

Philosophy, Ethics and Aesthetics in the Far-Eastern Cultural Sphere: Receptions of the Western Ideas and Reactions to the Western Cultural Hegemony

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Let us begin by pointing out a simple fact. While both in China and Korea the categories of “Chinese philosophy” and “Korean philosophy” are retrospectively recognized as formal terms and currently used, the Japanese academia, until now, does not use the term “Japanese philosophy.” My first question is, why did the divergence take place and what was the socio-historical background for this divergence? Based on this query, we will then expand the field of our investigation into the domain of ethics and aesthetics. This will provide us with a basic understanding of “knowledge” in the Far-Eastern cultural sphere in the modern era. This will also lead us to the question of translatability of key concepts in Asian cultures and, in extension, the “possibilities” of Oriental philosophies must be examined. “Possibilities” here imply at least three questions. First: is the Western philosophical tradition capable of referring to the Oriental tradition? Second: can the Occidental academic tradition of referring to the Orient be regarded as compatible with the scheme of “dialogue” between the East and the West? And third: In what way can global reciprocity be attainable without being caught by the hidden desire of “monopolizing” the knowledge for the benefit of those who possess it?

1. Philosophia Comes to East-Asia

The term 哲学 (*tetsu-gaku*) was invented by a Japanese, Nishi Amane 西周 (1829–1897) in 1860 as the translation of the Western term “philosophy.” China accepted the same neologism 哲学 (*zhé-xue*) in the 1890s and the same combination of the two Chinese characters was transmitted to Korea by 1884. The Chinese character *zhé* is a combination of “clear-cut” and “mouth” (*bien articulé oralement*), from which is derived the secondary meaning designating a person bestowed with wisdom in the Confucian tradition. “Xue” means a house where knowledge is transmitted from the master to the disciple. Previously, Nishi had proposed the term 希哲学 (*ki-tetsu-gaku*), [probably named after a passage by the Chinese Neo-Confucian scholar, Zhou Lián-xī 周濂溪 (1017–1073)], namely “a person worthy of the name cherishes cleverness” (literal translation) (Bian 2005:89) The first character *xī* 希 corresponds to the Greek notion of “philo-” in

Chinese. But the notion of “philo” could not survive, probably because of the Japanese preference for two-word terms in idiom formation (Yabu 2005).

Etymologically, the term which lacks in “philo” may be a mistranslation as it means literally “sophist learning,” that is precisely the opposite of what Socrates searched for. Yet *zhé* may also be interpreted as an abbreviated form of “先哲” i.e. “teachers in intellect,” which would be in consonance with the idea of ‘following faithfully the track of one’s master.’ And yet one should keep in mind that Nishi was strongly impressed by the contrast between the Chinese classical Confucian learning and Western philosophy. For him, the progress made by Comte’s positivism and Mill’s inductive method were a revelation. To his eye, even the Neo-Confucianism of the Sung Dynasty looked outmoded and remained in stagnation, as it was lacking in renewal and innovation. In contrast, the Western philosophy which he absorbed while in the Netherlands was perceived as making steady progress through the tradition of fair debates.

Thus “philosophy” was recognized by the Japanese of the mid-19th century as a new Western scholarly method which stood in sharp contrast to the Chinese Confucianism in stagnation. According to Nishi, Confucianism is “deductive” in its application of personal moral to the rules of the society as a whole, whereas Western philosophy is “inductive” in its search for the truth in accordance with Western natural science, where judgments were based on observations and analysis. But Nishi’s pro-Western stance was challenged by one of his colleagues. Nishimura Shigeki 西村茂樹(1828–1902), who also studied with Nishi in Holland, referred to several shortcomings of the Western philosophy in relation to Chinese scholarship. While Western philosophy puts emphasis on “knowledge” (知 *zhī*), it tends to overlook the “action” (行 *háng*), and it does not much care about “purifying the spirit” (洗心 *xiǎn xīn*). Thus, Nishimura found Western philosophy to be lacking in ethical dimension, if it were to be judged on the basis of the Chinese criteria. Clearly Nishimura is referring to the Neo-Confucianism of Wáng Yáng-míng 王陽明(1472–1528) who claimed that the concordance of thinking and doing (知行合一) is essential in ethical judgment. Nishimura’s reservation may well be compared with Aristotle who included theory (*hē theoretikē epistēmē*) and praxis (*hē praktikē epistēmē*) in the category of episteme. And yet, it may be fair to observe that even nowadays Chinese scholars tend to think that ethical dimension (人倫) is relatively lacking in the Western philosophical tradition (which stands in sharp contrast to the Western accusation of the Chinese lacking in respect for human rights).

