

Conclusion

To sum up, Nishida's intellectual path can be compared to a kind of self-liberation from the domination of Chinese thought that remains half achieved. This point is quite perceptible at the level of what we might call a shift to Buddhist thought. Nishida prefers to the Chinese ritual conception of nature as a unity of sky and man (*tenjin gōitsu* 天人合一), the idea of unification (*tōitsu*) with facts coming from a topological “negation of man inside man.”

In Buddhist terms, this unification has been expressed in the following propositions: Tenshan (徳山 782–865)'s “within mind without facts; within facts without mind”; Shinran's “natural spontaneity according to the law” (*shizen* 自然), and Dōgen's “relinquishment of body and mind” and self-negation.¹³⁸ Might Nishida have forgotten in 1940 the Chinese conception of *ziran*, present in Zhuangzi, Laozi and Wang Bi that he had stressed in 1933? His later interest in classical Chinese culture seems rather polarized on Chan Buddhism with its historical evolution as Zen in Japan. He quotes Confucius to explain the Buddhist notion of the root of the ordinary (*byōjōtei* 平常底).¹³⁹ Notwithstanding the fact that such a shift is partially related to historical, cultural and ideological means, is it still possible to provide a philosophical explanation for it? My hypothesis is that the sharp distinction between Western ontology and the Eastern theory of nothingness can be deepened through the differentiation of non being and absolute nothingness.¹⁴⁰ It might then be argued here within the frame of the construction of a kind of unification of world philosophies that, firstly, Nishida strove to extract *mainly* the essence of Western philosophy from the position of being (ontology)—even if that does not exclude Neo Platonist and medieval speculations about non being. Second, Nishida's position on Chinese philosophy is above all that of the duality present within the frame of a reciprocal correlation between a kind of being (*you*), and a kind of non being (*wu*) (meontology). But thirdly, these very distinctions and positions are only conceivable by taking, in principle, the endlessly unfolding position of the logic of absolute nothingness (neontology).¹⁴¹

Nishida proposes that Western cultures (Greek, Roman, Semitic, Christian, modern European science) mainly “take being as the foundation of reality,” or “what possesses a form” (that is, *yūkei* 有形, *eidōs*, Law, Absolute transcendent God, Personal God, objective thing) or that which is a determinate thing (*gentei serareta mono* 限定せられたもの). By contrast, Eastern cultures “take non being as the foundation of reality,” or “what is without form” (*mukei* 無形). In China, “the thought of non being” is practical; it is “the negation of practice through practice” (*gyō o motte gyō o hitei* 行を以て行を否定), a moral “negation of morality,” according to a spatial, three dimensional ritual practice. In India, the “thought of non being” is “the deepest” (*mottomo fukai* 最も深い); it is an act of intellectual negation, namely “the negation of knowledge by knowledge” (*chi o motte chi o hitei* 知を以て知を否定), conceived as “deep contemplation within the self and infinite compassion towards the external word” (*uchi ni wa fukaki meisō to nari, soto ni wa mugen no jiji* 内には深き瞑想となり、外には無限の慈

悲), or the endless world of samsāra of non permanence through time.

For Nishida actual reality itself is “both being and non being; being equals non being, and non being equals being” (*yū ni shite mu naru mono de aru* 有にして無なるものである、*yū soku mu, mu soku yū* 有即無、無即有). In other words, actual reality represents a “unity” in the making, in which all aspects (subjective and objective, noematic and noetic) absolutely unite each other in a dialectical self-determining actual reality. Nishida from this metaphysical standpoint insists that “various cultural forms crystallize,” based on a “transcendent, non-actual world” in Christian affirmation or Buddhism negation, or in the “immanent, actual world” in Greek intellectual aesthetics, or in Chinese moral practice or in the emotional grasp of the passage of time, as in Japanese *mono no aware*, tanka and haiku.¹⁴²

In his logic of place, Nishida does not proceed from determinate being (things) to oppositional nothingness (actions), and then to absolute nothingness (operation) through negation, as in the Hegelian logical process. He reverses the order: while standing in absolute nothingness, “we see things through action;” we do not follow a “process of time” but plunge into the empty “depth of time” (*jikan no soko* 時間の底). Nishida conceives of neither Japanese nor Buddhist culture as absolute. All culture for him possesses the dialectic nature of reality under certain aspects: “historical reality is both spatial and temporal; both objective and subjective; both being and nothingness. Needless to say, every culture emerging in history as a concrete reality includes these different aspects. The more concrete it is, the more this is so.”¹⁴³ In Nietzsche’s terms, Greek culture is mainly Apollonian and centered on being, space, even as it contains some Dionysian elements, such as non being, time, pessimism. Christian culture is mainly ontological with God as an absolute person, “the most determinate” person with “free will” (in the words of Thomas Aquinas), but not entirely lacking a “thought of nothingness” with God as “Deus absconditus,” and negative theology such as in Dionysius the Aeropagite. Indian culture is pantheism (*banyū shinkyō* 万有神教) and a “negation of all beings” (*banyū o mo hitei* 万有をも否定). Modern scientific culture is mainly ontological, but hides some meontological aspects such as the negation of actuality as idea, person, and subjectivity.¹⁴⁴ We can interpret Nishida’s ontological characterizations represented by “is” in the above quotations as reflecting the very crystallization of cultural forms from within the noematic depth of absolute nothingness, so giving the world its pluricultural colors.

