

BOOK REVIEWS

Charlotte Ikels, ed., *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004. 320 pp. ISBN: 0-804-74790-3 (hbk), \$60.

Reviewed by Leslie Williams

In East Asia, Confucian philosophy so pervasively structures interpersonal relations that its influence can easily be taken for granted. In the classroom, social dynamics in China, Korea, and Japan cannot be effectively addressed without introducing the Five Relationships that have grounded all proper interaction in East Asian societies. Bright students are often curious about the realities of the present, but Confucian thought belongs to the realm of tradition. The task of reconciling traditional forms and present-day behavior has been made a great deal easier thanks to this new publication.

This edited volume provides candid and unflinching perspectives on contemporary practices of filial piety in mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Frankly, behavior is not what it used to be, *vis-à-vis* ideal Confucian standards. The ideal stem or extended family residence in which parents live with at least one married child is still routinely found, most notably in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. But numerous are the exceptions to this pattern.

A wave of social, political, and economic changes, detailed in four chapters, have changed the traditional family landscape in rural mainland China. Young married couples make more income than their elders, and this has precipitated changes: married sons and daughters-in-law are less compliant, the position of elderly parents is more dependent upon the young, and separate nuclear family dwellings routinely emerge. In extreme circumstances, when married children are intransigent in their refusal to support their aging parents and the local economy is unfavorable, the elderly are marginalized and forced to fend for themselves, often being bitter about their offspring's shabby treatment and lack of filial behavior. In rural China, family division contracts, meal rotation, and separate dwellings are some of the strategies employed to strike a compromise between vastly differing expectations and to mitigate cross-generational tensions.

On the whole, roles have been reversed: the elderly, rather than the young, are now pawns. Elderly parents who are unwilling to live according to this new script, which is vastly divergent from their own past life experience, are sometimes literally left out in the cold. Some parents even bemoan the fact that they have offspring, since those with no children can secure more substantial care from the state. While several PRC policies have served to make intergenerational relations more tense, the state is ineffective in arbitrating the resulting family disputes. The communist regime has also curtailed traditional funeral rites on ideological grounds, but these important expressions of filial practice have proved difficult to eradicate completely.

Parents in urban areas of the PRC often receive retirement pensions, allowing them to be less dependent on their children and maintain more familial power and respect. But these urban dwellers, more often than not, prefer to live in their own apartments rather than risk intergenerational conflicts.

Urban family dynamics in mainland China and Taiwan occupy two chapters. Contemporary Taiwan appears to be a more congenial environment for more traditional strains of filial practice. According to research by Martin K. Whyte, 35% of parents in his sample in the urban mainland lived with a married child, as opposed to 63% of parents who did so in his Taipei sample (pp. 111,117). Persisting patrilineal kinship and the comparative lack of pensions for the elderly in Taipei are two salient factors mentioned here that have made traditional expressions of filial practice more frequent in the Taiwan sample when compared to the population considered in mainland China's Baoding.

Two chapters document family changes in South Korea. As in other parts of East Asia, the relationship between husband and wife has become more privileged than the filial one between a son and his parents. Although over 56% of elder Koreans appear to live with a married child (p. 142), fewer sons are supporting their parents, and there seems to be a tendency for married couples to pay more attention to the wife's parents than the husband's (as is the rule in orthodox Confucian thought). Tables have been turned, and even in instances where the elderly parents live with their son's family, the daughter-in-law is more apt to be in control rather than the mother-in-law (as formerly was the case). One survey cites reports that 50% of elderly respondents "suspected" they had previously been "deliberately" neglected by children whose responsibility it is to support them.

Filial practice in Japan is covered in three chapters. Passive rebellion characterizes a host of behaviors exhibited by young Japanese who feel trapped under the heavy burden of obligations to social superiors, particularly parents. Confucian ideals have conferred absolute authority upon elders in Japan (regardless of whether they merit it or not), group demands always override individual concerns, and Akiko Hashimoto argues that in Japan's Confucian social order, legitimate and overt rebellion is cognitively impossible. The result is that young Japanese people are "profoundly disengaged, apathetic, and indifferent," while parents likewise ignore problems because the ideal of filial piety remains an unquestioned reality that "camouflages" problems for the sake of maintaining harmony (p. 195).

