

# ***JAPAN STUDIES REVIEW***

Volume Nine  
2005

Interdisciplinary Studies of Modern Japan

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**JAPAN STUDIES REVIEW**

**VOLUME NINE**

**2005**

A publication of the Southern Japan Seminar  
and Florida International University

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the ninth volume of the *Japan Studies Review* (JSR), an annual peer-reviewed journal sponsored by the joint efforts of the Southern Japan Seminar and the Institute for Asian Studies at Florida International University, with partial funding from the Japan Foundation. JSR continues to be both an outlet for publications related to Southern Japan Seminar events and a journal that encourages submissions from a wide range of scholars in the field.

Appearing in this issue are four articles on a variety of topics related to the Japanese literature form of *haikai*, social and political turmoil during the Meiji Restoration period (1869-1912), and the implications of learning karaoke in a group-oriented society.

The first article, "Depopularizing the Popular: *Tentori Haikai* and the Bashō Revival" by Cheryl Crowley, focuses on the Bashō Revival movement in the middle of the eighteenth century, when Bashō poets, (commoners and low-ranking *samurai*) meant to redesign the popular comic form *haikai* into a prestigious genre of literature.

Following this, "From Fukuzawa to Blaut: On the Origins of Japanese Eurocentrism" by Daniel K.T. Woo, studies the influence of the notion of Eurocentrism, or Western superiority, on the philosophy of the Japanese scholar Fukuzawa Yukichi, who sought independence from governmental interference as well as from old customs and practices of the Meiji Restoration.

The third article, "National Morality, the State, and 'Dangerous Thought': Approaching the Moral Ideal in Late Meiji Japan" by Richard Reitan, studies the tension near the end of the Meiji era between a state-sponsored intellectual movement concerned to identify and legitimize national identity with ideas of loyalty and filiality and an anti-state movement that emphasized anarchy, socialism, and individualism.

The final article, "Karaoke Learning in Japan: Individual Expression in a Group Context" by Hideo Watanabe, analyzes the individualistic role of karaoke learning in a socially dependent society, and shows some interesting and surprising results through fieldwork studies.

Also appearing in this issue are five essays. The featured essay by Kinko Ito, "A One-Week Retreat at a Zen Monastery in Japan: An Ethnographic Participant-Observation," provides a personal account of a *dai*

*sesshin*, or one-week retreat, held at a Zen monastery in Japan. The four student essays were selected from a conference contest held in conjunction with a Southern Japan Seminar meeting in November 2003, and will be introduced by guest editor Inger Brodey of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill at the beginning of that section.

Additionally, the volume contains three book reviews of recent publications on Japanese studies. Charlotte Ikels' edited volume on contemporary practices of filial piety in light of social, political, and economic changes in mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan is reviewed by Leslie Williams of Clemson University; William Johnston's work on the Abe Sada murder case is reviewed by Jan Bardsley of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and James Heisig's study on the philosophy of Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani of the Kyoto School is reviewed by Gereon Kopf of Luther College.

Please note: Japanese names are cited with surname first except for citations of works published in English.

Steven Heine, Editor

**Re: Submissions, Subscriptions and Comments**

Submissions for publication, either articles or book reviews, should be made in both hard copy and electronic formats, preferably Word for Windows on a disk (please inquire about other formats). The editor and members of the editorial board will referee all submissions.

Annual Subscriptions are now \$15.00 (US). Please send a check or money order payable to *Florida International University*.

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All comments and feedback on the publications appearing in *Japan Studies Review* are welcome.

ISSN 1550-0713

# Articles



**DEPOPULARIZING THE POPULAR:  
TENTORI HAIKAI AND THE BASHŌ REVIVAL<sup>1</sup>**

*Cheryl Crowley  
Emory University*

*Haikai* is not often discussed in the context of popular culture. It is typically categorized as "classical" Japanese literature. This term suggests that its objects of study are antithetical to popular culture, which is typically a designation for works outside the literary canon. However, in the first centuries of its development, *haikai* was decidedly uncanonical. Originally derived from the elite linked verse form *renga*, the comic form *haikai* got its start as an ephemeral, expendable kind of amusement, and its transformation into a genre of literature that merited refined aesthetic appreciation was a process that took hundreds of years. In this paper, I examine one part of this process: the emergence of the Bashō Revival movement in the middle of the eighteenth century. I explore the ways that the Revival poets, who were commoners and low-ranking samurai, tried to reshape *haikai* into a poetic form equal to that of the elite forms *waka* and *renga*, and in doing so to raise their own status in an era that otherwise offered little social mobility.

While the first part of the eighteenth century was a period of remarkable growth in the number of *haikai* schools and practitioners, the Revival poets viewed their genre's success as problematic, as they equated popularization with vulgarization. Since by definition *haikai* relies on language and imagery that grounds itself in the popular, the Revival poets' stance would appear to be paradoxical. Although they represented only a minority in the *haikai* community of their day, ultimately it is the Revival poets and their successors, rather than their more popular rivals, who eventually came to be regarded as the central figures of *haikai* history. How did this happen?

To consider this question, I will discuss the characteristics of *haikai* that made it a part of popular culture; examine the circumstances of historical development of *haikai* that led to the rise of *tentori* 点取 (point-

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally given as a paper presentation at the April 17, 2004 meeting of the Southern Japan Seminar in Atlanta, Georgia.

scoring) *haikai*, and finally show how the Revival poets' efforts to counteract what they saw as the cheapening effect of popularization as a defense not only of the dignity of *haikai*, but of their own movement.

### The Rise of *Tentori Haikai*

In 1751, the Kyoto *haikai* poet Mōotsu 毛越 published an anthology, *Kokon tanzaku shū* 古今短冊集 (*Ancient and Modern Poetry Card Anthology*), a collection of exemplary *hokku* verses of the past and present printed in the form of reproductions of the poets' own calligraphy. Mōotsu's collection aimed to reinvigorate interest in the work of *haikai* poets of the past – especially that of Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) – showing it to be superior to the common type of *haikai* practitioner of the day. *Kokon tanzaku shū* was not particularly influential, but it is worth taking a look at because of its preface, which was written by the eighteenth century's most prominent *haikai* poet, Yosa Buson (1716-1784).

At the time that Mōotsu asked him to write the preface, Buson was a struggling young painter, recently returned to the Kansai area in order to seek his fortune. He was not a professional *haikai* poet, but he had a good reputation in Edo in the Tōhoku area based on his work with the Yahantei school of Hayano Hajin (1678-1742).<sup>2</sup> Buson's preface, while containing the usual conventional words of praise for the anthology's editor, also included a damning indictment of the mainstream *haikai* poets of the day:

Nowadays those who are prominent in *haikai* have different approaches to the various styles, castigating this one and scorning that one, and they thrust out their elbows and puff out their cheeks, proclaiming themselves *haikai* masters (*sōshō* 宗匠). They will flatter the rich, and cause the small-minded [i.e., *tentori* poets] to run wild, and compile anthologies that list numerous unpolished verses. Those who really know *haikai* frown and throw them away. Indeed, old priest Sainen-bō 西念坊 uses their verses to patch his paper coverlet at night, and old nun Myōshin-ni 妙心尼 uses them to label her jars of miso; is this not a disgrace?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Hajin was a student of Bashō disciples Kikaku and Ransetsu. Buson joined his school around 1734, when he was 20, and he remained a member until Hajin's death.

<sup>3</sup> *Buson zenshū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1994) p. 90. Sainen-bō and Myōshin-ni are typical clerical names; they refer to no one in particular.