1-1 Invention of Oriental Philosophy

Here, we look at one of the cultural conflicts which occurred at the introduction of Western philosophy in the non-Western, and in this context, the Far-Eastern cultural sphere. In the formative years of the Japanese ‘modern’ academia undergoing Westernization from around the 1880s, philosophy was first established as a university discipline. Let us have a brief look at the first generation. Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心 (1863–1913), the Japanese pioneer of Western style art historical study, was one of the first graduates from the Tokyo University. He is known to have learned Hegelian philosophy from an American Professor E. F.

Fenollosa (1853–1908) before his graduation in 1880. The courses for “Indian and Chinese Philosophies” were introduced in the following year in 1881 in the Department of Philosophy side by side with “Western Philosophy” in the Faculty of Letters. The notion of “Oriental Philosophy” 東洋哲学 was promoted by Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855–1944), the first recipient of the Chair of Philosophy. Clearly, Inoue felt the necessity of supplementing Western discipline with Eastern traditions and he coined the term of “Oriental Philosophy” by way of analogy. Behind his intention of establishing a “synthesis of the East and the West,” we may detect his nationalistic intention: The East should show that it is perfectly equipped with an equivalent of Western philosophical tradition which can rival the West. Though his approach is criticized as superficial and judged syncretic at best, Inoue nonetheless made it clear that a passive acceptance of the Western academic discipline was not enough for an Eastern nation-state to modernize its scholarly outlook (Shimomura 1965/2005:22).

Curiously, however, “Japanese Philosophy” was absent in the curriculum proposed by Inoue, and it remains so until today. For more than 120 years since the founding days, it seems that the Department of Philosophy in Japanese universities is satisfied with the triple subdivision into Western, Indian and Chinese philosophies. The Indian Philosophy Department succeeded domestic siddham studies in Buddhist temples (since the 9th century) and grafted to it Western philology consisting of studies in Sanskrit and Pali texts. The Chinese Philosophy Department maintained more or less faithfully the legacy of exegesis of Chinese Confucian or Taoist classics, without being strongly influenced by Western scholarship. Meanwhile, Western philosophy in Japan mainly consisted of translating important classics and expounding them. Though it is commonly said that *philosophieren* (in German term) was in fashion among students in the pre-war period, Western style meditation or reflection did not directly take root in Japan but gave way either to the Zen Buddhist practice or to the faith in Christianity through conversion.

Predominant in the pre-war high school study in humanities (which covered only less than 5 percent of the population) was a scholastic philology which was conducted through the reading of Western original texts such as Descartes, Kant and Schopenhauer, not to mention Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. It may be worth mentioning that, here again, the Western idea of “philology,” highly appreciated by Nishi Amane, was surreptitiously replaced by the kind of exegesis which Nishi despised in his Confucian learning. The meticulous reading of the classics and the attempt to translate them into Japanese (which were quite often too difficult for the ordinary readers to understand) as well as the introduction of the latest Western contemporary works constituted (and still constitutes) most of the Japanese academic activities in the Western Philosophy Department. Dialog and debate, which reside at the very core of the Western philosophical tradition, were replaced by an authoritative monolog delivered by professors in the classrooms. As far as the number of chairs and students are concerned, “Western Philosophy” occupied the predominant place in the discipline of philosophy in the academic world in Japan, and the Indian and Chinese philosophies assumed the secondary and auxiliary positions. Such was, in brief, the Japanese pre-war institutional situation in the Department of Western Philosophy.

1-2 Chinese ‘Philosophical’ Tradition

In China, a Jesuit missionary, Julio Aleni (1582–1649) first provided a phonetic transcription of “philosophia” (斐錄所非亞) in the 17th century, without being understood by the Chinese. It was in 1898 that Yán Fù 嚴復(1854–1921) gave another phonetic transcription for “philosophy” (斐洛魁非) in his translation of A. Huxley’s “Evolution and Ethics,” and by referring to the Japanese terminology, he gave the term of *zhé-xué* in his translation of J.S Mill’s *On Liberty* in 1903. While Yán concentrated on English writings, Wáng Guó-wéi 王国維(1877–1927) used the same term in his introduction to German philosophers like Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche through the magazine he edited, *Educational World* 『教育世界』 (1901). It is said that the *Principle of Philosophy* 『哲学要領』 (1903) by Cài Yuán-péi 蔡元培 (1867–1940) contributed to the consolidation of the terminology in the Chinese language. Cài became President of the Beijing University in 1917, and invited to the university Hú Shì 胡適 (1891–1962), former student of J. Dewey and a Columbia University Ph.D. holder. It was not until the publication of Hú Shì’s *Outline of History of Chinese Philosophy* 『中国哲学史大綱』 (volume 1 was published in 1919 under the May 4th Nationalist Movement in protest against Japan’s 21 demands after World War I) that Chinese traditional thinking as a whole was for the first time categorized under the terminology of philosophy (*zhé-xué*) (Kōsaka 2005:62).

