

## CHAPTER 1

# PHILOSOPHY AND *TETSUGAKU*

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In the West, philosophy has been pursued since antiquity. It is the study of all things and their clarification in the mind (*shinri*), the logical explication of the laws of heaven and of humanity, and the establishment of principles and theories about them, known as “philosophy.” We would translate “philosophy” into Japanese as *tetsugaku* or the “science of seeking clarity.” As the title of my book suggests, philosophy encompasses all “teachings/doctrines” as a whole. If one follows the tenets of one school of thought, there is a tendency to affirm its teachings or doctrines and reject all others. If we wish to contemplate all teachings from a standpoint of equal objectivity, however, we require a perspective capable of looking upon them from well outside and above them.<sup>1</sup>

—Nishi Amane

Philosophy was once the pursuit of truth, just as it was in the case of the individual sciences. The sciences were the search for truth in particular fields, but philosophy addressed everything as a whole. Truth existed outside of individual subjectivity, so philosophy was unaffected by the perspectives of ethnicity or culture. Even today, most researchers in the sciences continue to believe that truth transcends ethnic and cultural differences. The urge to inquire and pursue research is driven by the belief that the goal is to find the truth.

In the Western world the natural sciences were an integral part of philosophy. Isaac Newton (1643–1727), known as the father of modern science, considered his research to be “natural philosophy.” Clarification of the wondrous workings of the universe, he thought, was linked to demonstrating the greatness of God, the creator of the universe. The idea of philosophy as a comprehensive system for clarifying the truth of everything in the world reached its peak with Hegel (1770–1831). In philosophy, everything—science, religion, law, history, and so on—comes together, culminating in the truth. Philosophy in that sense is Hegel’s own system of ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> Nishi 1960, p. 289.

That spirit informed “philosophy” when it was introduced to Japan in the nineteenth century by the scholar Nishi Amane (1829–1897). Nishi coined the word *tetsugaku* 哲学 or “the science of seeking clarity,” and the word became widely known in 1874, with the publication of *Hyakuichi shinron* (A New Theory of the Unity of the Hundred), which propounded Nishi’s new theory attempting to transcend all moral and religious teachings. The exploration of philosophical ideas by Japanese scholars, which has been influenced by their knowledge of Eastern traditions of thought like Daoism, Buddhism, and so on, has opened up new avenues for understanding and insight, allowing them to contribute original ideas for the advancement of philosophical discourse. This book would like to discuss some of the arguments they have offered.

“Modern philosophy,” which is to say philosophy after Hegel, represents the work of philosophers who took exception to the notion that Hegel had successfully defined the truth. A major current is Marxism. Karl Marx (1818–1883) was quite a multifaceted thinker, but the Marxism established in the twentieth-century Soviet Union by way of Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) took scientific socialism as its slogan, declaring that the truth would be revealed through objective science. Ultimately, philosophy would be overwhelmed by science. This is the formalistic Marxism to which some Japanese scholars have remained loyal until quite recently.

The nineteenth century was the century of science. France’s Auguste Comte (1798–1857) believed that philosophy was intended to integrate all the sciences, and described his own views as positivism. The same was true of the English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). Both Comte and Spencer believed that social phenomena could be explained scientifically—and they are thus considered the forefathers of today’s social sciences. The ideas of these men were very influential in the early phase of Japan’s era of modernization, which began in the second half of the century. The thinkers who were involved in creating a new society in the Meiji era—Nishi Amane among them—eagerly tapped into the Comtian and Spencerian ideas.

As the sciences advanced, the scope of philosophy narrowed, eventually bringing into doubt whether there was even a need for such a separate system of ideas. In the early years of the twentieth century, such extreme faith in the science of physics emerged that it was held physics would explain all the world’s questions. With the development of psychology and neuroscience, science even tackled the human mind, leading some to believe that scientific understanding of the brain would clear up all its mysteries. In his early work *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) declared that all the questions of philosophy had been solved. Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and later Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), on the other hand, cast doubt upon everything expounded by traditional philosophy.

Such being the case, one might ask: What, after all, is philosophy? Is it really necessary? Before attempting to address such momentous questions, I would like to look at the

idea of the universality of philosophy. Given the relationship between philosophy and science in the nineteenth through the twentieth-century period, there can be a number of positions regarding this idea.