Buson's remarks here are a condemnation of practitioners of a highly commercialized form of *haikai*, *tentori* 点取 or point-scoring *haikai*, which had become wildly successful in the early part of the eighteenth century. In *tentori haikai*, a *tenja* 点者, or verse-marker, would set the verse, a go-between would distribute it to students, and then the go-between would deliver the students' responses back to the *tenja*, who would grade them with points. Both the *tenja* and the go-between collected fees for their services, and *tentori haikai* became very lucrative. From the students' point of view, this kind of *haikai* was extremely entertaining: it did not require extensive education or special training, people enjoyed competing with other members of their groups, and it even became a form of gambling as students vied with one another to gain the most points.<sup>4</sup>

While *tentori haikai* offered a means for some people to make a living off their literary talents, other more idealistic poets despised it. Point scoring in itself was not necessarily the problem – similar systems had been used by teachers of *waka* and *renga* as a pedagogical tool for centuries. However, competition for points became an end in itself, and quickly degenerated into an activity that was little more than a game.<sup>5</sup> Also, *tentori* practitioners were less concerned with the craft of poetry than with writing something impressive and witty, to dazzle others and win points from the *tenja*. In this sense, *tentori haikai* strongly favored *zoku* 俗 – the mundane or commonplace – over *ga* 雅 – the elegant and refined.

How to balance *zoku* and *ga* in *haikai* was a perennial question. The early seventeenth century poet credited as *haikai*'s founder, Matsunaga Teitoku 松永貞徳 (1571-1653), defined *haikai* as poetry that contained a *haigon* 俳言, or *haikai* word.<sup>6</sup> By that, he meant words and imagery that came from a lexicon much broader than the highly restricted one permitted to poets writing in *waka* and *renga*.

The vocabulary of *waka* and *renga* was limited to words contained in a few sources, like the early imperial poetry anthologies, as well as *Ise*

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<sup>4</sup> Satō Katsuaki 佐藤勝明, et al., eds., *Renku no sekai* 連句の世界 (Tokyo: Shintensha, 1997), pp. 89-90.

<sup>5</sup> Suzuki Katsutada 鈴木勝忠, "Kyōhō haikai shi" 享保俳諧史, *Haikai shi* 俳諧史, vol. 1 of *Haiku kōza* 俳句講座 (Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1959), p. 210.

<sup>6</sup> Teitoku, *Tensuishō* 天水抄 (compiled 1644). Cited in Satō, *Renku no sekai*, pp. 44-45.

*monogatari* and *Genji monogatari*. *Haikai*, however, was meant to be comic, or at the very least to include a twist of insight that brought together two disparate worlds – the sensitive, exalted realm of *ga* that was included in allusions to classical literature, and the ordinary, everyday realm of *zoku* that was contained within the *haigon*. *Haigon* referred to a wide range of language, ranging from Buddhist terms and Chinese loanwords to *zokugo* 俗語,<sup>7</sup> the vocabulary of everyday life. The friction between the classical and the vernacular, between *ga* and *zoku*, generated the spark that ignited *haikai*'s humor and insightfulness.

Both *ga* and *zoku* were necessary in *haikai*, but the balance between them was not always easy to manage. In their eagerness to produce verses that were clever and exciting, *tentori* poets tended to lean heavily towards the *zoku* to create effects that would win them the most points. Thus, more fastidious poets felt justified in regarding their work as vulgar and lacking in real craft.

The other aspect of *tentori haikai* that dismayed more high-minded poets was that *haikai* itself was becoming a commodity; *tenja* were more interested in profit than in literary quality and made little effort to cultivate taste and sensitivity in their students. Eager to increase their income and maximize the number of students, many were willing to lower their standards in order to make themselves appealing to the largest number of people possible. The growing sophistication of print culture and advances in communication and travel in the eighteenth century also contributed to the commercialization of *haikai*. The accessibility of *haikai* texts and the ease with which disciples could correspond with, and even meet, distant *tenja* put the practice within reach of people even in provincial towns and rural areas, and the *tenja*, in turn, were not slow to capitalize on this.

### Matsuo Bashō and His Successors

One poet who resolved with consummate skill the problem of how to balance *ga* and *zoku* was Matsuo Bashō. After spending his early years working as a *tenja*, Bashō abandoned the role of a for-profit poet and set about seeking a higher standard for *haikai*. Instead of asking for payment for services, Bashō came up with various ways of receiving the patronage of his disciples and friends that did not involve cash, largely by accepting

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<sup>7</sup> Ogata Tsutomu 尾形 侑, *Haibungaku daijiten* 俳文学大辞典 (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1995), pp. 721-722.

lodging and gifts in exchange for his teaching. He was unwaveringly committed to the ideal of making *haikai* the equal of *waka* and *renga*. One of his most famous formulations was "Saigyō's 西行 *waka*, Sōgi's 宗祇 *renga*, Sesshū's 雪舟 painting, and Rikyū's 利休 tea all have the same thing in common"<sup>8</sup> with *haikai*, in other words that *haikai* poets had the potential to aspire to the same level of greatness as the greatest of *waka* and *renga* poets, as well as the greatest of painters and tea ceremony masters. On the face of it, this may not seem like such a radical statement, but it is important to remember that the origins of *haikai* were its function as a recreational interlude between serious bouts of *renga*. It is probably an exaggeration to call it pulp literature, but it might be more safely referred to as "trash," because it was almost always discarded at the end of a *renga* session, even when the rest of the day's labors – the *ushin* 有心 or standard *renga* was recorded and preserved.<sup>9</sup> By calling *haikai* the equal of *waka* and *renga*, Bashō was making a very bold claim for the value of his genre, setting it on the same level with the elite genres of the past.

Bashō's statement also stands out because in terms of social status, the poets who wrote *haikai* were inferior to those who composed *waka* and *renga*. The innermost secrets of *waka* were carefully guarded by the aristocratic houses whose intellectual property they protected; and while persons of lower status (*jige* 地下) could become proficient at *renga*, *ushin renga* was an elite genre. Even someone like Teitoku, whose great literary skill was acknowledged by prominent intellectuals of the day, was excluded from the highest levels of *waka* training because he was a commoner. Comic *renga* – known as *mushin* 無心 or *haikai no renga*, eventually became the genre of choice for commoners.<sup>10</sup> In the early modern period, as commoners began the process of transforming this offshoot of serious *renga*

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<sup>8</sup> Sugiura Seiichirō 杉浦正一郎, et al., eds. *Bashō bunshū* 芭蕉文集, vol. 46 of *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学大 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1959), p. 51. Saigyō (1118-1190) was a priest, *waka* poet, and traveler; Sōgi (1421-1502) was a renowned *renga* poet; Sesshū (1420-1506) was famous for his ink painting; Sen no Rikyū 千利休 (1522-1591) was a founder of the tea ceremony.

<sup>9</sup> Satō, *Renku no sekai*, pp. 91-93.

<sup>10</sup> Kuriyama Riichi 栗山理一, *Haikai shi* 俳諧史 (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1963), pp. 52-60.

into the independent genre *haikai*, their aspirations for it mirrored those that were stirring elsewhere in their lives as a product of the increased prosperity brought by the Tokugawa peace, that is to say, for greater dignity and prestige.

While Bashō and some of his contemporaries started a trend towards a more serious-minded kind of *haikai*, the momentum was lost after his death. *Tentori haikai* continued to attract increasing numbers of followers, and Bashō's disciples splintered into numerous groups. Just like the *tentori* poets, the schools founded by Bashō's disciples competed with one another for students, and even used their affiliation with Bashō as a selling point, each of them claiming exclusive possession of his authentic teaching.