Here, the contrast between Japan and China is amply clear. Japan, which had invented the term *tetsu-gaku*, as the translation of “philosophy,” never applied it to the native genealogy of thinkers. In contrast, China openly declared that it has its own history of philosophy which is worth being compared with Western philosophy. By referring to the Hegelian schema of progress, Hú even claimed that Chinese philosophy will take a position in the future philosophy of the world. Another key person in this context is Féng Yǒu-lán 馮友蘭 (1895–1990), who published the history of Chinese thought as *History of Chinese Philosophy* 『中国哲学史』 in 1931 during the Japanese aggression called the “Manchurian Incident.” Féng regarded institutionalized Confucianism as the fossilized and sterilized phase of the doctrines of the ancient philosophers and claimed that the genuine Chinese tradition was restored by modernity introduced through reforms by Káng Yǒu-wéi 康有為 (1858–1927). Beside the fact that Feng’s conception apparently follows the Hegelian concept, it also had the merit of being in tune with the Marxist interpretation. However, this may also reflect a Chinese native way of understanding history as a retrieval of the lost tradition (Kōsaka 2005:65).

Thus, “philosophy” in the Chinese understanding is no longer regarded as a translated notion from the West but is to be treated by posterity as an innate and inherent category proper to Chinese thinking. A paradoxical consequence is that nowadays most of the Chinese professors of the Chinese Philosophy Department share the conviction that *zhé-xué* existed since antiquity in China and that “philosophy” is nothing but a Western equivalent (only some lexicologists do not agree with this idea). The official interpretation in China did not accept such an interpretation as to maintain that the term was introduced in China through

the Japanese translation of the Western notion of “philosophy.” More importantly, the spirit of practice in Marxist philosophy was similar to the Chinese ethical tradition of the Wang Yang-ming school, where practice and knowledge used to be closely connected with each other so as to encourage political as well as spiritual revolution (though in China scholars put more emphasis on metaphysical speculation while in Japan the Yang-ming studies gain extremely ethical dimension).

1-3 Korean Philosophical Subjectivity

In Korea, Yu Kiljun 兪吉濬(1856–1914), who had studied at the Keiō Gijuku school in Japan, recorded the etymological idea of “philosophy” in his *Seiyō Kenbun* 『西遊見聞』 (1884), observations during his stay in the U. S. A. It was in the 1890s that the enlightened thinking of Lock and Rousseau, the utilitarianism of Bentham as well as the idea of natural law by Montesquieu reached the Korean intellectuals. Among the early scholars, one should mention the name of Lee Chungiik 李定稷 (1841–1910) who studied Kant. Far from being a refuge from the reality of Japanese suppression and occupation, studying philosophy in Korea is said to have been recognized as a practical way of understanding and overcoming the suffering and the oppression inflicted by Japan upon the Korean race.

It is also worth mentioning that the colonial rule gave birth to the nationalist resistance. Among the leading philosophers of the generation, Shin Namcheol 申南激 (1907–1958) and Park Chiwoo 朴到祐 (1909–1949) were graduates from the Keijo Imperial University in Seoul who became leading Marxist philosophers in North Korea after Korea’s liberation from the Japanese rule. Chon Wonbae 田元培 (1903–1984), graduating from the Kyoto Imperial University, participated in the foundation of the Korean Philosophers’ Association in 1933. Kim Tuheon 金斗憲 (1903–1981), graduating from the Tokyo Imperial University, became a leading scholar in Western ethics at the Seoul University. Ahn Hosang 安浩相 (1902–1966), who obtained his Ph.D. from the Bon University and published *Lectures of Philosophy* 『哲学講義』 in 1942, was to be nominated the first Director of the Department of Education in South Korea. Han Chijin 韓稚振 (1901–?), who graduated from the South California University and who was the author of the first general introduction of philosophy published in Korea, 『最新哲学概論』 (1936), was abducted to North Korea and later went missing.

After the defeat of Japan in 1945, and especially since the Korean War in 1952, the People’s Republic of Korea established the so-called “Subject thinking” 主体思想, a North Korean interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, in which the people are designated as the subject carrying out their own destiny of realizing the revolution. The Institute of Philosophical Research in Pyongyang published the *History of Korean Philosophy*, based on the materialistic ideology in 1960. The Japanese translation of the book in 1962 seems to have had a deep impact on some intellectuals of the Korean Republic. Park Jonghong 朴鐘鴻 (1903–1976), an authority of the times, for example, searched for the framework of Korean philosophy by studying the important spiritual father of modern Korean thought, Choi Hanki 崔漢綺(1803–1875). Of course, Park’s studies were conducted not from the Marxist point of view, which was strictly prohibited under the military

rule, but primarily in reference to the English empiricism (Li 2003).