Further arguments of Nishida’s seem to confirm this topological description. For example, the “occidental idea of nature” is an abstract concept affirmed by the subject conceiving nature as an existing material, in particular in science. “Nature in Chinese culture, the union of sky and man” comes to represent rather a “humanized nature” seen from the “central” position of man, a wisdom of nature grounded in the reciprocation of being and non being.¹⁴⁵ And the “natural spontaneity according to the law” refers in Shinran to the topological negation of men as the very place of a nature recovering its natural spontaneity, and of the absolute force of the other (*tariki* 他力) in Amida’s vow.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, Western thought searches for reality in the direction of the noema, namely the ontologized object of knowledge: *eidōs* in Greek philosophy or the physical world in modern European science. The place of determined being is the location for objectivity. By contrast, Eastern practice searches for reality in the direction of the *noesis*, namely the act of knowledge: intellectual introspection and compassion in Indian religion, ritual in Chinese practice. The place of oppositional nothingness is the field of action. And Nishida philosophy represents an attempt to search for reality in the dialectical unity of the two directions, neither condemning

nor rejecting either of them. Absolute nothingness is the place wherein we see objects (*noema*) through action (*noesis*).¹⁴⁷ Of course, Nishida's quite schematic explanation requires more proofs and exposition.¹⁴⁸ However, it does not accord to Chinese philosophy an inferior position, as was the case throughout Japanese intellectual history, for example in Confucianist thinkers such as Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622–1685), or *kokugaku* 国学 masters such as Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801) or Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843).¹⁴⁹ It accords to Chinese philosophy rather the position of a definitely special character (*tokushoku*) within the frame of a metaphysical system aiming at a topologization of world philosophies.¹⁵⁰ Nishida, who wrote his metaphysical analysis of ancient Chinese culture four years before the Nanking massacre of 1937, was indeed against this war. He responded that it would be desirable for Prime Minister Konoé at least to “demonstrate his determination, and tell the world that the government will not take an aggressive, narrow-minded course.”¹⁵¹

Now, in what sense should we take this metaphysical specificity of Chinese thought? We are allowed to interpret this genuine position as an intermediary and at the same time a supreme position.¹⁵² In Nishida's terms, this simultaneity refers to the word *soku* 即.¹⁵³ Here, there is a striking characterization by Wang Fuzhi who speaks of a “dynamic tension between opposite forces . . . powerful creative tensions that some call the *Dao*,” giving us the “wisdom” constantly to “find perfect equilibrium in all situations.” So this position is in no way unproductive or uncreative.¹⁵⁴ In this perspective, we might recall the words of Pak Tong-hwan quoted above, and refer to what Nishida himself eventually called “Chinese philosophy” (*chūgoku tetsugaku* 中国哲学) as the philosophy par excellence of the middle (*chū* 中).¹⁵⁵ For he saw it as a genuine and unique meditation on mutation and cyclical interchange between “complementary opposites” (“yin/yang, sky/earth, void/full, father/son”¹⁵⁶), “the notional couples of traditional thought” irreducible to “being or the reality of the absolute.”¹⁵⁷ A. Cheng emphasizes this point:

Perceived as two aspects of a unique and same reality [plunged] into a permanent coming-and-going movement, [the virtual and the manifest] are not generators of “disjunctive concepts” such as being/nothingness, spirit/body, God/world, subject/object, reality/appearance, good/evil, etc. The Chinese, having this concern of avoiding the risk inherent in dualism of coagulating the circulation of the vital breath into a face-to-face dead end, preferred to put forward the polarity of the Yin and the Yang that preserves the alternative current of life and the correlative character of all organic reality: coexistence, coherency, correlation and complementarity. . . . Aspiration for a return to a lost unity can be found in other cultures, but what is specific to Chinese thought is the continuity provided by the constant coming and going between there-is-not and there-is, invisible and visible.¹⁵⁸

If we try to interpret this description in terms of Nishida's topologization, we need to remember that the place of oppositional nothingness shows itself in at least two complementary layers, reciprocal interaction and infinite transition.¹⁵⁹ Such a complementarity is expressed under a myriad forms in German philosophy (Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Cohen, Lotze, Husserl), within the context of Western philosophy which seems always to consider being as the alpha and omega of reality. But in the range of a world philosophy, these layers might correspond to the effective “interaction and reciprocal becoming” of the complementary opposites of Chinese thought.¹⁶⁰ In the *Yijing* 易经, the essence of the mutations is not a quasi magical gradual transformation (化) without shock, but a change (变) as “the principle of interchange of Yin-Yang or conversion of one into the other,”¹⁶¹ expressed in the endlessly moving and changing

nature of water.¹⁶²

Moreover, we have to consider here an empty place of mediation, the “middle” (中), the “void” (*xu*), as the source of the tension between mutations that generates the “organic relation, living and creative, that constitutes” these opposites, and attracts man towards the Good.¹⁶³

We are far from the cautious care to keep a “right middle” between two extremes or from a chilly compromise that would satisfy itself with a “middle term”. . . The middle is not an equidistant point between two terms, but rather this pole whose attraction draws us higher, creating and maintaining in all life situations a tension that makes us aspire always more to the best part of what is born between us.¹⁶⁴

In other words, this middle is man as the medium, which is expressed by the first and second component of the character 仁 in Chinese, becoming two separate characters in Japanese: *ningen* 人間.¹⁶⁵ Since Confucius, these terms have expressed the idea of a priority of the duality (二) over the unity, of in betweenness (間) over individuals in human relations in families, communities, societies, states, and universe, which is a pivotal conception for contemporary Japanese philosophy.¹⁶⁶ The characters themselves are not fundamental notions to combine, but a network of significations born from stylized gestures according to a ritual value.¹⁶⁷ This is better understood as a sentimental, political, and social space of distinctions (別),¹⁶⁸ distribution (分), as in the *Xunzi* 荀子,¹⁶⁹ rather than as a space of assimilation (兼), standardization or levelling according to rational and equitable judgments, such as in the arguments of Mozi. Nishida quotes Xunzi precisely to define the nature of Chinese thought directed at moral improvement through rituals.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, as he himself remarked, in Confucianism this space refers to the kind of ritual negativity of individuality present in benevolence.¹⁷¹ To this we can add gentleness¹⁷² and sacrifice¹⁷³ as well as compassion: I am human because I cannot but help the other in pain or in danger; there is no reason for this moral conduct.¹⁷⁴