Fifty years later, the Bashō Revival movement emerged from the *haikai* community's chaotic landscape of rivalry, competition, and commercialization. The movement was made up of a loose affiliation of poets, most of whom belonged to schools associated with Bashō, i.e., the Shōmon 蕉門, and included poets like Buson, Takai Kitō 高井几董 (1741-1789), and Katō Kyōtai 加藤暁台 (1732-1792). They were different from their contemporaries in that they advocated a return to the original ideals of Bashō, seeking an understanding of his teachings that was unmediated by an adherence to factional orthodoxies; instead, they aimed to recover the true essence of Bashō's teachings through close examination of his works. They frowned on the un-aesthetic excesses of *tentori haikai* practitioners, and viewed the *tenja* who catered to them as avaricious, talentless toadies.<sup>11</sup>

### The *Bunjin* Ideal

The Bashō Revival poets' hostility towards the *tentori* poets can be attributed to a number of factors. One of them was a development that at first glance might seem unrelated to *haikai*: the rise of the ideal of the *bunjin*, or literatus, which had its origins in the contemporary surge of interest in Sinophilic culture, particularly Chinese poetry and painting.

The Tokugawa shoguns were avid supporters of Chinese studies, particularly Confucian philosophy, as a means of maintaining social order. As knowledge of Chinese philosophy, ethics, and history was disseminated, interest in other aspects of Chinese learning developed. One of the high

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<sup>11</sup> Konishi Jin'ichi 小西甚一, *Haiku no sekai* 俳句の世界 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1995), pp. 195-197.

points of this trend was the emergence of Ogyū Sorai's 荻生徂徠 (1666-1782) *kobunjigaku* 古文辞学, or study of ancient rhetoric school. Sorai emphasized accomplishment in a wide range of artistic pursuits, and prominent among them was poetry. He insisted on the importance of achieving a direct understanding of classical Chinese texts without the encumbrance of commentaries. For Sorai and his followers the Chinese tradition was not something to be passively memorized, but lived out in practice, and poetry was central to the well-lived life.

Sorai and his followers were just one example of a more general trend towards interest in Chinese arts. Increasing numbers of wealthy people, including many commoners, developed a great fascination for Chinese things and skills, and as they possessed great resources in terms of money and leisure time, they were in a position to pay for them. The ideal of the *bunjin* 文人, or literati, arose in this context. *Bunjin* (Chinese: *wenren*) originally referred to scholar-gentlemen who, at various points in Chinese history, withdrew from public service – either voluntarily, in protest, or under duress – in order to pursue reclusive lives of artistic accomplishment. Amateurism was their hallmark; they painted, wrote poetry, and did calligraphy for purposes of self-cultivation; they looked down on professional artists who did the same for money. The *bunjin* ideal appealed to wealthy Japanese commoners because it championed the amateur. Financially secure through other means, they practiced poetry for pleasure, and in doing so claimed the prestige of the Chinese literatus, who disdained profit.<sup>12</sup>

Many *haikai* poets had a close affiliation with the sinophile groups that gave rise to the idealization of the *bunjin*, particularly those *haikai* poets who also wrote *kanshi* (Chinese verse). As a result, there were many points of intersection between the *bunjin* ideal and ideology of the Bashō Revival. In the first place, stress on the value of poetry – writing it as well as reading it – was important to both. In the second place, Revival poets shared with adherents of the *bunjin* ideal a distaste for overt competition over profit and fame. Again, amateurism was the hallmark of the Chinese *wenren*, who painted for the sake of self-cultivation, unlike the professional court painters who worked to please patrons. This had a special resonance for wealthy commoners attracted to the *bunjin* ideal and Revival *haikai* alike. Denied access to real elites (i.e., aristocratic status, participation in

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<sup>12</sup> Kuriyama, *Haikai shi*, pp. 202-208.

government) and contemptuous of the excesses of commoner culture, the glorification of the amateur was a way for non-elite *haikai* poets to aspire to some kind of elite status, insofar as it gave them the moral ground on which to stand as they castigated popular *tenja* for being venal and profit-driven.

### The Anxiety of Reception

A second factor that contributed to the Bashō Revival poets' hostility towards *tentori haikai* can be referred to as an anxiety of reception, that is, a deep sense of unease engendered by their confrontation and unprecedented large audience of readers.<sup>13</sup> The anxiety of reception is a term coined by Lucy Newlin to describe the sense of crisis she observed in eighteenth century English Romantic poets, who struggled to create and defend their artistic identity and authorial integrity in an era when the relationship between writers and their audience changed rapidly as more and more people had access to books. Unlike Harold Bloom's formulation of the anxiety of influence – the theory that "strong" writers battle with the legacy of their literary predecessors in order to establish their own literary identity the notion of anxiety of reception acknowledges the powerful effect that changes in the makeup of the reading public have on literary texts.

In eighteenth century Japan, as in Europe, a new audience of reader-writers emerged alongside the improvements in literacy, advancement in publishing technology, and the professionalization of various roles related to the production of printed texts that took place in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These developments had particularly powerful implications for *haikai*, whose market was drawn from precisely the group of readers that was growing the fastest – urban and rural commoners. As the number of *haikai* consumers grew, there were more of those whose interpretive competence was uncertain. As a result, struggles over standards, authority, and norms engendered an even greater sense of urgency.

As an antidote to *tentori haikai*, Bashō was a fitting choice. He stood out from his predecessors and contemporaries because of his serious approach to *haikai*. Thoroughly versed in the classical tradition yet innovative and experimental, Bashō infused what was still a frivolous and somewhat simpleminded genre compared with the profundity and dignity of *waka* and *renga*. At the same time, his verse and his teaching style was

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<sup>13</sup>Lucy Newlin, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. vii-x.

accessible to a wide range of people in the cities and the countryside. Even more importantly, though his life was relatively short, he spent a good deal of it traveling, and as a result he had a large number of followers, many of whom went on to found their own *haikai* school and use their connections with Bashō as a mark of legitimacy.

The successors to these Bashō disciples and their students became the core of the Revival movement. Their efforts to resist the commercialization of *haikai* associated with the *tentori* poets were extremely successful, but had a somewhat paradoxical effect. The Revival poets' embrace of Bashō's teachings as a way to confer distinction on themselves created an elite among practitioners of this commoners' genre. This was an elite that more and more poets aspired to join, and, despite the best intentions of the Revival poets to depopularize *haikai*, their work actually ended up doing more to popularize it than anything achieved by the *tentori* poets.



## **FROM FUKUZAWA TO BLAUT: ON THE ORIGINS OF JAPANESE EUROCENTRISM**

*Daniel K.T. Woo  
University of Toronto*

### **Fukuzawa and Eurocentric History**

Modern history has brought grand debates over the nature and interaction of civilizations across the globe – civilizations that are increasingly tied closer and closer to one another through social, political, and economic structures. The longstanding and apparently prevailing dominance of European civilization – “The West” – has spawned a vast wealth of academic discourse on the reasons contributing to, and justifications for, Western dominance, including the merits of the deep ideological principles of its societies. Such discourse then, by virtue of its meaning both for intellectuals and common people everywhere, has a profound and enduring effect on the development of relations on individual and international levels.

Without a doubt, those who “write” history feel a heavy burden of moral responsibility. The question to be asked is this: Do historians feel a moral obligation to redeem the past? Or, is the burden some slight acknowledgment of the gradual but grave consequences of written history to which all historians are accountable? If, indeed, historians can be granted even a modicum of intellectual credit, Eurocentric history, now widely charged as polemical, self-aggrandizing, and false, has been championed under the banner of world history by scholars who recognize the implications of what they have written. How valid is the claim that Eurocentrism’s grievous influence has reached far beyond history departments to construct the very foundations of racism and color the world with social and cultural pariahs? Regardless of the impossibility of a quantitative answer, such a question warrants earnest investigation.