Generally speaking, Korean students of philosophy have not taken Japanese research in philosophy seriously. Not only in Confucian studies but also in Buddhist studies, Korea believes it has occupied a superior position to Japan since antiquity, and would not recognize any merit in Japanese cultures, which has been accused of vulgarity and believed to have no merit other than corrupting the good manners of the Koreans. Even the apparent neutrality in Japanese scholars' philological approaches has been judged by Korean intellectuals as proof of Japan's intellectual irresponsibility for their colonial rule and usurpation. Until recently, South Korean nationalist scholars had good reason to intentionally ignore Japanese philosophical studies. Those Japanese who manifested a guilty consciousness toward Korea were mostly Marxists. Any contact with them could easily lead to death penalty in South Korea under the military dictatorship, whereas non-Marxist Japanese students were mostly apolitical and ideology-free philologists. Their scholarship, lacking in morality by definition, was judged *de facto*, and should have been judged *de jure*, worthless for Korean engaged nationalists. It was not until 1999 that the Korean Association for Studies of Japanese Thought was founded in the Republic of Korea, and it has publicly declared that its main purpose consists of criticizing the remaining traces of the imperialist ideology that is deep-rooted in Japanese philosophy at large.

1-4 Crisis in Identity

Chinese intellectuals, for their part, have traditionally shown little interest in Japan except as a convenient transit port for the importation of the latest Western knowledge. While significant amount of Western books were retranslated via Japanese translations in the pre-war period, little attention has been paid to what was happening in Japan. The situation has not changed in recent years. Of the 1701 scientific papers on foreign philosophy which the Research Center of Philosophy of the Chinese Institute of Social Sciences published between 1978 and 2000, only 87 articles have dealt with Japan, covering no more than 5 percent of the total (Bian 2005:74).

It is true that Japanese publications like *World Classics* (which means in reality Western classics) or (Western) *Thinkers of the 20th Century* have been recently translated into Chinese. Still the Chinese readership is naturally not interested in the way Japan has received and digested these Western classics and contemporary Western thinkers. Retranslation from the Japanese is promoted and permitted by the authorities for the sake of convenience: partly because translated terminology in Japanese by way of Chinese characters is quite helpful (if not always re-utilizable), and partly because Japan did not suffer from the quasi-total discommunication with the Western scholarship that China has suffered under strong Moscow influence (since the Stalin era) and especially during and after the Cultural Revolution.

However, what is happening in recent years is a great challenge to Chinese intellectual history. Let us look at the Chinese translation of a book on J. Derrida published in Japan which was rendered into Chinese by a translator who did not have any notion of the French original and for whom the English translation

remained linguistically inaccessible. A simple glossary (which the Japanese publishers are unwilling to include, for fear of discouraging domestic purchase) would not suffice to avoid interminable confusions in terminology. Despite efforts at standardization, the Chinese characters used to transcribe the main Western contemporary authors tend to differ from one translation to another, making it virtually impossible to identify identical authors (even for authors themselves who usually have no command of the Chinese language) unless the spelling was given in brackets (the names were often misspelled up until the 90s, but in recent years Chinese publications have started the practice of mentioning the original spelling, making the identification of Western authors' names easier than the Japanese translations, which are usually lacking in them).

The most serious problem which remains even today is the lack of communication. Many Chinese specialists in foreign languages, who are translating the latest Western publications, are not always highly respected by Chinese professors in the Chinese Philosophy Department. Few top-ranking Chinese scholars in Chinese philosophy willingly speak foreign languages, and do not know how the content of their utterances are modified in interpretation into Western languages. Among Chinese scholars, those who are fluent in Western languages have little contact with those who are proficient in Japanese. Most of the Japanese scholars in Chinese philosophy are, even nowadays, poor at speaking Western languages, and few are motivated to publish in Chinese. And most of the Western scholars in Chinese studies no longer speak Korean or Japanese as easily as their senior distinguished teachers. In short, philosophical dialog or tri-log in the Far-East cannot be achieved without relying on exceptionally talented scholars.