From Nishida’s position, such an opened, rich, and deep inter subjective space can be likened to the “place of an oppositional nothingness,” even if the reason for such an aperture needs to be probed. Apart from the primary importance of the void (oblivion, change, forgiveness) for a subjectivity defined as “the coming and going between void and things” (*Zhuangzi*),¹⁷⁵ we might suggest that Nishida, stressed also the *plane* of this coming and going movement as residing in a *place* of a deeper nothingness, a kind of void before the void.¹⁷⁶ In other words, if according to Nishida, “to be is to stand within,”¹⁷⁷ that is, if being is in absolute nothingness, then inter relations between beings must also stand in this unfathomable place.

To put it in a nutshell, Western philosophy scientifically explores the wonders, soundness, and hegemonies of a real and objective being, within which void still does not really exist.¹⁷⁸ Chinese philosophy describes the functional¹⁷⁹ interactions between the “thousand beings,” and the “void” as the place of “mutations,”¹⁸⁰ concentrating on ritual and organic circulations of all kind. And Nishida probes the depths of reality as an operation of self-evacuation, giving “Japanese philosophy” the mark of a special concern for the unification of cultures. But no philosophy is superior to the other. It is rather a question of domain, behaviour, competence, specialization, depth—in a word, a question of place.

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NOTES

1 This study is the second part of a critical survey of the relations between Nishida Kitarō and Chinese philosophy. The philosophical conceptual framework of the present essay is based on the definitions, warnings and explanations given in the first part, "Nishida Kitarō and Chinese Philosophy" in Cheung and Lam, ed. *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 4*. The reader is strongly advised to consult that essay first. I wish to make three preliminary points with regard to Part 2. Firstly, I rely mainly on the *History of Chinese Thought* by Anne Cheng for references, in particular those concerning Laozi and Zhuangzi. Secondly, my aim is by no means to justify the fact of Kyoto School philosophers commitment with nationalism. Thirdly, I do not contest the evidence that the main intellectual influences on Nishida's thought are Western philosophy (see Dalissier, 2009a) and Japanese Buddhism. What follows is an attempt to provide additional material for the ongoing debates on Nishida.

2 Nishida 1937, in *NKZ 2002–2009*, vol. 7, p. 339.

3 Nishida 1937, in *NKZ 2002–2009*, vol. 7, p. 339. Nishida 1935, in *NKZ 2002–2009*, vol. 11, p. 283.

4 Cheung 2009, pp. 156–75.

- 5 See Dalissier 2009b, pp. 224 ff., 237, for an explanation of the use of these terms, borrowed from Occidental philosophy.
- 6 Vandermeersch 1977, 1980, vol. 2, pp. 512–513, quoted in Cheng 1997, pp. 103–104. The following English translations of quotations from this work are my own.
- 7 Cheng 1997, p. 194. Emphasis added.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 194–95. *Laozi*, § 10, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 201.
- 9 Ibid., p. 305.
- 10 Ibid., p. 311. Emphasis added. See also pp. 41, 274.
- 11 *Laozi* 28 and 40, Cheng 1997, pp. 442–43.
- 12 *Laozi*, § 11, quoted in Cheng 1997, pp. 194–95.
- 13 Ibid., p. 195.
- 14 This term refers to a unifying, creative, corporeal operation. See Dalissier, 2009a, p. 102. On “intuition in action,” see Dalissier 2008b, pp. 21–51.
- 15 Cheng 1997, p. 255.
- 16 Ibid., p. 195.
- 17 「皆知美之為美 斯惡已 皆知善之為善 斯不善已 故有無相生」 *Laozi*, § 2, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 195. See also the translation by Izutsu: “All under heaven recognize beauty as beauty, and then arises ugliness. All under heaven recognize good as good, and there arises evil. In fact, being and non being give birth to each other.” (Izutsu, 2001, p. 30)
- 18 *Mu ni torawarete iru, mu no katachi ni toraerarete iru mono de aru. Sono genzai wa ugoku genzai de wa nai. Tada mugen no genzai de aru. 無に囚はられて居る、無の形に囚へられて居るものである。その現在は動く現在ではない、唯無限の現在である*」 in Nishida 1933, p. 450. Translated by David A. Dilworth as “The Forms of Culture of the Classical Period of East and West Seen from a Metaphysical Perspective,” (Nishida 1970), p. 252. I will frequently modify the English translations.
- 19 See Dalissier 2009a, pp. 292, 399–403, 423 ff. The same point is expressed, in a slightly different way, in Nishida’s idea that Chinese culture “lacked that spirit that searches endlessly for the truth” and “became solidified and fixed” (NKZ 1987, vol. 12, p. 280) itself. Nishida does not suggest that it stopped developing, but rather that it ritually searched for the truth, renewing itself within the scope of its own tradition.
- 20 For precise references, see Dalissier, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009c. In Nishida 1970, p. 245 (1933, p. 440), Nishida refers to “Russian culture” as a “culture of nothingness,” arguing as follows: “A culture of negation of the logos; in its inner depths there is a dark intensity (*kurai shinkoku* 暗い深刻), such as seen in the novels of Dostoevsky. In such a sense, it has qualities which are even more opposed to Greek culture than other cultures. Even in present day Russian Marxism, there is such a special quality (*tokushoku* 特色) despite its profession of scientism.” This is an intuition that one of his disciples, Nishitani Keiji, would develop in his work, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*. See Nishitani 1990.
- 21 *Rittaiteki soshiki* 立体的組織, Nishida 1970, pp. 237–48. (Nishida 1933, pp. 440–44).
- 22 See my treatment of Nishida and space in Dalissier 2008a. Nishida’s theory of unity without form is based on the distinction between the two abyssal dimensions of “retreat” (no form) and “dissemination” (formation). The “spatiality” is symbolically expressed as a “plane” (*heimen* 平面), NKZ 1987, vol. 7, p. 445. On the metaphysical geometry of “planes” and “solids” in Nishida, see Dalissier 2009a, pp. 262, 282–88, and Appendix pp. 134–169 (Appendix to Dalissier 2009a can be found on-line at: <http://www.droz.org/siteDroz/rubrique.php?ID=1002339>).
- 23 Dalissier 2009a, pp. 180–181. Nishitani Keiji was to place particular emphasis on the idea of vacuity as a “blue sky.” See, for instance, Van Bragt 1982, pp. 1–45.
- 24 Cheng 1997, p. 311. Emphasis added.
- 25 *Kū suru koto* 空うすること, Dalissier 2009, p. 526 ff.
- 26 Cheng 1997, pp. 377, 451.
- 27 Cheng 1997, p. 451.
- 28 「氣本之虚則湛 [一] 無形, 感而生則聚而有象」 Zhang Zai, *Zhengmeng*, 1, *Zhangzai ji*,