In Japan's Tohoku region, farmers, fishermen, and eldest sons are not attractive marriage partners for young women. John Traphagan divulges that young women do not want to marry an eldest son because they are then bound to become the primary caretakers for not only the man's children, but also his parents. In addition, mother-in-law versus daughter-in-law friction is legendary, with the husband routinely siding with his parents' wishes rather than his wife's. Young women's changing expectations and their increasing unwillingness to shoulder filial responsibilities has resulted in brides from the Philippines entering these rural communities to fill the breach.

Brenda Jenike, citing her fieldwork in Tokyo's Sugunami Ward, provides poignant glimpses of an increasingly displaced cohort of Japanese senior citizens: those 80 years of age and older. These great-grandparent-aged individuals are marginalized in their own families and communities because of the following six factors: (1) they are identified as being "frail" (p. 227); (2) there is a lack of rehabilitation programs and encouragement to attend them when available; (3) senior citizen clubs cater to a younger senior cohort; (4) supply of senior day care facilities lags far behind the demand; (5) day care facilities favor less healthy seniors at the expense of healthy seniors' participation; and finally, (6) these most elderly are neglected by their own families with whom they live. As a result, these individuals lament their advanced age as being a distinct liability.

This volume presents clear and riveting perspectives from the trenches of ethnographers on the front lines. Its substantive ethnographic data admirably fills a void in our understanding of social realities in contemporary East Asia by registering the pulse of filial practice in the global age. Another plaudit for this book is the scholars' sensitivity to the

fact that definitions of filial piety are situationally determined; while some common denominators exist, there are interesting divergent understandings depending on the population. This work is a ready reference for all students of East Asian cultures and societies.

William Johnston, *Geisha, Harlot, Strangler, Star: A Woman, Sex & Morality in Modern Japan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. viii + 243 pp. ISBN 0-231-13052-X (hbk), \$29.50.

Reviewed by Jan Bardsley

On May 19, 1936, the story of a sensational murder made national news in Japan. Abe Sada had been arrested for strangling her lover, a restaurant owner and married man by the name of Ishida Kishizō, in the Tokyo red-light district of Asakusa. Following the murder, she had cut off his genitals and taken them with her when she slipped out of the inn. Newspaper reports of the couple's endless and experimental lovemaking and the gruesome end to their affair fascinated the public. Occurring only a few months after the famous February 26th attempted coup d'état, the story of Abe and Ishida provided some relief from the apprehension stirred by national politics. It also exemplified one of the imaginative themes of the era, the play of *ero-guro-nansensu* (the erotic, grotesque, and nonsensical). In fact, the evocative power of the incident continued long after Abe Sada had been released from her six-year prison sentence. She became the subject of sexuality studies, novels, and films. In 1976, Ōshima Nagisa's film *Ai no corrida* [Realm of the Senses] brought international attention to the Abe Sada story and renewed sensationalism: the film's graphic sexuality caused it to be banned from Japan for decades.

Geisha, Harlot, Strangler, Star reads like a crime novel. We learn much about Abe, her self-described life on the margins as a geisha, prostitute, maid, mistress, and cafe waitress, and about how she and Ishida became entangled in their affair. We follow Abe through her youth and the trauma of rape, her vulnerability to venereal disease (she is eventually diagnosed with tertiary-stage syphilis), her trial and imprisonment, and what is known of her life after her release. At every turn, Johnston strives to let Abe speak for herself, relying a good deal on what she said at her interrogation by the police after her arrest.

Johnston also appends his translation of “Notes from the Police Interrogation of Abe Sada” at the end of the book so the reader can get the fullest sense of Abe’s account. The notes, Johnston assumes, are only a portion of what Abe told the police in the month-long interrogation. Reading the notes is rather eerie, especially as one sees how guilelessly Abe relates the story of her life, her passionate love for Ishida, and her feelings about the crime. Others in her life, especially middle school principal Ōmiya Gorō, her sometime lover and benefactor, worry that Abe is on a path to self-destruction, but they have no idea of how far she will go and how much their own lives will be affected in the process. Abe’s interrogating officer, Adachi Umezō, who was charged with establishing the truth, believed that Abe “held back nothing” in her straightforward account of her life and crime (p. 124). He also found little in Abe that resembled either a criminal or an alluring geisha, or for that matter, a restaurant hostess. Adachi remarked on how excited Abe became when describing her love for Ishida and his “technique” in pleasing her (p. 124).