2. Western Recognition of the Eastern Tradition

Despite these inherent difficulties which still remain, Oriental Philosophy gained a certain reputation in the West. Okakura Tenshin, whom I briefly mentioned, proposed a triangular structure of the Oriental spirit. If India excels in religious spirituality (which is expressed in the emotion of Buddhist "mercy"), China boasts its intellectual dimension in ethical thinking. Combining these two main Asiatic currents, Japan appears as an embodiment of the aesthetic aspect of the Oriental culture. Though debatable for its highly nationalistic formulation, this triangular structure curiously reminds us of the configuration of *sěfirīōt* in Hebraic Kabbarah thought, in which *Tif'eret* or beauty is articulated from the combination of *Hesed* or mercy and *Gěūrāh* or justice (Izutsu 1991:287). Okakura also compared the position of Japan as "the beach where each successive wave of Eastern thought has left its sand-ripple as it beats against the national consciousness" (*The Ideals of the East*, 1904).

Though extremely schematic, this vision was partly justified by the following publications. Just as Okakura's own *The Book of Tea* (1906) was a manifesto of the Oriental aesthetics, Gū Hóng-míng 辜鴻銘 (1857–1928), the legendary Confucian scholar of the Qing Dynasty, published in English, *Spirit of the Chinese People*, which was translated into German as *Der Geist des Chinesischen Volkes u. der Ausweg aus dem Krieg* (1917) as a Confucian ethical message to Europe during the war. The same year Rabindranath Tagore

(1861–1941), the first Nobel Prize laureate in Literature from Asia in 1913, published his *Nationalism* so as to denounce Western and Westernized hegemony (including that of Japan) in defense of the search for spirituality. Contemporary to Paul Valéry’s “Crise de l’Occident,” these publications by Oriental authors also precede Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the Occident* (1920).

2-1 Japan’s Invention of Oriental Aesthetics

Okakura’s vision of the Asian Civilizations which was proposed at the beginning of the 20th century attained a certain maturity in the 1930s, when attempts were made to theoretically elaborate the so-called Oriental aesthetics. Since we have already examined elsewhere the revival of Chinese aesthetics notions in the modern era (Inaga 2001), let us limit ourselves here to the examination of the so-called Japanese aesthetics. The only vocabulary of Japanese aesthetics that were admitted into the *Oxford English Dictionary* are *yūgen*, *wabi* and *sabi*. Why could only these three concepts, among so many others, obtain a “civil right” so to speak in the English language?

The term *yūgen* 幽玄 appears for the first time in Arthur Waley’s *Noh Plays of Japan* (1928) which explains the term as “meaning that which lies under the surface, vague and opposite of the obvious, suggestion rather than a manifestation.” Though the notion stems from classical Chinese, it was elaborated by medieval Japanese aesthetics and performance arts. *Sabi* 寂び, for its turn, appears in the book on *Noh gaku* (1932) by Beatrice Lane Suzuki (–1938) treating the same medieval Noh drama. The third expression *wabi* 侘び is seen in Suzuki Daisetsu’s 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966) highly influential *Essays in Zen* (1934), with the phrase “Eternal Loneliness is something known pre-eminently in Japan.” Suzuki Daisetsu also explains *sabi* as follows: “*Sabi* consists in rustic unpretentiousness or archaic imperfection, apparent simplicity or effortlessness in execution, and richness in historical associations.” This being said, our next question would be: why were these specific terms frequently discussed during the 1930s?

First, it must be pointed out that in contemporary Japan, Zeami 世阿弥 (1364–1443), known until then as a Noh play actor, was recognized for the first time in the 1910s as a play writer and singled out in the historiography of Japanese literature. Simultaneously, the aesthetic term *yūgen*, which had never been particularly used, became a key-term in the Japanese history of ideas. A hypothesis for the succession from *yūgen* to *sabi* seems to be advanced and established around Ōta Mizuho 大田水穂 (1876–1955), who, by claiming this succession, revived the *haikai* poetry master, Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1644–1694) together with his aesthetics of *sabi* (Inaga 2005).

Ōta’s idea showed a clear distinction from the dominant views which had been proposed by previous scholars of national studies. Kamo no Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697–1769), who initiated the revival of the ancient poetry, proclaimed the *masuraoburi* “manlich” vigorous archaic style of the *Man’yōshū* 万葉集, the *Collection of Ancient Poems* (759) of the 8th century as the highest achievement. Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801), the scholar famous for his study in mythology, *Kojiki* 古事記 (712) and the *Tale of Genji* 源氏物語 (1008), in contrast, appreciated the highly technical rhetoric of the neo-classical *Shin kokin wakashū*

新古今和歌集 (*New Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems*) edited in 1201. If a very schematic interpretation is allowed, the medievalism in Japan may correspond to the revival of the vernacular literature of late medieval Europe, which is alien to both Greek archaism and Roman classicism, but contains a core to the Renaissance of the national literature.