Eurocentric discourse, while customarily and understandably self-perpetuating, may be found – seldom as it is – among sophisticated and influential intellectuals of cultures originally foreign to the European mold. Perhaps the most outstanding of these intellectuals is the formidable Japanese scholar, Fukuzawa Yukichi, whose career during the nineteenth century provided a philosophical outlook arguably unparalleled in scope and depth among his contemporaries in Asia. His revolutionary persistence for independence from governmental interference pervaded Japanese

academic culture, and helped spur the Meiji Restoration. He urged his fellow countrymen to cast aside the shackles of old customs and practices, and sought to introduce pragmatic solutions to social issues. At the same time, he opposed the possibility of a pan-Asian movement that would tie Japan down with traditional ways. He saw, instead, the prospects of a civilized Japan linked to the Western world.

This essay relates Fukuzawa's earlier work with the notion of Eurocentrism and its diffusion, and interpreting within this framework Fukuzawa's spirit of independence and his ideological acceptance of the curse of imbalance. In his earlier work, Fukuzawa approaches the analysis of Japan by writing specifically for a Japanese audience. Nevertheless, his analysis is one that advances an empirical acknowledgement of the spirit of independence, from which European ideological supremacy is derived. In many ways, it is oddly enough his belief in Europe's supremacy that motivates him to write for his countrymen.

### **Blaut's Definition of Eurocentrism**

From the outset, it is necessary to define and discuss the concept of Eurocentrism. While his central thesis imposes conspicuous overtones of moral and rational objections to Eurocentric thought, J. M. Blaut's monumental work, *The Colonizer's Model of the World*, provides a useful context for understanding the term. In concise fashion, Blaut writes that Eurocentrism "is a label for all the beliefs that postulate past or present superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans," noting crucially that these beliefs are statements about empirical reality supported by the supposed facts.<sup>1</sup> While Blaut eschews refuting directly the factual arguments of European scholars, he challenges them on an indirect level. Along with other scholars, he claims that the acceptance of empirical facts in the social sciences often is unrelated to evidence.

Consequently, his conclusion is that Eurocentrism is a unique set of beliefs that constitutes the "intellectual and scholarly rationale for one of the most powerful social interests of the European elite"<sup>2</sup> with the designed purpose and upshot of "justifying and assisting Europe's colonial activities," or what Blaut calls the "colonizer's model of the world."

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<sup>1</sup> J.M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

*Difficulties and Assumptions*

One difficulty we can anticipate is Blaut's failure to propose an unambiguous method of diagnosing the empirical qualities of Eurocentric beliefs. Since this essay will be looking at empirical defects in Fukuzawa's arguments, as Blaut suggests must be done, assessing the empirical qualities of Fukuzawa's ideas will be problematic, yet will offer much insight.

Possibly because Fukuzawa is Japanese, and is writing for a Japanese audience, it may be that he is automatically disqualified from being Eurocentric, since he is "non-European" in a traditional, ethnic sense. However, in Fukuzawa's case, a Eurocentric approach would not be obviated merely because he is writing for the betterment of his native land. It is likely that his intention is not to assist Europe's colonial pursuits; nevertheless, if he advocates beliefs and empirical facts that postulate Europe's superiority he is, regardless of intention, justifying in no insignificant degree Blaut's upshot of Eurocentrism.

Notice that Fukuzawa's principles must supersede his ethnicity in the consideration of a Eurocentric belief. To affirm this further, observe that Japan is, as Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen write, "physically and culturally rooted in what used to be considered the extreme East."<sup>3</sup> It should be implicit then, that if Fukuzawa really is Eurocentric, Blaut's notion of the "colonizer's model of the world" must be able to transcend geographic and cultural boundaries, assuming universal applicability where the prerequisite is ideological conformity, the potential of which is inherent in everyone.

*Diffusionism Introduced*

Blaut's interpretation of diffusionism is also useful in fostering an understanding of Eurocentrism, and how Fukuzawa can be understood in these terms. On the subject of cultural change, Blaut notes that change can be a product of an invention within the community, that is, it can be independently achieved. Otherwise, Blaut observes, a change will be the result of an idea that enters into the community, the idea having originated elsewhere. The second process is known as diffusion. Blaut makes two comments: Diffusionists believe that most humans are imitators, not inventors, and diffusionists are elitists who mostly claim that "only certain

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<sup>3</sup> Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, *Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), p. 51.

select communities are inventive” and that there are “permanent centers of invention and innovation.”<sup>4</sup>

### Japan in Context

For Fukuzawa, Japan exists within the context of Europe. He believes that Japan must look abroad for solutions to domestic problems of stagnation, and he laments its compulsion to do so. He writes that the “trend today is to compare things in our country with those of foreign countries,”<sup>5</sup> with the aim of gleaning knowledge that might nudge Japan in the right direction. In comparison with the West, Fukuzawa is vehement in admonishing the Japanese, and in still harsher and bolder language, the Chinese and Koreans for their uncultured and barbaric ways. His work is littered with such remarks. He ruminates that the Japanese “seem to lack the kind of motivation that ought to be standard equipment in human nature. We have sunk to the depths of stagnation.”<sup>6</sup>

Fukuzawa contemplates Japan’s suffering, blaming the 250 years of Tokugawa rule in which “there were so few people in this country who accomplished any great [work]” on the lack of independent spirit.<sup>7</sup> He writes, “A spirit of independence has never existed in even the slightest degree [in Japan].”<sup>8</sup> Of the Chinese and Koreans, Fukuzawa is unrestrained: Both “will be wiped out from the world with their lands divided among the civilized nations.”<sup>9</sup> For Fukuzawa, it is akin to “a righteous man living in a neighborhood of a town known for foolishness, lawlessness, atrocity, and heartlessness.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Fukuzawa is intent on following “the manner of the Westerners in knowing how to treat” the Chinese and Koreans.<sup>11</sup> Conceivably, Fukuzawa is referring to the Opium Wars between China and Britain, and China’s capitulation in 1843 with the Treaty of Nanjing.

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<sup>4</sup> Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World*, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, “Japanese Enlightenment and Saying Good-Bye to Asia,” *Japan, A Documentary History* 2 (1997), p. 347.

<sup>6</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1973), p. 160.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>9</sup> Fukuzawa, “Japanese Enlightenment,” p. 352.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

*Diffusionism and the Spirit of Independence*

In Fukuzawa's earlier work, he articulates his belief that the essence of his country, and that of the rest of Asia, lacks the "spirit of independence among men"<sup>12</sup> and consequently suffers in terms of progress. In the West, this spirit is prevalent, contends Fukuzawa, and fosters independent invention. He laments that, although Japan has embarked on a journey of outward restoration, the Japanese people have not developed the ability, characteristic of Western societies, for independent progress and innovation.<sup>13</sup> He is illustrating that the development he is witnessing in Japan is the result of European diffusion.

Studying Western history, Fukuzawa is impressed by the inventions in the West that are the result of this spirit. Fukuzawa points to James Watt's invention of the steam engine and the railway as the brainchild of Robert and John Stevens. "To utilize these outstanding techniques and inventions, these individuals often formed private associations"<sup>14</sup> through which individual innovation could be nurtured. Fukuzawa looks to private ownership as a mechanism fostering the Western spirit so elusive to Japan. In this sense, he propounds the European model of political organization, denouncing the over-dominance of government in preference for entrepreneurial values.