The first position is that philosophy, like the other sciences, is universal and not affected by differences in culture and tradition. In this view, philosophy may have originated in Greece and developed in the West, but as in the other sciences, where it developed is not so significant; what is important is the extent to which its findings hold up as universally valid. This was the accepted view among the scholars who labored to introduce Western philosophy to Japan in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Today, that view is probably not as widely held as it was then.

Marxism was premised on this assumption of universalism, but today its persuasiveness is weakening. The tendency toward assumption of universalism was strong among philosophers in the lineage of Anglo-American analytical philosophy, who argued that the truth could be established by clarifying the logical structure of language. Today, however, few adopt this blatant universalism. Nevertheless, the assumption that philosophy is something that is valid anywhere in the world remains largely taken for granted, and anyone anywhere in the world is thought to be able to join in the discussion on philosophy on an equal footing, ordinarily using the English language.

At first glance, this position appears to be very open-minded. It holds that states and nations are artificial entities that ultimately would be discarded and all individuals would be world citizens of equal status. This idea was not limited to Marxism but widely seen in progressive thought. It naturally led to the assumption that there was no need to consider differences in philosophy according to culture or tradition.

The optimistic notion that states and nations would soon dissolve is, of course, by now seen as highly unlikely. The principles of democracy—which at first were thought to be universally applicable—have been subject to critical scrutiny in Arab nations and elsewhere for reflecting what are essentially Western ideas. Just as in the world of medicine, where both Western and Eastern medicine may both be considered valid,<sup>2</sup> one could argue that it is a kind of intellectual imperialism for (Western-specific) philosophy to be presumed to be universalist.

A second position regarding the universalism of philosophy is that its tradition originated in Greece and exists only as developed over the centuries in the West. This is in fact

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2 The traditions of modern medicine that enjoy the greatest worldwide acceptance as science are those that trace their origins to Western medicine, but other methods of healing, including Chinese, that developed through long traditions also remain, many of them in practice even today. Some of the practices of Oriental medicine are now and then pronounced of dubious effect and tend to be viewed with skepticism by Western medical practitioners. Still, some cases of illness that proved beyond the reach of Western medicine have been cured by such alternative remedies, leading to serious recognition of what can be learned from those traditions.

the particularist view, which might at first seem to be a modest position, intended to delineate the limitations of Western philosophy. According to this stance, philosophy is a specific cultural tradition, without universalist applicability, and therefore is of little use when transplanted to other spheres of culture.

*Philosophy may have developed in the West, but kindred forms are found in various parts of the world.*

If that were the case, only a few people interested in Western philosophy—people unconcerned with necessity—would take up its study. Western philosophy would have the status in a country like Japan similar to, for example, German literature, which offers the lineage of work by great writers and poets like Goethe passed down in the specific geographical

region of Germany. While there is no inevitable *necessity* to transplant German literature to Japan, it has had quite a major impact on the country in modern times. By the same token, no matter how valuable we might think Japanese literature is and how useful it would be for it to be known around the world, it does not follow that world literature *needs* to follow the traditions of Japanese literature.

Philosophy has creatively unfolded over a much broader territory than either German or Japanese literature, but were we to argue that it is something particularistic and limited only to the West; it would follow that philosophy is not something that needs to be accepted in areas other than the West. Proponents of this position, however, do not strictly adhere to the particularity of Western philosophy. Their understanding is, rather, that while philosophy developed only in the West, it does provide a model for the world. They believe that the non-West does need to study and accept it. Philosophy has indeed been accepted not only in the West but in other regions, so arguments that it is strictly particular to the West are difficult to support.

Such a position, however, is even more West-centered than the first position. It would claim that philosophy specific to the West is in itself universal and ought to be acceptable anywhere in the world. It would be equivalent to saying, for example, that German literature is universalistic but Japanese literature is not.

That leads to a third position: It is possible to say that philosophy in the narrow sense certainly originated in Greece and developed in the West, but that kindred forms are found in various parts of the world and that they too can be called “philosophy” in the broad sense. For example, it is widely recognized that systems of thought that can be called philosophy developed in ancient India and China. The terms “Indian philosophy” and “Chinese philosophy” are generally recognized in Japan and the rest of the world.