10, Cheng 1997, p. 451.

29 「天地之道無非以至虛為實. . . 金鉄有時而腐, 山岳有時而摧, 凡有形之物即易壞, 惟太虛無動搖, 故為至實」 Zhang Zai, *Zhangzi yulu, Zhangzai ji*, 325, Cheng 1997, p. 451.

30 *Zhengmeng*, 1, in *Zhangzai ji*, 7–8, Cheng 1997, pp. 453–54.

31 *Zhengmeng*, 2, 6, in *Zhangzai ji*, 10, 22, Cheng 1997, pp. 453–54.

32 Cheng 1997, pp. 451–52.

33 「循是出入, 是皆不能已而然也. . . 太虛為清, 清則無礙, 無礙故神; 反清為濁, 濁則礙, 礙則形」 *Zhengmeng*, 1, in *Zhangzai ji*, 7–9, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 452.

34 *Nengyiyowu* 能一有無 (*Yishuo* 易說), *Zhangzai ji*, p. 207, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 453.

35 *Zettaimujunteki jiko dôitsu* 絶対矛盾的自己同一, Dalissier 2005, p. 1372.

36 The expression refers to the original sense of the “natural order” (*li* 理). Cheng 1997, pp. 57, 595. This central image of Chinese thought returns in thinkers such as Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130–1200) and Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1193), Cheng 1997, pp. 479, 511. See the analysis by Nishi Amane 西周 (1829–1897), in Saito 2006, p. 6.

37 Vandermeersch 1977, 1980, vol. 2, p. 285, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 57.

38 Cheng 1997, pp. 57, 88. Granet 1934, pp. 15, 36. See, however, the notes of Heiner Roetz concerning this delicate question in Cheng 2005, pp. 53–57.

39 Granet 1934, pp. 45–46.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

41 Nishida 1970, pp. 240–44 (1933, pp. 434–38).

42 Dalissier 2009a, Appendix, pp. 117, 126, 370, 380.

43 Nishida 1939b, p. 320. Such a philosophy of history contrasts with Lévinas’s ontological apprehension of historical science in relation to the problem of the other. See for instance Lévinas 1971, pp. 48, 198, 252–253, 276, 283, 329.

44 On the greatness of Confucianism, see NKZ 1987, vol. 12, pp. 344–45. *Nihon bunka no mondai* 日本文化の問題 (The problem of Japanese Culture, 1940). On the “ritual-social” aspect, especially in the Six Classics (*jing* 經), the *Book of rites* (*Liji* 禮記), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), the *Book of History* (*Shujing* 書經), the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經), see Nishida 1970, pp. 240–43 (434–37). Nishida owned numerous editions of these works, see Yamashita 1982, no. 78, 218–219, 221–228 (p. 188), 196, 443 (p. 310), 751, 756, 760, 767 (p. 323), 953 (p. 334). He made reference to the Spring and Autumn Annals, the Changes and the Four Books, until at least 1944, one year before his death. An old edition of the Spring and Autumn Annals in his possession is annotated in detail; see Yamashita 1982, no. 225 (p. 196). He also quotes the Commentary of Zuo (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳), the *Analects* (*Lun yu* 論語), the *Mean* (*Zhong yong* 中庸), *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Laozi* 老子 and *Xunzi* 荀子; Nishida 1970, pp. 240–51 (1933, 434–49).