Presumably having understood the structure of European society, Fukuzawa realizes that the answer to Japan's problems rests in independent innovation – or the spirit of independence – which may be fostered through a capitalist-based political system.<sup>15</sup> The realization of this institutional transformation, writes Fukuzawa, is "the task of present-day politicians" and, since he is "only diagnosing the situation," Fukuzawa declines in addressing the process by which his observations could be implemented.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Fukuzawa is referring to the Meiji Restoration.

<sup>14</sup> Fukuzawa, "Japanese Enlightenment," p. 349.

<sup>15</sup> Fukuzawa points explicitly to a European "middle-class," a product of the capitalist system, from which innovation flows. He writes that the "civilization of a country must not be initiated by the government above, nor can it be born of people of low estate. It is the middle class that can nurture a civilization, showing the masses a way to follow," in Fukuzawa, "Japanese Enlightenment," p. 349.

<sup>16</sup> Fukuzawa, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, p. 160.

It is important to note that speculation only is possible on whether or not Fukuzawa is a diffusionist according to Blaut's description. Blaut writes:

If we accept the quite fundamental assumption that all human groups are truly human in their thinking apparatuses, and therefore broadly similar in their ability to invent and innovate...we would expect inventions to occur everywhere across the human landscape.<sup>17</sup>

Possibly Fukuzawa believes that there should be select and permanent centers of invention and innovation, in which case Japan must realize its latent potential as one of them. In that case, Fukuzawa is a diffusionist. Or else, Fukuzawa rejects the notion that only select and permanent centers of invention and innovation exist, and that it is possible for Japan to develop a previously nonexistent spirit and join the Western ranks. Whether Europe is merely one source or the source, Fukuzawa does believe that manifestations of the spirit of independence do diffuse from Europe. As Fukuzawa dramatically puts it, this diffusion is "the onslaught of Western civilization."<sup>18</sup> Clearly, Fukuzawa is writing for his fellow Japanese, attempting to force recognition of the desperate need to develop a spirit of independence. He beckons to his countrymen and his fellow intellectuals not to be swallowed up in tides of Western ideas, but to "float with them in the same ocean of civilization."<sup>19</sup>

#### *The Curse of Imbalance*

However improper it seems to assess Eurocentric tendencies in Fukuzawa's early writing in anachronistic terms with definitions only later derived, the problems these definitions bring about seem punishment enough. In the most obvious case, that Fukuzawa's argument can be verified as empirical is at the least questionable, thus making uncertain the applicability of Blaut's definition of Eurocentrism. It seems then, that an attempt must be made to assess to what extent Fukuzawa's argument is empirical in conception. Fukuzawa's critical description of the spirit of

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<sup>17</sup> Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World*, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Fukuzawa, "Japanese Enlightenment," p. 351.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

independence and the conclusions that he draws from it need to be substantiated by a valid model or theory in which to frame the examples. Fukuzawa attempts such a model in *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, and it is necessary to evaluate its merits in determining if indeed his conclusions are based on an empirical process.

Fukuzawa begins by offering what he calls, “the curse of imbalance.”<sup>20</sup> By this he means an imbalance of power – an imbalance that may provoke the powerful into succumbing to despotic and ill intentions. It is a “curse” because Fukuzawa regards it as an inevitable trait of human nature, and he surmises, “there is nothing that can be done about it.”<sup>21</sup> He observes that this imbalance is found not only in Japan, but also throughout the world, asserting that the imbalance as well as the urge of despotism extends to “all sectors of human society, from the greatest to the smallest.”<sup>22</sup>

From here, Fukuzawa explains that, unpleasant as it is, the inequities of the imbalance are less important than, and should be subordinated to, the spirit of independence: “But even with such social injustice there is still a pervading spirit of individuality and nothing hinders the expansion of the human spirit.”<sup>23</sup> Only when this independent and innovative spirit is fostered should efforts be made to deal with the side effects, the burden of which Fukuzawa places on the government.<sup>24</sup> His acceptance of the imbalance of power as inevitable and subordinate to the spirit of independence indicates that, while his ideological beliefs have support, there is no concrete theory that explains the principles underlying his assertion.

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<sup>20</sup> Fukuzawa, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, p. 135.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>24</sup> Fukuzawa writes, “But since the treatment of this disease [of imbalance] is the task of present-day politicians, I do not intend to discuss it here.” Fukuzawa appears truly to be concerned with an unequal distribution of wealth, especially within the Western-style capitalist system he is proposing, possibly because of the practical obstacles and problems such inequities will raise, and he devotes no insignificant attention in discussing the dilemma. In Fukuzawa, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, p. 160.

### **Fukuzawa vis-à-vis European Counterparts**

Also significant in Fukuzawa's framework is his understanding that "members of the ruling class must have both physical and intellectual powers and a certain amount of wealth."<sup>25</sup> He acknowledges that those who rule must always be the powerful. In this sense, Fukuzawa is describing precisely the necessary qualities of Blaut's upshot of Eurocentrism.

As a qualification, there is one important distinction between Fukuzawa's views and those of traditional Eurocentrists: Fukuzawa believes, because the "curse of imbalance" leads to ill intent, the powerful "must always take stock of themselves."<sup>26</sup> The traditional Eurocentrists surely acknowledge Fukuzawa's "curse of imbalance," but they reject the notion of self-reservation completely, according to Blaut. Indeed, it is entirely the intention of Eurocentric thought, as Blaut suggests, to provide the opportunity to exploit an imbalance of power, wicked in design and wicked in practice. That is, Fukuzawa is yet to be disabused of grandiose dreams in which the powerful and wealthy may be benevolent rulers.

Fukuzawa looks to the West as cultivating groups of private citizens who champion the spirit of independence and, though growing in power, are restrained either by the government or by self-reservation in submitting to ill temptations: "In England, France, and other countries in the modern world, the people of the middle class progressively amassed wealth; with it they also elevated their own moral conduct."<sup>27</sup> Again Fukuzawa's naivety is apparent in this respect: "Now, even in the West not everyone is equal in terms of wealth or prestige." This is hardly an admission worthy of such a complex intellectual, especially considering that his life paralleled the Industrial Revolution in Europe, which exacerbated inequality to an extreme, as conceded by scholars everywhere, including Fukuzawa's counterparts in Europe.<sup>28</sup> In exploring the multitude of associated issues the significance lies not in the fact that Fukuzawa's conception of the proper organization of society resembles that of Europe's ruling elite, or even that of America's; it is, rather, that the same organizing principle appeals to elites everywhere.

All of this, then, deals with Fukuzawa's earlier ideological inner

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

workings and illustrates that his ideological beliefs are reinforced only by his immediate observations. In his earlier work, he categorically elaborates on points of Western superiority, and persuasive though they are, offers a concrete model or theory that in many respects does not provide the authority with which to frame his examples. In addition, he propounds at least the fundamental aspects of European ideology, though it can be said that he diverges in respect to certain details.

What can be done? As Blaut suggests, there are many implications of enduring historical inaccuracies. His upshot of Eurocentrism is a damning charge not only against traditional historical literature, but also much of contemporary scholarship. At the same time, intellectual movements such as Eurocentrism are often reversed piecemeal, and only then with devoted effort. This paper should be considered part of that effort in offering some basic understanding of the origins of Eurocentric thought with regard to Japan.

Finally, a few words on the development of history: It seems that world history not only describes the human past, but also prophesies its future – one that has been and continues to be determined by the West. If historians feel a moral obligation to redeem the past so much so that they have internalized an approach akin to the one adopted by Eurocentrists, they will continue to disregard the grievous moral position of their status, and Blaut is but one warning of the perilous result of this tendency. If, on the other hand, historians do indeed feel the gravity of their position, they can choose not to overlook this moral discomfort and, instead, to help realize a world safer for us all.