This position is the most fair and would seem to avoid the pitfall of being overly centered on the West, and yet we cannot avoid some lingering skepticism. In fact, the critique has been presented that what is called “Indian philosophy” and “Chinese philosophy” are nothing more than parts of Indian and Chinese thought that have been

plucked out and presented with the trappings of the Western philosophical approach, and that they are not based on the development of Indian or Chinese thought per se. Western philosophy places reason and faith in diametric opposition, and asserts that its tenets are built on the basis of reason, but Eastern philosophies do not assert such a strict dichotomy and do not consider the two on the same level. Recently, therefore, in place of the terms Indian philosophy or Chinese philosophy, it is now common to speak in somewhat looser terms of “Indian thought” and “Chinese thought.”

In Japan, a major problem with this third position, for all its merits, is that what can be called “Japanese philosophy” before importing Western philosophy was very weak, so that it is difficult to confidently assert any philosophic tradition of our own. The nineteenth-century journalist and political theorist Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901) famously declared: “Japan has no philosophy.” Indeed, when Japan established modern universities, courses in Indian and Chinese philosophy were soon offered, but it was a long time before the subject of “Japanese philosophy” was taught. It was only recently that Kyoto University established a course on the history of “Japanese philosophy,” and the bulk of its content is concerned with the modern era; what there is in traditional thought before that era is a matter of considerable debate. Japanese philosophy—*tetsugaku*—is often associated with the thought of the founder of Sōtō Zen Buddhism, Dōgen (1200–1253), and of the founder of Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism, Shinran (1173–1263). But while their ideas may be cited as examples, it is not clear how or if their thought might form what could be called a tradition of philosophy. It is usual, and more appropriate, therefore, to speak not of the history of Japanese philosophy but of the history of *Japanese thought*. That being the case, even if we adopt the third position described above, we arrive at the conclusion that we do not know what it means to study philosophy in Japan.

The point I would like to make is that none of the three established positions on the scope of “philosophy” explained above is really satisfactory. How important is it to be concerned with Western philosophy? Wouldn’t it be possible to develop a system of thought of a different mode that is not so wedded to the Western philosophical tradition?

In this book, I concern myself mainly with “tetsugaku,” (the Japanese word for philosophy). *Tetsugaku*, now with a tradition of more than 150 years, has a great deal to offer in the advancement of knowledge. During these 150 years, some of Japan’s brightest scholars dedicated themselves to the fervent study of the West and then, based upon what they had learned, made assiduous efforts to construct a distinctive system of thought of their own. In their work are original ideas not found in the writing of Western philosophers—ideas of significance upon which it seems a great waste not to know and build further. While carrying on the work done by those scholars, surely we can further develop what

*Would it be possible to develop a system of thought not wedded to the Western philosophical tradition?*

they began. The *tetsugaku* that has developed over a century and a half, though it does derive from borrowings from the West, has become established as a distinctly Japanese discipline, and it is the work of these scholars that I wish to make my point of departure.

As a parallel example of this kind of development, we might take Buddhism, which originated in India. The Buddhist scriptures were translated into the classical Chinese language, and were transmitted to Japan from China via the Korean peninsula. Over that path and in that process, Buddhism changed so greatly from the viewpoint of other Buddhist regions, that what is called Japanese Buddhism seems almost like a different religion. When we think of Buddhism strictly in terms of the tradition that originated in India, Japan's Buddhism must seem quite an odd derivative, displaying many deviant practices. However, there is much we can learn from these "deviations." Perhaps it is even possible to take Japanese Buddhism as a focal point and reconsider Buddhism as a whole from there. Using a similar approach, in the case of philosophy, *tetsugaku* (哲学; Ch., *zhexue*; Kor., *cheolhag*) is a word in common currency that was coined in Japan and was then accepted in China and Korea as well. In that sense, in East Asia the term has tradition and intellectual weight of its own.

So, while *philosophia* is the tradition that began in Greece and was nurtured in the West, the Eastern traditions—of which *tetsugaku* is one—also deserve consideration in their own right. This broader sense of "philosophy" includes not just Western philosophy as part of our frame of reference, but also embraces without bias the traditions of Japan and East Asia on the same plane as Western philosophy, even though some aspects of *tetsugaku* might seem difficult to call philosophy in the strict sense.

Looked at this way, while (Western) philosophy may have a tradition of more than one thousand years, *tetsugaku* is a relatively new field of scholarship that began about 150 years ago. One of the merits of focusing on *tetsugaku* is that we can avoid the West-centered point of view. It is important to study the philosophy of the West, but there is no need for our thinking to be confined by it. Another merit is that while Western philosophy today appears to be at something of a stalemate and is widely said to be in decline, *tetsugaku* is a relatively young field of scholarship, full of potential for building toward the future and fulfilling its potential.