45 「古者聖王以, 人之性惡以為偏險而不正, 悖乱而不治, 是以為之起禮義制法度, 以矯飾人之情性而正之, 以擾化人之情性」 *Xunzi*, chapter 23, in Nishida’s own edition, *Xunzi* 1912, vol. 23, p. 288. This book is referenced under no. 78 in Yamashita 1982, p. 188. It is difficult not to notice the underlining in red ink of some significant words in the first chapter of the *Xunziji-anyi* 荀子箋詁 (Commentary on Xunzi) (Yamashita 1982, no. 236, p.197), a book that cannot have belonged to any ancestor of Nishida, given the edition date of 1885. We have thus a right to believe this copy and the annotations were Nishida’s. The underlined words are “吾嘗跂而望矣. 不如登高之博見也,” vol. I, p.1: “I once stood on my tiptoes to look out into the distance, but it was not so effective as climbing up to a high place for a broader vista.” (Knoblock 1988, vol. 1, p. 136). Emphasis added. These very words, and the rest of this passage (“Climbing to a height and waving your arm does not cause the arms’ length to increase, but your wave can be seen farther away. Shouting downwind does not increase the tenseness of the sound, but it is heard more distinctly”) might indeed be used to express the essence of the “logic of place” in Nishida: not to stand in “action” from within a determined “point of view” (*tachiba*) but to reach a higher “unfolding” place, thanks to the coordinated work of the perceptiveness of “intuition” and the climbing power of “reflection.” See Dalissier 2009a, pp. 149, 423 ff. Some other sentences are also underlined in red, and these I render here into italics: “There

must be *some beginning for every type of phenomenon that occurs*. The coming of honor or disgrace must be a *reflection on one's inner power*. From rotting meat come maggots; decaying wood produce wood-worms. . . If you *accumulate* enough earth to build up a high hill, rain and wind will flourish because of it. If you accumulate enough water to *fill a chasm*, dragons and scaly dragons will *be born within it*. If you accumulate enough good to make whole your *inner power*, a divine clarity of intelligence will be naturally acquired and a sage-like mind will be fully realized. Accordingly, if you accumulate paces and double paces, you will lack the means to reach a thousand *li*; and if you do not accumulate small streams, you will have no way to fill a river or sea" (vol. 2, pp. 137–38) All these words can be said to coincide with Nishida's topological account of "filling," "emptying," and "condensation." See my treatment in Dalissier 2009a, p. 464 ff.

46 Nishida 1970, pp. 240–44 (434–38). Nishida 1940, pp. 279, 339. Emphasis added. But at the same time, we need to remember the very rituality of Japanese culture itself.

47 Nishida 1970, p. 247 (442). Hegel 1940, p. 270. Emphasis added.

48 「礼必本就天」 *Li Yun* (礼運) section of the *Book of the Rites*, quoted by Nishida in Nishida 1970, p. 241 (435). See Nishida's own copy (Heian Shoko, 1891), Yamashita 1982, 219/196.

49 *Ten wa seiō no hakaru tokoro de atta* 天は聖王の則る所であった, Nishida 1970, p. 241 (435).

50 Nishida 1970, p. 253 (451–52).

51 Nishida 1940, pp. 346–47, 360.

52 On the ritual dimension of the Ritsu sect, see Hase 2005, pp. 7–18 and Hérail 1986, pp. 93–94. For the transformation of the Shingon sect, see Nishida 1970, p. 253 (451). Emphasis added.

53 Cheng 1997, pp. 409, 413.

54 Nishida 1940, pp. 356–57. Historically, Chan maintained itself through the Five Schools of the Five Dynasties (907–960) and the three schools of the Song dynasty (969–1279): *caodong/Sōtō* 曹洞, *linji/Rinzai* 臨濟, *yunmen /Unmon* 雲門. See Nakimovitch 1999, pp. 70–71 and Nishida 1970, p. 243 (437).

55 Nishida 1940, pp. 307, 360, 365–366. "Zen, which taught that 'the willows are green and the flowers are red,' fused with the spirit of the warrior in Japan during the Kamakura period, and thus it, too, was a great influence on Japanese culture. We may even say that Zen has deeply permeated Japanese life," Nishida 1970, p. 253 (451).

56 The concepts of noema and noesis in Nishida differ radically from their expressions in Husserlian phenomenology. Roughly speaking, noesis represents the endless self emptying and retreating operation of nothingness as an ungrounded medium. Noema stands for the crystallized, formalized, ontologized negative trace testifying to such a retreat of nothingness. The noema is manifestation of being, of something to see, think, act, or remember from within this place of absolute nothingness. See Dalissier 2009, pp. 203, 411–418.

57 *Doko made mo* is an expression Nishida endlessly repeats. Its meaning is essential to a realization of the effort he took to understand things as such, from the infinite perspective of a never grounded creative nothingness. See Dalissier 2009a, p. 461.

58 *NKZ* 1987, vol. 12, p. 280. In 1942, he added: "I think that a real effective spirit works at the root of Japanese culture. It must develop itself towards a scientific spirit really knowing no hindrance;" "artistic creation as an act of historical production." *NKZ* 1987, vol. 10, p. 264.

59 See Gordon 2003, pp. 188–192 and the Conclusion below.

60 Nishida 1970, p. 254 (452–53). See Dalissier 2009a, p. 22 ff.

61 Nishida 1970, p. 248 (444).

62 Nishida 1970, pp. 249–50 (445–47). Emphasis added.

63 "The object of feeling cannot be intellectually determined. It cannot be frozen spatially (*kūkanteki ni kotei serareta mono de wa nai* 空間的に固定せられたものではない); for it is infinite movement." Nishida 1970, p. 252 (450).

64 Yusa 2002, p. 260. Yusa quotes Nishida 1970, p. 254 (448–49).

65 Nishida 1970, p. 254 (452–53). Emphasis added.

66 *No de wa nakarō ka* のではなかろうか (translated here as "might we not think...?") is an

expression that Nishida very seldom uses. On Nishida's style, see Dalissier 2009a, pp. 18, 143, 328, 363–71, 413.

67 Dalissier 2009a, pp. 41, 127, 405, 510–14, 554.

68 Ibid., p. 402.

69 *Soko ni* そこに. This is an example of the method of topologic argumentation noted previously.