Geisha, Harlot, Strangler, Star is also an outstanding history of life on the lower rungs of Japanese society in the 1920s and ’30s. It would work well as a text in college-level modern Japanese history, literature, and women’s studies classes. Descriptions of sex acts and even the nasty mutilation are not the primary focus of the book, and students would learn much about the underside of prewar Japan from reading this. Following Abe Sada, we see how the justice system worked and what it was like to live in a women’s prison. We also learn about the sex trade, the fluidity of marriage among the common class, and the kind of mobility among places, families, employment, and lovers a woman like Abe Sada could experience. The book’s photographs of Abe give an idea of how her case was reported in newspapers; most interesting is one from *The Mainichi Newspaper*, which shows how Abe’s head is completely covered in a conical straw hat while she is being led into the courtroom by five male guards (p. 137).

Geisha, Harlot, Strangler, Star prompts comparisons with other historical studies and with works of fiction. For example, this volume adds a valuable dimension to our histories of modern Japanese women, especially those who run afoul of the law. One could compare it to Mikiso Hane, *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), which includes personal accounts of prison life by women whose political defiance landed them in jail, and in some cases, caused their executions. Looking at both books, as well as studies of women who tried to work within the system,

one might ask how thinking about Abe's crime could broaden our idea of women and politics in 1930s Japan.

Abe Sada's mobility – her frequent changing of jobs, partners and locales – and her apparent drive for sexual pleasure also recall the Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693) classic, *Koshoku ichidai onna* [Life of an Amorous Woman].¹ A comparison of Abe's confession and the amorous women in Saikaku's work could raise interesting ideas about how narratives of aberrant sexuality can be used to entertain and to comment on social mores of the larger society. In another vein, we might compare media thrill in Japan over Abe to the much-acclaimed American Broadway musical and film, *Chicago*, and its enthrallment with the jazz-crazed beauty who slays her lover. What makes the femme fatale provoke such fascination in 1930s Japan and in American popular culture today?

In his concluding chapter, "Epilogue: A Trail of Re-Creations," Johnston considers this fascination by briefly introducing his reader to the wide variety of Japanese works that Abe Sada inspired. Apparently, some of the accounts made Abe feel as if she were reading about a stranger. One postwar work in particular drew her ire. She sued the author Kimura Ichirō when he published *Abe Sada iro zange* [The Erotic Confessions of Abe Sada] in 1947, an "alleged" confession that borrowed liberally from Abe's interrogation report but described her in mainly sexual terms. In retort, Abe published *Abe Sada shuki* [Memoirs of Abe Sada] in 1948, in which she continued to maintain that from start to finish her affair with Ishida was all about love.

Intriguingly, although Abe Sada stories continued to emerge, Abe herself disappeared from view. As Johnston writes, "The vast corpus of works on Abe Sada is a subject that merits a book in itself. What is important here is simply that ever since she committed murder and mutilation, her story has kindled imaginations. While her actions were extraordinary, her life opened a window on all-too-ordinary human desires and passions, raising themes that have continued to resonate in the minds of people in Japan and elsewhere" (pp. 161-162). In offering this richly contextualized, accessible, and detailed volume of the Abe Sada case, Johnston has paved the way for studies of the multiple recreations of the woman and her crime.

¹ Ihara Saikaku, *The Life of an Amorous Woman, and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Ivan Morris (London: Chapman & Hall, 1963).

James W. Heisig. *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 2001. xi + 380 pp. ISBN 0-8248-2480-6 (hbk), \$42; 0-8248-2481-4 (pbk), \$25.30.

Reviewed by Gereon Kopf

James Heisig's *Philosophers of Nothingness*, the English version of his *Filósofos de la nada*, appeared in 2001 and has ever since provoked a series of superlative reviews published in the common venues dealing with Japanese thought and comparative philosophy, praising it for the most part as a brilliant milestone in scholarship of the Kyoto School. Such it is in many ways. In this book, Heisig presents a clear, insightful, and accessible exposition of the philosophy advanced by arguably the three most important thinkers of the so-called Kyoto School – Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, and Nishitani Keiji – that was sorely lacking in the English and German speaking world as well as, I assume, most languages other than Japanese. In three sections, which are enclosed by an orientation and a prospectus, Heisig portrays the philosophies of Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani by focusing on their conceptual achievements, the ventures into political thought that all three thinkers engaged during the militarism of Showa Japan, and the religious dimension central to these philosophies. He does this in an extremely engaging style that draws the reader into the world of Kyoto School thought and kindles a passion for the issues the three thinkers had been struggling with throughout their careers.