What I am attempting in this book, then, is to contribute to this development. If *tetsugaku* is not a pursuit of truth (in the sense that *philosophia* was), what might it be seeking? Leaving my response to that question for the following chapter, let me first undertake a brief overview of the trends in Japanese philosophy and examine their features and the issues involved.

### **The Origins of *Tetsugaku***

Nishi Amane, the inventor of the word *tetsugaku*, was born in 1829, the son of a samurai physician of the Tsuwano domain in what is now Shimane prefecture. Nishi studied

Dutch at the domain school and became an avid student of Western learning. In 1862, at the age of 33, he was sent to the Netherlands to study with other young samurai including Tsuda Mamichi (1829–1903, later a noted legal scholar and government official) and Enomoto Takeaki (1836–1908, navy minister and adviser to the Privy Council). Nishi apparently had already become interested in Western philosophy before leaving Japan, for in a letter sent to a friend named Matsuoka Rinjirō, he wrote: “Yasokyō [Christianity] is what is followed by the general populace in the West, but it is not much different from Buddhism and is vulgarity itself. There is little to learn from it. The study of ‘philosophy,’ however, goes far beyond the teachings of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi [that is, Neo-Confucianism].” That account shows his expectations for (Western) philosophy, and belief that it needed to be introduced to Japan.

What captured Nishi’s interest was not only Western philosophy—which he called *Seiyō no seiri no gaku*, or the “Western science of human nature and principle”—but also the more pragmatic science of economics. In the Netherlands, he studied under the famous economist Simon Vissering (1818–1888), focusing mainly on law and economics. He was not from the outset, therefore, a specialist in philosophy, but at the time he was in Europe the philosophy of Comte and Mill, then very influential in the Netherlands, was very closely associated with the social sciences and offered much to satisfy Nishi’s intellectual curiosity. After returning to Japan, Nishi served as an advisor to Tokugawa Yoshinobu, who was shogun from 1862 until the shogunate was abolished in 1867. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Nishi entered the new government and was mainly involved with the establishment of the institutions of the modern military forces. He helped found and was a member of the prestigious Meirokusha (Meiji Six Society), a scholarly society whose members were the leading Enlightenment thinkers of the Meiji era, and exerted considerable influence during his time.

In contrast to the more academic approaches popular in later times, Nishi’s *tetsugaku*, therefore, was very pragmatic in nature and, as in the case of Comte, he saw it as the learning that tied together all other knowledge including the natural and social sciences. In his *Hyakugaku renkan* (Links of All Sciences), the encyclopedic series of lectures he gave in 1870 systemizing the interrelationships among all branches of knowledge, Nishi stated that there was a principle of unity for all phenomena and there needed to be an overall unity for all things; philosophy encompassed all the sciences, and like the king ruling the people of a country, all systems of knowledge were subject to the principles of philosophy. He followed the definition that “philosophy is the science of all sciences.”

Nishi’s *Hyakuichi shinron*, which first established use of the newly coined word *tetsugaku*, clarified this stance. One might think that he was advocating the unification of all religious and ethical teachings (*kyō*), East and West, but probably that was not exactly what he had in mind. Rather it seems that he intended to limit the scope of “teachings.” Nishi was particularly critical of the notion of the union of such teachings and

government, as seen in Neo-Confucianism, which attempted to govern according to moral teachings. He took the position that “government and moral teachings are two quite different things.” Government should be conducted according to laws, not moral rules.

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Nishi’s idea of *tetsugaku*, therefore, was suited to the needs of those who were attempting to forge modern constitutional government in Japan. Even among the early modern period scholars of Confucianism, Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728) had criticized the Neo-Confucianist idea of rule by the virtue of the sovereign. Nishi’s thinking was

influenced by his distaste for Neo-Confucianism and also by his study of Sorai. Even though he seemed to advocate unification of “all teachings,” the scope of teachings that he supported, even of such religions as Buddhism and Confucianism, became restricted. Because he separated the “physics” (*butsuri*) that clarifies the truths of the material world and the “psychology” (*shinri*) that studies the heart and mind of human beings (both traditional fields that were much broader than the “physics” and “psychology” of today), the “teachings” that are related to “psychology” became even more restricted. While defining *tetsugaku* as encompassing the system made up of various sciences, “teachings” were no more than a small part of *tetsugaku*.