70 Nishida 1970, p. 250 (447). Emphasis added. The importance of the notion of practice is stressed in particular in Confucius, *Analects*, VII, 24, XII, 3, XIV, 38 and XV, 25.

71 See Yamagata 2007, p. 13.

72 Or “compaction,” “condensation.” Cheng 1997, pp. 39–40, 206, 298, 502, 577, 581.

73 See J.-F. Billeter and his analysis of the formula: “Treat things as things without letting yourself be treated as things by things” (物物而不物就物), Billeter 2004, pp. 108–109.

74 Cheng 1997, pp. 39–40.

75 He mentioned Laozi and Zhuangzi, and quoted Laozi, Nishida 1970, p. 242 (435).

76 Cheng 1997, p. 121. Emphasis added.

77 是非吾所謂情也。吾所謂無情，言人之不以好惡內傷其身，常因自然，而不益生也 *Zhuangzi* 5, *Shinshaku kanbun taikai* 1979, VII, 243, quoted in Cheng 1997, p.134. For Nishida, “nature” in Chinese culture was “the order by which the sun, moon, and stars move [around man and the Earth] 日月星辰に由って運行,” Nishida 1970, p. 243 (437).

78 Cheng 1997, p. 124.

79 Ibid., p.138. Emphasis added. See pp. 130–131.

80 *Zhuangzi*, 18, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 138.

81 Cheng 1997, p. 149.

82 Ibid., p. 149.

83 Dalissier, 2006, pp. 112–42.

84 *Zhuangzi*, 5, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 134.

85 *Zhuangzi*, 2, 7, 33, *Shinshaku kanbun taikai* 1979, VII, 185–186, 290, quoted in Cheng 1997, pp. 130–31. See also pp. 354, 386, 440.

86 Dalissier 2006, pp. 115–24, 137–39.

87 *Zhuangzi*, 2, quoted in Cheng 1997, pp.131–32.

88 Cheng 1997, p. 138. Dalissier 2009a, pp. 145, 394–95, 472.

89 See Dalissier 2009a, p. 395, Appendix, p. 318.

90 Ibid., p. 477.

91 Ibid., pp. 476–77, 484, 582. Emphasis added.

92 See Dalissier 2007b, pp. 19–42, in particular pp. 20, 25–26, 29, and Dalissier 2009a, pp. 395–396.

93 See Nishida's essay on topological operationalism, Nishida 1939a.

94 See Dalissier, 2007b, pp. 19–20.

95 *Laozi*, 25, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 336.

96 Wang Bi, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 336.

97 Dalissier 2009a, pp. 266, 371, 518.

98 Nishida 1940, pp. 370–71. Nakagawa underlines this aspect in Nishida and in Japanese culture, Nakagawa 2005, pp. 29–36.

99 I have shown the sense in which Nishida's notion of unification diverges from the Kantian synthesis in Dalissier 2009a, p. 190.

100 *Analects*, VII, 1, Legge: “A transmitter and not a maker.” See also *Analects*, II, 11, VII, 20.

101 Enlightenment thinkers saw this ahistoricity as the very state of “natural reason, unadulterated by time and without revealed religion.” See Roetz in Cheng 2005, pp. 49–50.

102 Cheng 1997, p. 581.

103 Blocker and Starling 2001, pp. 3–5.

104 *Analects*, VII, 1, Cheng 1997, pp. 31–35, 76, 84, 581. Anne Cheng thus asks: “Is it not at all times a Chinese priority to start by itself, to find truth in itself?” Cheng 1997, p. 411. One might refer

here to the “spontaneity” (自) present in the meaning of 自然. Yet this priority is not to be conceived of at the level of the individual, but rather at the level of the interrelations between individuals and the world.

105 Lee 2004, p. 18.

106 Cheng 1997, p. 300.

107 Ibid., pp. 293–294, 495–499, 588–591, 610–611, 618, 632.

108 Ibid., p. 393 ff, pp. 431, 433.

109 This tendency can be said to be more or less present in Mou Zhongsan, Hu Shi, Feng Youlan, Xiong Shili, Liang Shuming, Ma Yifu, Ge Zhaoguang, Fu Sinian, Liu Shipei, Chen Fuchen, Xie Wuliang, Wang Guowei, He Lin, and then Marxism. See Cheng 1997, pp. 641–645, and Cheng 2005, pp. 8–9, Defoort 2005, pp. 69–71, Thoraval 2005, pp. 94–95 and especially Zheng 2005, pp. 124–132, 137.

110 Cheng 1997, pp. 431, 433

111 Billeter 2004, pp. 23–24.

112 See Pak 2004, pp. 31–32.

113 Blocker and Starling 2001, pp. 28, 34, 71–75. See Oshima 1989.

114 Nishida 1940, p. 359. An example is the “great unification” (*dayitong* 大一統), a unity (一) which represents a political unifying power (統) celebrated by an imperial cult during the Han. This speaks of the “unity of sky and men that closed itself before Chinese thought, too hurried to underlie political unification with ideological harmonization, was able to engage in a real scientific approach. Cheng 1997, pp. 301–303, 311, 499. As Ueda Shizuteru explains, Nishida seems to have condemned the idea of hegemonic unity in war, colonization, or imperialism. See Dalissier 2009a, p. 22 ff. On this topic, see also Arisaka 1996, Goto-Jones 2005 and 2008, Heisig and Maraldo 1994, Matsumaru 2003, Williams 2004 and Yusa 2002. For less sympathetic readings of Nishida’s position during the Second World War, see Hiromatsu 1989, Harootunian 2000 and Lavelle 1996.