In addition, Heisig's strategy to separate technical arguments from the main body of the text is, in my opinion, brilliant. This method not only makes the text immensely readable, but the narrative notes that Heisig presents in an addendum of roughly seventy pages also constitute the perfect venue for following up different arguments that, while sometimes only tangential to the main thread of the book, nevertheless, provide insightful if not absolutely necessary information. Since Heisig thus gathers the notes by section rather than assigning them to individual terms or citations, reviewer Brett Davis suggests that this method may make "the task of tracking down a particular reference a bit cumbersome."² Citing the

² Brett Davis, "Introducing the Kyoto School as World Philosophy: Reflections on James Heisig's *Philosophers of Nothingness*," *The Eastern Buddhist* 34/2 (2002), p. 146.

references in the order in which the quotations appear would make them easily accessible and still maintain an otherwise superb format.

One of the main contributions of Heisig's book is his argument that the thought of Kyoto School thinkers constitutes essentially a world philosophy or, at least, a call for one. In short, Heisig contends that Kyoto School philosophy transcends the borders of a parochial philosophy and provides the impetus and the method to do philosophy that draws from various philosophical traditions. Heisig argues that "even this very idea of comparative philosophy ends up confirming the assumption that the only world philosophy is philosophy done in the western mold. This is the mold that Nishida, Tanabe and Nishitani have broken, though the consequences of that rupture have only just begun to affect those engaged in the classical western philosophy around the world" (p. 8). Here, Heisig not only describes the project of the Kyoto School but boldly and justifiably challenges the hypothesis that philosophy must be "philosophy in the western mold."

In addition, he points out the irony, whether consciously intended or not, with which Heidegger's claim identifying philosophy with the tradition emerging from the Greeks declares a geographically-restricted philosophy to be universal. The Kyoto School philosophers suggest an alternative methodology by interweaving Western and Buddhist ideas in the form of Nishida's "worldly world" 世界の世界 or "world of world history" 世界史の世界,³ and their variations on the notion of "absolute nothingness" 絶対無. I will return to the latter concept below. The key to the conundrum of world philosophy lies, as Heisig is well aware, in the term "philosophy" itself. Of course, the academic discipline of Philosophy takes its name from the Greek word *philosophia*, first used by Homer and Herodotus, but the etymology of a name does not preclude other traditions.

³ Ironically, Nishida developed these two concepts in the context of his politically controversial "*The Problem of Japanese Culture*" 日本文化の問題, to argue that Japan, as any other culture, has to become "worldly" (today we would say "global") in order to theorize the role Japan has in the world. It shows the tension between Nishida's "political philosophy" and his "fundamental inspirations," and supports Heisig's interpretation that the former distracted from the latter (p. 99). *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* 西田幾多郎全集 [Collected Works of Kitarō Nishida], vol. 12 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten 岩波書店, 1988), pp. 275-394.

P.T. Raju has argued in his 1962 work, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy*, that the Sanskrit *darsana* and the Chinese *xia* 家 (J. *ka*) similarly denote a philosophical discourse in the narrow sense. Gene Blocker's *World Philosophy: An East-West Comparative Introduction to Philosophy* more forcefully attempts to create one world philosophy by combining the foundational thinkers of Greece, India, and China to introduce and discuss the fundamental issues and arguments in metaphysics, epistemology, etc.

It does seem, therefore, more than appropriate that the push towards a world philosophy initiated by the philosophers of the Kyoto School and their contemporaries in India such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan is supplemented by fundamental discussions on the nature of philosophy. Heisig's three-level definition of philosophy as a "more or less conscious myth or framework of values," a "more critical body of thought dealing with ultimate questions, systematically recorded and transmitted," and the "particular tradition that began in Athens" (p. 7) offers a good starting point. The fact that he is preparing a symposium on "Re-defining Philosophy" illustrates the importance a rethinking of philosophy has for the project of developing world philosophy.⁴

Let me state very clearly that I completely agree with Heisig's argument and sympathize with his projects; however, the project of a world philosophy raises a few important questions, especially with regard to the categories we generally use. I would like to focus here on those pertaining to Heisig's project in *Philosophers of Nothingness*. A malicious intent could misconstrue his argument that Kyoto School philosophers, as the most prominent representatives of Japanese philosophy, laid the foundations for a world philosophy and think it equates three terms: Kyoto School philosophy, Japanese philosophy, and world philosophy. This is, of course, not the case, but headings such as "Japanese philosophy as World Philosophy" beg the question of what our categories mean. Is membership in the Kyoto School defined by direct lineage or by even a closed society limited to "Nishida, Tanabe, and their disciples," as Masakatsu Fujita suggests,⁵ or is it possible to define the Kyoto School philosophy by method or content as the title *Philosophers of Nothingness* implies?