**NATIONAL MORALITY, THE STATE, AND  
“DANGEROUS THOUGHT”: APPROACHING THE MORAL  
IDEAL IN LATE MEIJI JAPAN**

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There are those, like the treasonous group that was punished this year, who embrace Dangerous Thought...the kind of unhealthy thought that opposes or destroys National Morality...[But] as long as we use National Morality to regulate Japanese society, the continued existence of the Japanese people is assured.

Inoue Tetsujirō, *Outline of National Morality*

People say that anarchism is a poison that comes from the mouths of traitors and that it is an extremely evil and dangerous doctrine...[But] the great doctrine and spirit of anarcho-communism...by striving for the happiness and advantage of everyone, will encourage the progress and improvement of humankind.

Sakamoto Seima, *A Word on Joining the Group*

At the end of the nineteenth century, as many in Japan began to question the idea of the superiority of Western civilization, various articulations of Japanese national identity began to emerge. One form that these expressions of cultural exceptionalism took was the discourse on National Morality. This discourse emerged as the dominant form of moral inquiry among academic moral philosophers by the close of the Meiji period. As a state-sponsored intellectual movement concerned with identifying and legitimizing the unique moral sensibilities of the Japanese, National Morality played a crucial role in the formation of national identity in Japan. Through imperial edicts, public lectures, and school textbooks on moral training, scholars and bureaucrats disseminated a morality of loyalty to the state, filiality to one's parents, and patriotism, representing each as distinctly "Japanese" virtues. Yet the National Morality of late Meiji was not merely a collection of statements on loyalty and filiality, as contemporary studies of this movement often maintain. When placed in its philosophical and socio-political contexts, the importance of National Morality's linkages with the philosophy of Personalism (a form of

philosophical idealism centering on the moral cultivation of the individual) and with anti-state political movements of the time, such as anarchism, socialism, and individualism, becomes clear. National Morality scholars drew upon Personalism to help legitimize state efforts to suppress anarchism and other forms of Dangerous Thought.

The Taoist classic *Tao te ching* observes, “When the state is in confusion, it is then that there are faithful subjects.”<sup>1</sup> Such a statement might well be describing turn-of-the-century moral discourse in Japan. At this time, while the Dangerous Thought of anarchism, socialism, and individualism threatened to undermine the foundation of the state, various state apparatuses sought through a number of strategies to produce “good and faithful subjects.” In other words, Dangerous Thought and the faithful subject emerged together, the one providing the negative condition against which the other was conceptualized and defined. National Morality played a central role in the cultivation of faithful subjects and the suppression of Dangerous Thought.

Moreover, National Morality can be seen as an effort to configure the good as the pursuit of a moral ideal. Though coded in the philosophical jargon of Personalism, this “ideal” signified complete moral homogeneity – a community of subjects perfectly loyal to the state. That which facilitated the approach toward this aim constituted “the good,” while whatever inhibited or obstructed this aim was “evil.” In National Morality discourse, then, an individual’s actions were only truly good when they corresponded to the good of the state. Conversely, the Dangerous Thought of anarchism, socialism, individualism, and even the literary genre called “naturalism” represented obstacles on the path toward the ideal, and thus could legitimately be suppressed as social evils.

National Morality appropriated still powerful conceptions of loyalty and filiality from Japan’s pre-revolutionary past and fused them with new conceptions of the person and the state developed within Personalism to produce an argument legitimizing the state’s efforts to cultivate the loyal subject and suppress or annihilate obstacles on the path toward reaching this goal. This particular formulation of National Morality, appearing for the first time in Inoue Tetsujirō’s *Outline of National*

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<sup>1</sup> Robert G. Henricks trans., *Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), pp. 222-223. All translations that follow are my own unless otherwise indicated.

*Morality*, represented a subtle but important reconfiguration of the discourse. This raises several important questions: How was such a reconfiguration of National Morality possible, and why did it take place when it did? What exactly was dangerous about Dangerous Thought, and how did it come to occupy such a central position in the National Morality conception of the good? Finally, what strategies did National Morality deploy for the suppression of Dangerous Thought, and how were these resisted?

The passage from the Lao Tzu text cited above refers to a space of non-differentiation – the “One” or the “Tao” – that had been lost or rejected. Once outside this conceptual space, distinctions emerge: good and evil, order and disorder, faithful and unfaithful subjects. National Morality also posited such a space, but unlike the broken antiquity of Taoism, it lay in the ever-receding future, approachable but never finally attainable. Recognizing its ideal as unattainable, National Morality proponents nevertheless sought to “approach” the ideal through the universalization of the state-centered normative space it helped to produce and through the annihilation of its other, Dangerous Thought. National Morality and its opponent, however, were inextricably bound to one another, each taking on meaning only by existing in opposition to the other.

The “loyalty” of the loyal subject took on significance precisely in opposition to Dangerous Thought, or conversely, Dangerous Thought was only “dangerous” inasmuch as it encouraged defiance and disloyalty to the state and the moral position it sponsored. National Morality could never bring about the complete annihilation of Dangerous Thought without altering (or perhaps annihilating) itself in the process. In this sense, the tension between National Morality and Dangerous Thought was marked by a desire to annihilate, on the one hand, and a need to sustain, on the other hand. In short, National Morality was constrained to stop short of the complete annihilation of Dangerous Thought – to check, to control, but not to erase it. The discourse on National Morality in Japan reveals a close connection between the pursuit of the moral ideal and violence. It was the state’s pursuit of this ideal that sustained the very social reality it sought to transcend, one of moral disarray, dissension, and violence.

### **Inoue Tetsujirō’s Outline of National Morality**

In 1911, the Ministry of Education, as part of the state’s efforts to create loyal subjects, selected Tokyo University philosophy professor Inoue

Tetsujirō to give a series of lectures on National Morality (*Kokumin dōtoku*, or Morality of the “Nation” or the “People”). In these lectures, Inoue criticized the unquestioned adherence many in Japan showed to the ethical theories of the West, by arguing that an investigation and cultivation of the unique moral sensibilities of the Japanese people was of paramount importance in the effort to forge national unity and protect the state. He described National Morality as “an expression of the people’s spirit” (*minzokuteki seishin*), reflecting the “national character” discourse prevalent at this time.<sup>2</sup> Inoue placed particular emphasis on patriotism, ancestor worship, the notion of the state as a “family,” and the virtues of loyalty and filial piety.

Loyalty to the emperor (the father-figure of the “family-state”) was to be expressed in the same way one expressed filiality towards one’s parents – hence, the recurrent call for “loyalty-as-filiality” (*chūkō ippon*) in National Morality texts by Inoue and others. In this way, the metaphor of the state as a “family” was used to evoke patriotic thought and practice. Further, Inoue invoked the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 as a foundational text for National Morality. This document, issued in the name of the emperor, called for the subject’s loyalty and self-sacrifice for the good of the state. For Inoue, this rescript was “the sacred book of Meiji” and “the essence of Japan’s national morality.” “Within it,” stated Inoue, “are listed all of those things considered to be the important points of National Morality.”<sup>3</sup> Inoue’s lectures were published in 1912 as *An Outline of National Morality* (*Kokumin dōtoku gairon*), and during the decade that followed, more than fifty scholarly works on National Morality appeared.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Inoue Tetsujirō, *Kokumin dōtoku gairon* [Outline of National Morality] (Tokyo: Sanshōto, 1912), p. 4. The idea that each nation possesses its own unique national character shaped late nineteenth and early twentieth century moral discourse in Japan. Inoue, in his 1912 edition of *Tetsugaku jii* [Philosophy Dictionary], translated *minzoku seishin* as *Volksgeist*. The German notion of *Volksgeist* (i.e., spirit or genius of the Volk/folk/nation) was central to national character discourse of this time.