115 See Yamagata 2007, pp. 1–22.

116 Granet 1934, pp. 23–24.

117 Nishida 1940, p. 387. Nishida 1970, p. 237 (429).

118 Nishida 1940, pp. 279, 339. See Dalissier 2005, p. 587, as well as Dalissier 2009a, pp. 19, 106, 223 ff.

119 See for example in *Zhuangzi*, Billeter 2004, p. 38.

120 “To know the name. Saying the name is possessing being or creating something. All beasts are tamed by the one who knows how to name them,” Granet 1934, p. 41. Cheng 1997, p. 145, 477. Granet 1934, p. 84.

121 Dalissier 2009a, p. 353 ff.

122 Billeter 2004, pp. 17–18, 50. This account of the *Zhuangzi* comes closer to the logic of place: the first steps might correspond to the visual place of determinate being in its mass and inertia; the second, to the breach opened in being as a place of nothingness opposing parts in more and more skillful action; the third, to the place of absolute nothingness as the site of pure creative operation bodily expressing spirit. But J.-F. Billeter shows that we need to describe a fourth level, in which conscious activity “takes a certain distance from the activity of the body, taking the attitude of an ironical spectator. . . toward what happens inside ourselves,” and acts as a “limited control, as simple supervision” of incorporated and necessary gestures. Here we encounter the mastering level of experience of 游, Billeter 2004, pp. 67–69, 95. Now, might we argue further that such an inner operation is similar to Nishida’s practical and poiesistic application of the logic of place as intuition in action, in which to produce is to see the product?

123 “Whereas the intellect can never know with certitude, the hand knows what it is doing with an infallible reliability; it knows how to do what language cannot say,” Cheng 1997, p. 127.

124 Cheng 1997, p. 37. See also pp. 58, 66, 122–123, 127 and Roetz in Cheng 2005, p. 54.

125 Cheng 1997, p. 66.

126 Nishida 1970, p. 250 (447).

- 127 Nishida 1940, pp. 33, 218, 268, 289.
- 128 Nishida 1940, pp. 356–57, 338–40, 363.
- 129 Blocker and Starling 2001, pp. 74, 91, 95, 106.
- 130 This aspect can be seen in the afore mentioned quotation: “The teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi deny the actual world in the direction of the noesis [act of knowledge],” Nishida 1970, pp. 244, 438.
- 131 Nishida 1939b, pp. 258, 277–78, 284. Nishida 1939a, p. 326 ff.
- 132 Nishida 1940, p. 289. See Dalissier 2009a, p. 24 ff.
- 133 Dalissier 2008b, pp. 30–33, 47.
- 134 Ricoeur 1990, p. 80 quoting E. Anscombe. Ricoeur 1992, p. 62.
- 135 Ricoeur 1990, p. 91, Ricoeur 1992, p. 72.
- 136 Ricoeur 1990, pp. 131–134, 204–206, Ricoeur 1992, pp. 107–110, 174–76.
- 137 Dalissier 2008b, pp. 24–27.
- 138 Nishida 1940, p. 370–71.
- 139 Nishida’s quotation (造次心於是顛沛心於是), in Nishida 1939b, p. 303, refers to the Analects, *Rijin* 4 里仁 第四, Lunyü 1978, p. 76: 君子無終食之間違仁。造次心於是。顛沛心於是: “The man of goodness does not separate himself from virtue. Even during his lunch, he always stays [or stands] here; even when he is busy, he always stays here.” We note the topological implication of the fact of standing or staying here (於是).
- 140 We might recall here the words of Yusa mentioned above, p. 145.
- 141 See *NKZ* 1987, vol. 12, pp. 160, 360.
- 142 Nishida 1970, pp. 237–251 (429–448).
- 143 Nishida 1970, pp. 246–251, 254 (441–448, 452).
- 144 Nishida 1970, pp. 238–240, 244–245 (430–434, 438).
- 145 Voltaire and the philosophers of the Enlightenment also had this vision. See Dyck in Cheng 2005, p. 21.
- 146 Nishida 1940, pp. 370–71.
- 147 This is the “intuition in action” (*kōiteki chokkan*) in which we rejoin the world of objectivity through the level of the act, Nishida 1970, pp. 244–46 (438–41).
- 148 Nishida himself used all kinds of symbolism to express his thought, as can be seen in particular in several essays entitled “Schematic Explanations” *Zushikiteki setsumei* 図式的説明 *NKZ* 2002–2009, vol. 13, pp. 219–66, 572–89, vol. 9, pp. 305–35.
- 149 Blocker and Starling 2001, pp. 90–91, 116–117, 121. Motoori claimed that Japanese Shintō was “superior to Chinese philosophy,” pp. 106–107.
- 150 Nishida used the same word, *tokushoku*, to characterize specificities of Japanese and Chinese culture, according to a neutral metaphysical standard, expressed in the ideal of dialectical reciprocity of cultures. Nishida 1970, pp. 240, 246–47, 254 (434, 442–43, 452–53). On his “topologization” of the history of philosophy, see Dalissier 2009a, p. 570, Appendix p. 347 ff.
- 151 Yusa 2002, pp. 284–285. See also pp. 290, 295, 297.
- 152 Cheng 1997, p. 42.
- 153 Dalissier 2009a, Appendix, p. 224, Dalissier 2005, p. 1246.
- 154 Cheng 1997, p. 581.
- 155 “China” (*chūgoku* 中国) is the “country” (国) of/in/at/for the “middle” (中). This “middle” cannot be reduced to a geographical position or an intermediary intellectual position, for example between Europe and Japan or Europe and India. See Dyck in Cheng 2005, p. 33. Yamaga Sokō argued on the other hand that only Japan deserves such a “central” position, see Blocker and Starling 2001, p. 91. We have to interpret such a “middle” in its specificity, by contrast to Aristotle’s “right middle” (*mésotês*), Nāgārjuna’s “Middle Way” (*mādhyamaka/chūron* 中論), the idea of an intermediary position of the “semblance of the law” (*zōbō* 像法) according to *mappō shisō* 末法思想 and the notion of “in between-ness” (*aida* 間) in Japanese culture and philosophy.
- 156 Cheng 1997, pp. 41, 274, 283–284.
- 157 Zheng 2005, p. 135.