2-2 Construction of “Japanese-ness” Discourses

Contemporary Japanese scholars in “national literature” 国文学 were searching for the “essence of the national literature.” Hisamatsu Sen’ichi 久松潜一 (1894–1976) distils three spiritual qualities, i.e. *makoto* (“truthfulness” corresponding to the archaic style), *monoaware* (emotional attuning to the passing world which contains a sentiment of resignation typically expressed, according to Motoori, in the *Tale of Genji*) and *yūgen*. Clearly Hisamatsu is trying to synthesize the above mentioned three characteristics by claiming that the early medieval antithetical literary spiritual qualities like *aware* and *okashi* (more or less lyrical comic) are fused into profundity by the medieval notion of *yūgen*. Likewise, Okazaki Yoshie 岡崎義恵 (1892–1982), by referring to the German philology of F. Schlegel or W. Dilthey, insisted upon the importance of the “fusing” as a distinctive character of the Japanese literary history. This idea shows a clear similarity with the notion of “*Rahmenlosigkeit*” or frame-less-ness proposed by Tsuzumi Tsuneyoshi 鼓常良 (1887–1981) in his *Kunst Japans* (1927) as a basic concept of Japanese aesthetics in contrast to the Western tradition where a clear distinction is maintained between literary and artistic genres.

To these medieval revivalist interpretations, a Marxist scholar, Kondō Tadayoshi 近藤忠義 (1901–1976) riposted by saying that *yūgen* reflects the escapist spirit of the medieval period which was concocted by the sedimentation of the corruptive maturity of the feudalistic aristocratic society of the previous late Heian period. Though Kondō’s view of the medieval era is negative (and a similar view is still a dominant official interpretation of Japanese literature taught in mainland Chinese normal schools), he nonetheless shares with the proponents of medievalism the idea that the medieval period created a matrix of the Japanese character. In addition we may detect that, despite their oppositions, they all saw in the *yūgen* notion, not an aesthetic element but a principle of coordinating national character. This functionalistic approach leads contemporary Japanese scholars to the search of the Japanese-ness as an essence of the Oriental aesthetics (Let us note here a clear aggrandizing of “Japanese” into “Oriental” aesthetics, an aspect which we critically studied in Inaga 2001).

A typical case would be Ōnishi Yoshinori 大西克禮 (1888–1959), who published 『幽玄とあわれ』 *Yūgen and Aware* (1939) and 『風雅論「さび」の研究』 *Fūga Ron or A Study of Sabi* (1940). Professor of Aesthetics at the Imperial University of Tokyo, Ōnishi took a phenomenological approach in his study of Japanese poetry. Following the Western model of aesthetic categories, Ōnishi explains Japanese aesthetics as derivations from the Western basic concepts. He states: “Because of the advantageous position of the art-aesthetic moment in the West, the three fundamental aesthetics categories, “the beautiful,” “the sublime” and “the humorous” are transformed into “the graceful,” “the tragic,” and “the comic” respectively in the

West, whereas in the East, because of the advantageous position of the nature-aesthetics moment, they are generated as *aware*, *yūgen*, and *sabi* respectively (Otabe 2002:155).

2-3 Obscurantism as the Oriental Illumination

Ōnishi is satisfied by allocating several Japanese aesthetic terms to an auxiliary position of Western aesthetics categories. Still, throughout his minute analysis of waka poems, Ōnishi points out that a clear distinction between art and nature, which characterizes the West, is lacking in the Japanese poetics, where the human self tends to fuse into nature. He also looks into the “subtleness” and “stillness” of the Japanese aesthetic contemplation which shows particular interest in the *Dunkelheit* (German in the text) and the *Tiefe* which deny clear verbal articulations. The famous essay 陰翳礼賛 “Eloge de l’ombre” (1933) by the modern Japanese writer Tanizaki Jun’ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965) was almost contemporary to Ōnishi’s sober philosophical reflection. Although Ōnishi regarded Japanese aesthetic concepts as “irrelevant” in a Western context, it must be recognized that the Orientals of the period were searching for aesthetic concepts which may be classifiable by, but not reduced to, the Occidental category.

The essence of Japanese aesthetics had to be formulated in the delicate margin between compatibility with the Western canon (which was the condition for acceptability) and irreducibility to Western specificities (which was the condition for the claim of originality). The spiritual profundity (*Dunkelheit* or *Tiefe*) which was useful so as to give the impression of not easily accessible to the Western analytical apparatus was also a necessary condition to meet the Western expectation, and which was subject to an inevitable tendency to obscurantism by which Japanese aesthetics was marked. Heidegger’s famous notion of *Verborgenheit* and the idea of *ālētheia* were not tangential to this inclination. Our third question is to ask if these conditions were inherent to the Orient (and especially to Japan, in our present context) or was it rather concomitant with the Western inner (or innate?) logic of philosophical and aesthetic studies.