<sup>3</sup> Tetsujirō, *Kokumin dōtoku gairon*, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> For a list of works on National Morality beginning with Inoue’s *An Outline of National Morality*, see Inoue Tetsujirō, *Waga kokutai to kokumin*

The outflow of works on National Morality following Inoue's lectures has led some scholars to view Inoue's *Outline* as the formative or "original statement" on National Morality.<sup>5</sup> But of course, Inoue was not the first to emphasize the family system, ancestor worship, and loyalty to the state. Moreover, the term *kokumin dōtoku* itself had been a part of moral discourse at least since the late 1880s. This has led others to seek the origins of the National Morality movement in earlier works.<sup>6</sup> Yet this approach too is problematic. The search for the original statement of National Morality in contemporary accounts is only possible because of their treatment of this shifting discourse as an essentialized object with a fixed set of features that remain unchanged over time. The term *kokumin dōtoku* is treated as semantically transparent, signifying the same object and carrying the same meaning regardless of the context within which it appears.<sup>7</sup> Patriotism, loyalty, filiality, the "family-state," and so on become the defining "elements" of National Morality. Yet this formalizing method can only be maintained by ignoring important shifts in the social and intellectual contexts out of which statements on National Morality emerged.

Inoue's *Outline* did more than simply reiterate the elements of loyalty, filiality, etc., which had in some form been a part of moral discourse from the 1890s. It initiated a subtle but important reconfiguration

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*dōtoku* [The National Morality of Our People] (Tokyo: Kōbundo, 1925), pp. 492-497.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Funayama Shin'ichi, *Nihon no kannen ronja* (Tokyo: Eihōsha, 1956), pp. 109-156.

<sup>6</sup> Moral philosophers Fukasaku Yasubumi and Yoshida Kumaji, for example, traced the beginnings of National Morality to the 1886 work *Nihon dōtoku ron* [On Japanese Morality] by Nishimura Shigeki. See Yasubumi Fukasaku, *Kokumin dōtoku yōgi* (Tokyo: Kōdōkan, 1916), pp. 17-18; and Yoshida Kumaji's "Commentary" on Nishimura's text in Nishimura, *Nihon dōtoku ron* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1963), p. 120. Also see Nishimura, "Nihon dōtoku ron," in *Hakuo sosho* (Tokyo: Nihon kōdōkan, 1976), pp. 7, 9, 94.

<sup>7</sup> The term *kokumin dōtoku* took on different meanings within different intellectual contexts. See Shigeki, "Nihon dōtoku ron" and Hozumi Yatsuka, *Kokumin kyōiku: Aikokushin* (Tokyo, 1897), pp. 4-5, and his *Kempō teiyō*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1910).

of the discourse on National Morality. Inoue attempted to re-ground National Morality and its demand for loyal subjects through the construction of a new foundation for its claims, one drawing on the metaphysics of Personalism. In short, Inoue's *Outline* represented neither a smooth continuation of National Morality discourse nor this discourse's "original statement." Rather, it marks a shift in the discourse. Attention to its philosophical and socio-political contexts is particularly important. It was at this time that National Morality began to integrate the philosophy of Personalism to legitimize the suppression of Dangerous Thought.

### **The Philosophical Context: National Morality and Personalism**

Particularly lacking in contemporary studies of National Morality is any treatment of National Morality's connections with the moral-philosophical movement called Personalism. In the few works that address both, National Morality and Personalism are treated as two separate forms of moral inquiry.<sup>8</sup> But the conception of the good that Inoue put forward in 1912, as well as those developed in the majority of moral-philosophical writings on National Morality that followed, was closely intertwined with Personalism. National Morality's prescriptive statements – its demand that the people (*kokumin*) be loyal and filial, for example – rested on a framework constructed with key conceptual resources appropriated from Personalism. Understanding the fundamental concepts (the person, the good, the state, etc.) that enabled and informed National Morality's ethical claims requires a familiarity with Personalism as well.

Personalism is so called because of its attention to "personality," that is, to a self-conscious awareness of one's own individuality. In opposition to the utilitarian conceptions of the person as socially isolated

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<sup>8</sup> Carol Gluck, for example, in her work on Meiji ideology, devotes a chapter to a discussion of National Morality, but does not mention Personalism. Watsuji Tetsurō and Kaneko Takezō, in their brief overview of ethics at Tokyo University, discuss both National Morality and Personalism as "the two major pillars" of academic ethics at the turn of the century, but fail to show the interconnectedness of the two. See Chapter 5 in Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), and the essay, "Bungakubu," in *Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku jutsu taikan* (Tokyo: Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku, 1942), p. 391.

and atomistic that dominated early Meiji moral discourse, Personalism stressed the sociality of the person, but it did so in a way that went well beyond the trite observation that an individual was also a member of a community. Personalism held that the finite consciousness of each individual was a manifestation of an infinite or eternal consciousness (variously explained as God or as “spiritual principle”). This conception of the person, then, rejected the idea of an opposition between self and other, or between the individual and the social whole. All members of a society were seen as one, in that each participated in eternal consciousness.

For Personalism, the cultivation of each individual’s personality was a moral endeavor. It meant not only the development of one’s unique potentialities as an individual, but also the cultivation of a deep sense of awareness of the unity between finite and infinite consciousness, or between self and other. To achieve or at least pursue such “self-realization,” as it was often called, constituted the good in the moral philosophy of Personalism because it was to realize that the good of the other was in fact also one’s own. The state, in Personalist thought, was the space within which such “self-realization” took place. The primary function of the state was to facilitate the individual’s social actualization by creating the conditions necessary for this to take place. That is, it functioned as the *means* to bring about the *end* of self-realization. If the state stifled this process, it was not fulfilling its purpose.<sup>9</sup> Yet, with the appropriation of the vocabulary of Personalism by proponents of National Morality, personality (*jinkaku*), self-realization (*jiga jitsugen/kanzen*), and the ideal (*risō*), as well as the epistemology equating self and other or

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<sup>9</sup> Personalism, therefore, allowed for resistance to the state under certain conditions. British idealist philosopher T. H. Green, whose own writings in translation became an integral part of Personalist discourse in Japan from the early 1890s, maintained that disobedience to the state could be justified, but only as an attempt to bring the state and its laws more into keeping with its ideal. This provided the individual with a role to play in deciding the good of the whole – if the state was moving away from its ideal (as the individual understood it to be), the individual was justified in opposing the state and its laws. See T. H. Green, *Principles of Political Obligation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), especially pp. 110 and 147. Also see Yoshida Seiichi, *Rinrigaku yōgi* (Tokyo: Tokyo hōbunkan, 1907), p. 546.

individual and social whole (each central features of Personalism), came to be deployed in an effort to legitimize a new conception of the good that prioritized the state over the individual.

National Morality described the good as the self-realization of the person or personality (*jinkaku*), that is, it posited the good in terms of an ideal to be attained. In his *Outline*, Inoue discussed personality and the ideal in much the same terms as Personalism:

Attempting to complete (*kansei suru*) one's personality (*jiko no jinkaku*) is, namely, a method for realizing the ideal as a human being, and this method is morality (*dōtoku*).<sup>10</sup>

The “method” Inoue refers to here is not a methodology for moral inquiry, but rather the path of virtue (*dōtoku*), or of cultivating one's personality so as to approach the human ideal. Inoue pointed out that we can take “complete personality” as our objective precisely because personality is incomplete or imperfect. In other words, so long as personality is incomplete, it is possible to approach the ideal of complete personality.