⁴ See <http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/projects/projects.htm>.

⁵ Masakatsu Fujita, *The Philosophy of the Kyoto School* 京都学派の哲学 (Kyoto: Shōwadō 昭和堂, 2001), p. ii.

Similarly, is Japanese philosophy defined by geography, ethnicity of the author, language in which it is conducted, or by some intangible essence evoked by, among others, D.T. Suzuki and, more recently, Takeshi Umehara? What are the parameters of a world philosophy that transcends provinciality and invites a variety of traditions and methodologies without becoming a meaningless label? These questions are of course immensely challenging and Heisig does an exemplary job of negotiating the difficulties and traps inherent in these definitions. For example, in his notes, he presents the etymology of the term Kyoto School invented by Jun Tosaka in 1932 along with varying lists of school members suggested by the 1998 *Dictionary of Philosophy and Thought* 哲学・思想事典 as well as a number of scholars ranging from Takeuchi Yoshinori to Shibayama Futoshi.

Heisig also is actively pursuing the question of what constitutes Japanese philosophy in a source book he is presently preparing jointly with Thomas Kasulis and John Maraldo.⁶ Finally, his focus on the triad of Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani is warranted since (a) his emphasis is the variations on the philosophy of nothingness of which Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani represent three fundamental approaches, and (b) it was probably the works of Tanabe and Nishitani that brought the philosophy of Nishida and the Kyoto School to the level of prominence they have today. This, of course, does not preclude the observation that an English language exposition of the Kyoto School philosophy that includes the so-called minor thinkers of the school, in addition to the already available *A Sourcebook of Modern Japanese Philosophy* by David A. Dilworth, Valdo H. Viglielmo, and Agustin Jacinto Zavala would make an important contribution to comparative philosophy.

My sole disappointment with this book is that Heisig did not make more of the title *Philosophers of Nothingness*. Not only could this phrase be used to avoid the question of whether or not to define the Kyoto School by lineage and simultaneously highlight the main contribution of these philosophers, but it also leads straight to the center of the philosophies of Nishida, Tanabe and Nishitani. In fact, I believe that the notion of nothingness, even though it is not the one I would choose, could be used as a heuristic device to unlock the intricacies of their philosophies. Nishida, as Heisig states rather succinctly, was driven to find the one absolute principle that grounds all thought. In fact, his work can be read as an exploration of

⁶ See <http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/projects/projects.htm>.

possible candidates to function as such a principle.

In some sense, he found it in the notion of “absolute nothingness” 絶対無 “that is ‘absolved’ of any opposition that could render it relative, so that its only opposition to the world of being is that of an absolute to a relative” (p. 62) and, at the same time, “it allowed individuals, just as they are, to stand in opposition to one another as *absolute* contradictories” (p. 64). This principle constitutes Nishida’s response to the philosophical problems evoked by the dualism of European enlightenment thought, especially Kantianism and the founding block of philosophy on which he built, or at least tried to erect, his approaches to history and religion. The place where Nishida succeeded most in developing this notion of absolute nothingness that combined the oppositions of self and other, or subject and predicate without dissolving them was his philosophy of religion, to be exact, his notion of “inverse correspondence.”

This concept summarizes Nishida’s belief that “the stronger the opposition, the more deeply rooted the identity” (p. 103). Tanabe reinterpreted the notion of “absolute nothingness” he inherited from his teacher Nishida and located it squarely within the immanent realm of oppositions. While frequently sounding similar to Nishida’s later philosophy, which undoubtedly received some influence from Tanabe’s thought, Heisig clearly identifies their main difference: “For Tanabe absolute nothingness...is not an unmediated universal...itself lacking in differentiation...It does not *belong* to being, but at the same time its activity is only *manifest* in the world of being, refracted, for example, in the ethical activities of self-negating praxis” (p. 120). While Nishida’s absolute nothingness shares this ambivalence of being transcendent yet immanent, it does privilege the moment of identity, if only by virtue of Nishida’s terminology. Tanabe’s version of absolute nothingness is, instead, historical in the form of the “specific” (種) it mediates but it does not identify the universal and the individual. Similarly, it is this perseverance of the moments of differentiation and otherness in the form of “other-power” (他力) that enables his “absolute critique” of “the hybris of reason” (p. 161) and a methodology Heisig describes as “philosophy-*in*-religion” (p. 162).