3. The Western Empire Fights Back

As we have seen, Okakura, Tagore and Gu were among the rare Oriental philosophers and aestheticians who could articulate their ideas directly in Western languages. In contrast, the following generation (at least in Japan) like Ōnishi or Tanizaki, no longer manifested their ideas directly in Western languages. What they articulated in their native tongue was the merit of obscurity of their aesthetic appreciations. Even Okakura eloquently manifested the value of the lack of eloquence as one of the essential aesthetic features of the Orientals. Why was such a negative attitude dominant? And what was the Occidental reaction to the Oriental self-assertion?

Let us examine one of the most complex cases. The French extreme-right nationalist critic, Henri Massis (1886–1970), accused such Orientals as “Okakuras, Coomaraswamys, Tagores” of being “pseudo-Orientals.” In Massis’ view, all of them were products of Western education, and therefore they were armed with the weapons that the West had provided them (Hue 2000). A similar argument is still prevailing. The

Western academia expects from the East “fundamental contributions” which the West cannot expect of its own accord. And yet, “contribution” deserves to be recognized as contribution so long as it is “digestible” or “edible” in the Western logic of philosophy. However, so long as it is “digestible,” it is at best regarded as an addendum to the Western episteme. On the contrary, if some typically Oriental thinking is shown to the West, it simply would not be accepted because it is alien to the very notion of philosophy.

This mechanism of inclusion and exclusion can lead to an absurd consequence: Exemplary contributions from the East are not typically Eastern, as they already conform to Western philosophy. Typically Eastern contributions cannot be appreciated as such but are rejected in the West, as they do not belong to the Western category of philosophy. Nietzsche said in his *Wille zur Macht*: “Thinking rationally simply means interpreting according to the schema that we cannot get rid of” (Nietzsche 1954: 358). Such a tautological immune system of Western philosophy not only accounts for the ways that Japanese aesthetics were formulated in an obscure and negative fashion by Ōnishi Yoshinori in the late 1940s, but also partly suggests the logical reason why fundamental contributions from the East could not be recognized as such in the Western concept of philosophy.

3-1 Double-Decker Modernity

Karl Löwith (1897–1973), who was in exile in Japan during World War II due to his Jewish origin, made a revealing observation in this context. According to him, Japanese students study all the philosophical works from Plato to Heidegger in their study room at the second floor, but they usually live in a purely Japanese fashion on the first floor (Löwith did not mention “Western” philosophy, for “philosophy” did not mean for him anything but Western philosophy). The problem is that he could not find any ladder to connect the two floors. Though commonplace, his remark shows a basic condition in which Western philosophical knowledge was accepted (or wisely put aside) in a non-Western cultural sphere, named Japan, in the modern era. Between the Westernized second floor and the domestic first floor, what kind of relationship could (or had to) the knowledge entertain? Or if the connection was not established and could not be maintained as Löwith remarked, what could it mean?

When we talk about the possibility of intercultural dialog, we suppose as a prerequisite individuals who are capable of articulating his/her own ideas in a common working language. However, Löwith’s assertion suggests that there is a discontinuity between the philosophical formulation in Western language and pre-philosophical vernacular cultures. In order for an Oriental to be capable of taking part in an intercultural dialog, he or she must be ready to bridge the connection between the first and the second floor within oneself by way of inner dialog. One is expected to translate one’s own vernacular language into another philosophical language which is supposed to be universally valid (and recognizable in the Western academia). This translation process inevitably accompanies a sense of self-betrayal, which H. Massis maliciously revealed. *Traduttore è traditore*, indeed, but without this self-deceit one cannot put up a ladder between the first “vernacular” floor and the second “global” floor (Inaga 1999).

3-2 Can Nothingness be a Philosophical Subject?

Shimomura Toratarō 下村寅太郎 (1902–1995), a distinguished scholar in the history of science, gives a relevant account on this inevitably asymmetrical passage and lack of reciprocity. While Western thinking (including Islamic thinking) is argumentative and dialogical, he observes that Oriental thinking tends to avoid verbal utterance. Confucius declared that clever utterance and embellishment lacks in morality (巧言令色鮮仁). It is of course a simple hypothesis to recognize in the refusal and voluntary avoidance of verbal utterance the essential characteristics of Oriental philosophy and aesthetics. Still, so long as the West intends to find in the East something antithetical and oppositional to the West, it was a logical consequence that the Oriental themselves had to single out as their essence something that is not easily assimilated into the Western logic (Shimomura 1965/ 2005: 25). *Sabi*, *wabi* or *yūgen* may be palpable examples of this sort. It was the Westerners' own desire to summon the unknown that invited the unwelcome. A Japanese scholar in aesthetics, Ōnishi, had to choose the specific aesthetic terms in Japanese literature while being quite logically *aware* in advance that these key concepts he analyzed would be of little relevance in the Western philosophical context.