- 158 Cheng 1997, pp. 39–40, 206. See pp. 577, 581. See also the arguments of Pak 2004, pp. 35–36.
- 159 Dalissier, 2008a.
- 160 Cheng 1997, p. 41. Needless to say, this infinite reciprocity is not to be conceived of as sterile or purely circular, as if it were a pure end in itself. Mathias Obert has shown how it is possible to develop a positivity of reciprocity from the perspective of a phenomenological hermeneutics of behavior in Xu Fuguan (1902–1982), Obert 2005, p. 285.
- 161 Cheng 1997, pp. 40, 273–274. I modify slightly the quotation. This interchange refers to a “reciprocal penetration” that is to be precisely located within the same topological level. See Dalissier 2008b p. 37.
- 162 To refer to an essential metaphor of Chinese thought as a whole, “water” is taking place “in the tiny edge between nothing and something, between the ‘there is not’ (*wu*) and the ‘there is’ (*you*), and passing through infinite transformations,” Cheng 1997, p. 193. Emphasis added.
- 163 Cheng 1997, p. 41.
- 164 Cheng 1997, p. 42. See also *Liezi*, II. 7: “The right middle is impossible” (皆不中也), *Shinshaku kanbun taikei* 1979 vol. XXIV, pp. 24, 24, 85. The corresponding passage is marked with red ink in the B edition.
- 165 Cheng 1997, p. 68.
- 166 The concept of *aida* 間 is central for philosophers like Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎 (1889–1960) or Kimura Bin 木村敏 (1931–). See Blocker and Starling 2001, p. 137, and Sakabe 2007a, pp. 55–73.
- 167 Granet 1934, pp. 47, 53. See the commentary of Roetz (Roetz 2005, p. 54).
- 168 Cheng 1997, pp. 101–105, 98.
- 169 *Ibid.*, pp. 215, 218, 222, 225. *Xunzi*, 5, 10, 17, In Nishida’s edition, *loc cit*, t. XXII, 315–69, 546–94, 624–47.
- 170 Nishida 1970, pp. 240–244 (434–38). Nishida 1940, pp. 279, 339. Japanese culture itself, for instance in Shinto, shows some ritual aspects (Nakagawa 2005, p. 2). See Sakabe 2007b, pp. 321–41.
- 171 *Ren* 仁. Nishida quoted Confucius: “To overcome selfishness and revive ritual is benevolence” (曰克己復禮為仁). Nishida 1970, p. 241.
- 172 *Shu* 恕. *Analects*, XV, 23, Legge translates this as “reciprocity,” p. 301, quoted in Cheng 1997, p. 69.
- 173 *Analects*, XV, 8. *Mencius*, VI, A, 10, quoted in Cheng 1997, pp. 78, 180.
- 174 Cheng 1997, pp. 171, 178.
- 175 Billeter 2004, p. 144.
- 176 Regarding the notions of “plane” and “place,” see Dalissier 2009a, p. 258 ff. See also Appendix, pp. 134–169.
- 177 Nishida 1926, pp. 206–209; Dalissier 2009a, p. 325 ff.
- 178 On the debate about imperialism in European philosophy in relation to Chinese thought, see the earlier cited studies of Dyck, Roetz and Defoort, in Cheng 2005, pp. 13–89.
- 179 “Chinese philosophy gives preference to a global approach (整体論的), from functions (功能論的), and we cannot find here any realism (實在論). This primacy of the function makes it prefer the link, the relation, the process, what develops itself, and not the objective (客觀), the real (*shizai* and *shishi*), the end. However, realism constitutes the fundamental tendency of modern Chinese philosophy.” Zheng 2005, pp. 134–35.
- 180 Cheng 1997, pp. 40, 273–74. Chinese philosophy’s resistance to an ontological and rational reduction of the traditional notional couples, as in the modern “ontological turn,” testifies to the centrality of its philosophical position: “We must not forget that the word for ‘reason’ (*ratio*, coming from *reor*, which means counting, calculating, ‘reasoning’ becoming at the same time a ‘rationing’), refers to an intellectual operation of the separation of things, lived as ‘spontaneous,’ which is opposed to the Chinese intellectual operation, also lived as ‘spontaneous,’ and that consists, before all, in scrutinizing the way things are related to each other.” Kamenarovic 2005, p. 203.

要旨

西田幾多郎と中国哲学：影響と相違

ミシェル・ダリシエ

本稿は、筆者による西田幾多郎と中国哲学との関係を考察した研究論文の続編にあたる。前編の“Nishida Kitarō and Chinese Philosophy”は、西田哲学がどれだけの直接的もしくは間接的、明示的もしくは暗示的、歴史的もしくは概念的な影響を中国思想の知的土壌を基盤とする史料や人物から受けたかを考究したものである。続編である本稿では、西田が理解するところの中国哲学に対する西田自身の姿勢に焦点を絞る。この中国哲学なるものが西田の著作のなかで中心的な位置を占めているのかどうか、そうであるとするならば、この「中心」なる概念を我々はどう理解すれば良いのか。本稿では、西田哲学に現れる中国思想の複数の原型を提示するとともに、西田という日本の哲学者と彼の知的背景としての中国哲学との間に認識できる、方法論的、論理的、形而上学的な対照に光を当てるものである。