So Nishi saw *tetsugaku* as the overarching science of all the sciences that were then developing with great strides in his day. By contrast, he dismissed what had previously been called “teachings” (*kyō*) as only a small part of *tetsugaku*. We can see from this view that his *tetsugaku* had a very practical intention.

The trend in *tetsugaku* after Nishi turned toward Spencerian ideas, applying the theory of evolution to society and providing the ideology supporting the Meiji state’s survival-of-the-fittest policy of “enriching the country and strengthening its arms” (*fu-koku kyōhei*). A contrasting trend was taken up by Nakae Chōmin, who was active in the movement for popular rights (*jiyū minken undō*) and developed his own theory of materialism in his *Ichinen yūhan* (A Year and a Half) and *Zoku ichinen yūhan* (A Year and a Half, Continued), both books written in 1901.

In 1877 a modern university system was set up starting with the establishment of Tokyo University. It had faculties of law, science, letters, and medicine. The Faculty of Letters consisted of two departments, one covering history, philosophy (*tetsugaku*), and political science, and the other Japanese and Chinese literature. Philosophy was thus installed in academia—as *tetsugaku*—and became a subject of instruction. The first qualified instructor of Western philosophy in Japanese academia was Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), who came from the United States to teach at the university in Tokyo (1878–1886). Fenollosa is best known for his achievements in introducing Japanese art

to the West, but at the university he taught philosophy, mainly Hegel. His successor at the Imperial University (as it was renamed in 1886) and influential for a long time thereafter was Raphael von Koeber (1848–1923), a German-Russian scholar who taught mainly Greek and German philosophy between 1893 and 1914.

Koeber was much respected by his students for his noble character and he played a major role in turning the very pragmatic orientation of philosophy/*tetsugaku* in the early years of the Meiji era in the direction of more advanced learning. Because of the long history of Western philosophy going back to the Greeks, he emphasized to his students that they must first get a firm grasp of its history, and in that way he firmly implanted Western philosophy in the young intellectuals he taught as part of their basic educational cultivation. That does not mean that philosophy became an objective science or “science for science’s sake.” The young men who gathered in his classes were grappling with very real problems in their lives in those tumultuous times, and they sought answers to their dilemmas in the Western philosophy that Koeber taught. Gradually, philosophy began to change from an ideological tool for the management of the state into a path of inquiry along which the individual could seek answers to life’s burning questions. The Kant and Schopenhauer that Koeber taught were in particular read as guides for navigating life.

Nishida Kitarō’s (1870–1945) statement in the preface to *Zen no kenkyū* (published in 1911; trans. as *An Inquiry into the Good*) that “the problem of human life is the central concern running throughout the book,”<sup>3</sup> spoke for the many young students of philosophy of that time, so it is not surprising that the book became the all-time best-seller in *tetsugaku* in modern Japan. In a way, *tetsugaku* served as a kind of alternative to religion. The young intellectuals of the time reared on ideas from the modern Enlightenment spurned the long-established religions of their culture as mere superstition, and sought to replace such beliefs by turning to *tetsugaku*. Grounding themselves in Western-derived learning, they groped toward a rational way of life based on the self-reliance of the individual.

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It is from that starting point that the “Kyoto School” Nishida founded at Kyoto Imperial University took the lead in *tetsugaku*. While devoting himself to philosophy, Nishida, who in his young days had frequented temples to practice Zen meditation, sought to link a new, individual-centered religious practice—which was different from traditional religion—to *tetsugaku*. Young students who gathered around Nishida at Kyoto University combined fervent discussions of philosophy with Zen meditation sessions.

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3 Nishida 1990, p. xxx.

*Tetsugaku* again addressed the issues of the state and society when, following the birth of the Soviet Union (1922), Marxism began to draw attention worldwide. The Japanese Communist Party, aiming at the attainment of an ideal society, despite repeated suppression by the authorities, appealed to intellectuals and students and absorbed the energies of many young people of the time. Harsh efforts to stamp out its activities eventually led many JCP members to recant (*tenkō*), switching their loyalties as the power of state controls gained momentum. While the direction was the opposite, in the sense that people's attention was drawn to the issues of the state and society, there was continuity from the Marxist-influenced era to the statist-dominated era that followed. Then the country began its plunge into the international war that lasted until 1945.