Here lies the logical mechanism of Western refusal of the so-called Oriental philosophy. Since Hegel's famous denial of recognizing any philosophical episteme in the Orient (in his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*) (Hegel 1980: 138ff.), up until the categorical condemnation of the Kyoto school philosophers to Nazi sympathetic totalitarianism by recent American theory-oriented Japanese studies (Maraldo, Arisaka, Parkes 2005), the consistency is remarkable. This systematic will of Western self defense also finds its illustrations among such divergent thinkers as M. Heidegger (who monopolizes the philosophical thinking as the Greek-German heritage in his *Was ist Philosophie?* in 1957) and A. Danto (who manifests his unwillingness to draw any lesson from Oriental thought and moral philosophy) (Danto 1972: x–xi).

3-3 Articulating What Should Remain Non-Verbal

The reverse side of the same logic stigmatized Oriental philosophy. Indeed, if Oriental philosophy can exist as something worth being recognized as such by the West, it has to verbally articulate the thinking which is supposed (by the Western logic) to refuse the verbal articulation. Verbalize what should remain by nature non-verbal. Here is the birth trauma of Oriental philosophy as it was anticipated by the Western dialectic. This imperative constitutes the self-treachery without which Oriental philosophy cannot be recognized by the West. In other words, Oriental philosophy can exist only as a self-negation. To give logical attire to what refuses to be harnessed by the very logic itself without thereby damaging or denaturalizing it. Such was the impossible task that Oriental philosophy had to assume.

At the same time, this logical impossibility of Oriental philosophy leads to another important consequence. If Western philosophy relies upon the dialectic (*dialektikē*) and dialog (*dialegein*), Oriental philosophy, as it is defined according to Western logic, does not (have the right to) enter in the process of dialectic with its Western counterpart, because Oriental philosophy refuses (and should refuse by definition) logos.

How is it possible to make a dialog with something which refuses to be attuned to logos. Or, to put it another way, a dialog with what is inevitably denaturalized by assuming the logical attire, cannot be anything but a falsification. Consequently, Oriental philosophy can exist in so far as it reveals its incapacity of holding a dialog with Western philosophy. And yet this incapacity of dialog also implies, quite logically, that Oriental philosophy is by definition useless for Western philosophy, for it is lacking in dialog capability. The only possibility left for Oriental philosophy would be to logically analyze in a Western style the refusal of logical thinking in Oriental thinking. This lack of symmetry and the refusal of reciprocal knowledge is not the fault of Oriental philosophy. Far from that, it is the logical consequence of the prerequisite which the Occident imposed upon the Orient as its only possible and logically tolerable response to the Occident.

Here, the conventional hypothesis of dialog between the West and the East is negated by the very inherent logic of the philosophy itself. For, the only possibility of Oriental philosophy resides in its impossibility to dialoging with Western philosophy. If such were the reason why many Western philosophers since Hegel refused to acknowledge the Orient the right to have its own philosophy, their fear should be justified. For Oriental philosophy worthy of the name defies the Western philosophical tradition to maintain its dialogical principle itself, and menace it with self destruction. Indeed how is it possible to dialog with what refuses to dialog? The destruction of the dialogical principle would be a logical consequence of the definition of Oriental philosophy itself which the West has formulated and framed.

Löwith was deploring the lack of the connecting ladder between the East and the West. However, once the connecting ladder is in place, an unexpected logical chain would bring about a catastrophe. Needless to say, “the Orient” here is only an operational sign of our philosophical exercise and it may be interchangeable with other potential menaces which the West (also an operational sign) is capable of conceiving. In the light of this exercise of elementary logic, we should understand better the reason why the West has to fear the redskins, the yellow peril and black power. The phantom of an Henri Massis is still surviving and hovering around. One cannot entertain a philosophical dialog so long as one is overlooking this self-imposed refusal of dialog with the Orient through which the Occident has defined itself.

It is more than symptomatic that Izutsu Toshihiko 井筒俊彦(1914–93), unquestionably the best Japanese contemporary philosopher, an international authority of Islamic thought and an exceptional philologist conversant in more than thirty languages, gave a talk on “Beyond dialog—A Zen point of view” at a meeting in Teheran on “L’impact planétaire de la pensée occidentale rend-il possible un dialogue réel entre les civilisations” held at the Centre Iranian pour le dialogue des civilisations, on Oct. 1977 (Izutsu 1991: 375–408). Whether Izutsu’s endeavor was also a prisoner of the Western logic of philosophy or was he pointing to the way to liberate it from its ontological limit of knowledge is still an open question.

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