Finally, Nishitani replaces the notion of absolute nothingness with that of “emptiness” to stress its indebtedness to the Buddhist tradition and to shift from the search for a foundational logic to the rhetoric of the standpoint. This “standpoint of emptiness, then, is not so much a philosophical ‘position’ as it is the achievement of an original self-

awareness compared to which all other consciousness is caught in the fictional darkness of ignorance” (p. 222). Nishitani bases on this standpoint and the notion of selflessness it entails not only his philosophy of religion or what can be called an attempt at constructing a Zen philosophy, but more concretely an ethics and philosophy of science that conquers the alienation engendered by egocentrism in its philosophical sense and nihilism. In this way, the notion of “nothingness” does facilitate a comparison that brings out the differences between the three main Kyoto School philosophers and, simultaneously, focuses on their contribution to a world philosophy.

The questions, however, that remain in my mind are as follows: How will these variations on the philosophy of nothingness “be seen to have made a more lasting impact on twentieth century philosophy” than neo-Kantianism (p. 260)? How can these philosophies be extracted from “their naïve contexts” (p. 264) and be evaluated not merely as an interesting historical phenomenon, but rather as a major contribution towards a world philosophy? Or, as Joseph O’Leary puts it, “how can we sift what is living from what is dead in the philosophy of the Kyoto School?”⁷ My suspicion is that the answer to these questions lies exactly in developing something akin to a philosophy of nothingness from the sources of Kyoto School thinkers that does not take Kantian or neo-Kantian philosophy as its orientation but rather presents it as an example of contemporary thought, as Heisig implicitly suggests in his “Prospectus.” If this can be done successfully, I believe, the philosophies of the Kyoto School and, especially, the principle or standpoint of absolute nothingness will be able to provide a promising paradigm for a philosophy beyond parochial mindsets and boundaries.

In the final section, I would like to give a brief nod to a few topics ever present in scholarship on the Kyoto School. First, concerning a possible interpretation of Kyoto School philosophy as Buddhist thought, Heisig clearly and succinctly states that “the Kyoto school philosophers are eastern and they are Buddhist. But their aim and context is neither eastern nor Buddhist” (p. 8). Rather, their orientation is the Continental philosophy of their time, while their interpretations of Buddhism are idiosyncratic at best and more often than not have been rejected by many scholars of Buddhist studies.

Second, Heisig’s judgment concurs with this point when he tackles the perennial debate on whether Nishida supported the Japanese nationalist

⁷ Joseph O’Leary, “Philosophers of Nothingness: an Essay on the Kyoto School,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29/1-2 (2001), pp. 97-102.

ideology of his time. In short, according to Heisig, while Nishida “lent validity to the question of the identity of the Japanese spirit” and while “his idea of nation shared with the ideological propaganda...important assumptions about the special mission of the Japanese people,” the universalism of his general philosophical system and “inspiration” was in marked contrast to his adventures into political thought. Third, even though the notion of no-self constitutes a centerpiece of Kyoto School philosophy, Heisig correctly acknowledges that Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani failed, for the most part, to acknowledge the polyvalence as well as the ethical implications of this concept. All three instances reveal not only Heisig’s discerning insights but also his fair evaluation of Kyoto School philosophy in avoiding an uncritical adherence to as well as an equally uncritical rejection of the philosophers of nothingness.

I would also like to comment on Heisig’s idiosyncratic translation of Tanabe’s notion of *shu no ronri* as “the logic of the specific.” I find his choice of rendering intriguing and preferable to the traditional, literal rendition of the Japanese original as “logic of species,” not the least because it serves to distinguish Tanabe’s interpretation from Hegel’s terminology (p. 314). However, this may be a case where the reader could benefit from an explanation of this choice of words or even a *kanji* glossary especially since Heisig’s translation constitutes a break from not only the general use in Tanabe scholarship but also from his own rendition of *shu* as “species” in two essays published in 1990.⁸

In conclusion, Heisig’s book stands out as one of the most insightful and fascinating studies of the philosophies of the Kyoto school that simultaneously contributes to scholarship and functions as an introduction to the philosophies of nothingness.

⁸ James W. Heisig, “Foreword,” *Philosophy of Metanoetics*, trans. Takeuchi Yoshinori, Valdo Vigieliemo, and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. vii-xxx; and James W. Heisig, “The ‘Self That is Not a Self’:” Tanabe’s Dialectics of Self-Awareness,” *The Religious Philosophy of Tanabe Hajime*, eds. Taitetsu Unno and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1990), pp. 277-290.