### **Into the Labyrinth**

This book is not an attempt to follow the history of modern Japanese philosophy. It does not intend to offer an introduction to modern Japanese philosophy, but rather draws on its history and distinctive insights to take a fresh look at the various issues of philosophical inquiry. I naturally make reference to Western philosophy as well as to traditional East Asian and Indian thought. But the purpose of this book, with the inherited traditions of Japan's modern philosophy as my guide, is to explore the possibility of new developments. I do not limit myself to the field of philosophy in the narrow sense but take up some works that are philosophical in a wider sense. After all, the development of philosophy today must not be concerned only with the discipline in the narrow academic sense but consider problems of thought more broadly.

The path forward in approaching such problems is not likely to be clear and logical. It will only be possible to proceed with some twists and turns, moving forward a little at a time. Sometimes we will find ourselves in a labyrinth, and yet, by the time our journey is at its end, we will hopefully be somewhat closer to our goal.

I will begin with the very fundamental questions. After looking at the issues philosophy is concerned with, I will then move on to relationships with the Other. This involves questions of ethics, but we will see that is not all. Taking hints from issues of language, we will examine relations with the Other that transcend ethics. Also, we are likely to have to consider issues such as death and the divine, which are not ordinarily dealt with in philosophy. Having these problems as our basic premise will lead us to the basic issue of "who am I?" In addition, I will consider issues of a somewhat applied nature, such as religion, nature, and society. At least that is what I would like to attempt, although I am not sure it will all go according to plan.

I am not in fact a specialist in philosophy. I am a scholar of rather narrow perspective who has been engaged with the study of Buddhism and Japan's traditional thought. This project of constructing a new approach to philosophy is one I undertake with some trepidation, constantly asking myself if I have embarked on an adventure that is beyond my

powers. I cannot help thinking, nonetheless, that those Japanese who have been called philosophers up until now expended far too much energy in importing Western philosophy. Couldn't they have started with material closer at hand? If philosophy is something that we really need, it seems to me that we should be able to stand on our own feet and think with our own brains to pursue it, even if in a somewhat unpolished way.

Each chapter of this book begins with an epigraph quoting from one of Japan's philosophers or thinkers and proceeds by following along the clues for understanding that it offers. I will introduce Nishi Amane, Nishida Kitarō, Suzuki Daisetz, Watsuji Tetsurō, Kiyozawa Manshi, Tanabe Hajime, Natsume Sōseki, Minakata Kumagusu, Hiratsuka Raichō, Maruyama Masao, and Yanagita Kunio. Of these, only Nishi in his early years, Nishida, Tanabe, Watsuji, and Maruyama were philosophers in the narrow sense. Tanabe was Nishida's successor at Kyoto University, and yet he led the critique of Nishida. Watsuji, too, was called to Kyoto University by Nishida, but later went over to Tokyo Imperial University, where he was put in charge of the courses on ethics, and later in time developed his own original system of ethics. Kiyozawa was trained in philosophy and began his career in religious philosophy, but after struggling with rational philosophy he worked out a theorization of the position of faith in Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism. Suzuki Daisetz was a close friend of Nishida's and enjoys international renown as a Zen thinker. Maruyama Masao was a political scientist and scholar of intellectual history. These scholars were active in *tetsugaku* and its immediate periphery.

The other thinkers I take up in the latter half of the book, on the other hand, have more tenuous links with philosophy in Japan. Natsume Sōseki is usually introduced as a writer and novelist, Hiratsuka Raichō as an activist for women's rights, and Minakata and Yanagita are generally known as scholars of folklore studies. While philosophy generally begins and ends with comparatively abstract discussions, the ideas these people developed proceed along very concrete lines. It is my belief that ideas from these more applied fields need to be introduced into the realm of "philosophy."

The philosophers and others I introduce here are leading names, but do not, of course, account for all the important thinkers of modern Japan. The only postwar thinkers I include are Maruyama and a few others; my discussion centers mainly on these older figures, for they now represent what could be called the classic stance of modern Japanese philosophy. Even if we were to tackle the most up-to-date philosophical problems of our own time, we would very likely start by going back to them.

So, where will this adventure lead? Even if my argument should be somewhat rough-hewn in places, I believe that if it can chart something of an identifiable course, there will be some hope for developing a bona fide philosophy of Japan. While not being able to see clearly even myself what the way forward has in store, I am filled with both trepidation and expectation as I embark on this journey into the labyrinth of philosophy.