Moreover, one approaches the moral ideal only as a subject living within a state. That is, in National Morality discourse, as in Personalism, the state functioned as the space of self-realization. Inoue pointed out, “It is within the state that one grows, is active, and develops. Thus, if separated from the state, it is impossible to attain one's aims as a human being.” The state here as the space of growth, action, and development, is the only viable space of self-realization. The less “complete” or “perfect” (*fukanzen*) the state is, the more problematic the cultivation of “personality” will be. Thus, a well-organized, safe, and peaceful state is essential for the individual's self-realization.<sup>11</sup>

In National Morality thought, however, the ideal of complete personality referred not merely to the self-realization of the individual, but to the realization or perfection of the state as well. This was because the state, as the totality of all individual personalities, also possessed a kind of personality, one that National Morality identified with individual personality by drawing upon the self-as-other philosophy of Personalism. In short, “the completion of one's personality is the completion of the state, just as the completion of the state is the completion of the individual's

<sup>10</sup> Inoue, *Kokumin dōtoku gairon*, Appendix, pp. 74-75.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 85. Also see Fukasaku, *Kokumin dōtoku yōgi*, pp. 20-23.

personality.” In this statement by Fukasaku Yasubumi, moral philosopher (from 1912) and chair of the ethics department (from 1926 until 1935) at Tokyo Imperial University, cultivating individual or state personality was merely “viewing the same fact from different perspectives.”<sup>12</sup>

This enabled the assertion that “good” action on the part of an individual must contribute to the completion or perfection of the state. That is, as Fukasaku put it, “the individual’s actions are truly good when they are at the same time for the good of the state.”<sup>13</sup> The individual will be unable to complete his or her personality unless this is the case. This viewpoint served as a basis for the subject’s loyal and dutiful action on behalf of the state. To make sacrifices for the good of the state, according to this National Morality view, was precisely to perfect one’s own personality.

National Morality’s reconfiguration of Personalism was most apparent in its privileging of state good over the good of the individual (despite their ostensible identification). Whereas Personalism posited the state as merely a means to the end of individual self-realization, National Morality prioritized the completion of the state. The overriding concern of the state, according to Fukasaku, was survival, and this could best be ensured through the establishment of moral unity. Fukasaku stated, “The people must all practice a fixed morality. The term *kokumin dōtoku* refers to the morality (*dōtoku*) that the people (*kokumin*), as a people, must practice.”<sup>14</sup> Here, Fukasaku called for moral homogeneity, for a kind of national moral identity as a prerequisite for the survival of the state. The moral inclinations of the individual, wherever they diverged from the needs of the state, would be suppressed, while social practice in general would be regulated by National Morality. Indeed, as the epigram at the beginning of this article indicates, Inoue advocated the use of National Morality to “regulate society.” The object of regulation was clearly the *kokumin*, the “people belonging to the state” (i.e., the subjects of the state).

Enforcing moral sameness required suppression, as Fukasaku’s own statements make clear. Fukasaku pointed out that, because of egoism, the individual will at times ignore the needs of others or engage in activities that oppose the state (*han kokka teki koi*). “But, the power and the life of the state lies in suppressing the egoistic spirit (*shuga shin*) of the individual so

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<sup>12</sup> Fukasaku, *Kokumin dōtoku yōgi*, p. 637.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 638.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20.

as to resist this kind of anti-state activity and, in adapting the individual to the state, to finally bring forth self-sacrificing action in which the individual extinguishes his egoistic self and brings to life his eternal higher self on behalf of the state.” Fukasaku called this “State Personalism” (*kokka teki jinkaku shugi*), and maintained that this must be the basis for the cultivation of Japan’s National Morality.<sup>15</sup> In National Morality discourse, then, complete personality meant a perfected state personality, a morally homogeneous totality subsuming all individual personalities.

The moral ideal of complete personality served as the basis for Inoue’s conception of the good. In his *Outline*, he stated:

Once this great aim [of complete personality] is decided upon, the good and the evil of human society can for the first time be settled. That which is in accord with this objective is the good; that which is not in accord with this objective is evil.<sup>16</sup>

Here, in theoretical terms, Inoue has defined “the good” according to his National Morality perspective. His definition asserts that whatever is conducive to bringing about the ideal of complete personality is the good. Obstacles in the path of the ideal can legitimately be suppressed as evil. By equating the good of the person with the good of the state, and then carefully specifying what constituted the good of the state (e.g., loyalty, obedience), National Morality discourse delimited the good of the individual. The good, then, was no longer the form of self-realization compatible with individual ends as put forward by Personalism; the good now constituted conduct that served the state.

The ideal of complete personality therefore must be understood as a hypothetical moral space in which there is perfect moral action, where every thought and every action of each subject serves the state. In Inoue’s definition, the good is not this ideal itself, but the “approach” toward this ideal end. To approach the ideal, then, is to universalize a contingent and perspectival discourse, that is, to attempt to establish a moral space determined and regulated by the state, and this involves the sometimes violent suppression of otherness. Yet the ideal, according to Inoue, would remain forever out of reach, meaning that personality would never be fully complete or perfected.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 638-640.

<sup>16</sup> Inoue, *Kokumin dōtoku gairon*, p. 75.

The approach, then, had no endpoint. In this scenario, the state continually seeks to approach the ideal of the subject's perfect loyalty, but never attains it. As approach entails not only the universalization of the state's own normative views but also the suppression of moral alterity, the social reality of moral dissension, suppression, and violence is sustained. When Inoue's definition of the good is understood as allegory, we see that his ethical claims were not merely the objective conclusions of value-neutral philosophizing. They corresponded to the normative orientation of the state seeking to cultivate loyal subjects ready to serve the state, on the one hand, and to suppress Dangerous Thought, on the other hand. In other words, Inoue's definition of good and evil referred to loyalty to the state and Dangerous Thought, respectively.

### **The Socio-Political Context: National Morality and Dangerous Thought**

In the summer of 1910, while Inoue lectured on National Morality to the East Asia Society, a study group that he had established, police were completing the arrests of several hundred supposed anarchist activists suspected of involvement in a plot to assassinate the emperor. In December of that year, when the trial associated with this case began, Inoue, at the request of the Ministry of Education, was again lecturing on National Morality, this time to instructors in charge of moral training at Japan's Teachers' Colleges. At the conclusion of the trial, twenty-four of the accused were sentenced to death. Twelve of these had their sentences later commuted to life imprisonment, while the other twelve were executed in January 1911. This came to be known as the High Treason Incident (*Taigyaku jiken*).<sup>17</sup>

That Inoue's lectures on National Morality so closely coincided with the arrests, trial, and execution of these anarchist activists is suggestive of the close connections between National Morality discourse and the state's efforts to suppress anarchism. Indeed, about six months after the executions had been carried out, Inoue alluded to the High Treason Incident in yet another lecture that was to become the basis for his *Outline*. This lecture, like his previous lecture in December 1910, was at the specific

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<sup>17</sup> Regarding the trial for those accused in the High Treason Incident, see Itoya Toshio, *Taigyaku jiken* (Kyoto: San'ichi shobō, 1960), pp. 51-92, 125-195.

request of Minister of Education, Komatsubara Eitarō. There, to an audience of educators in the field of moral training, Inoue spoke of the enemies of National Morality:

Within Western civilization lies very harmful thought. There is even a great poison. These poisonous elements, not surprisingly, were imported into Japan along with beneficial elements. As a result, there are those, like the treasonous group that was punished this year, who embrace Dangerous Thought.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Inoue referred to those involved in the High Treason Incident. He assured his audience that the threat of this Dangerous Thought to National Morality had not ended with the execution of those twelve anarchists, for there still remained “those among a portion of society who embrace unhealthy thought, even though they go unpunished. It cannot be denied,” he asserted, “that there are some who embrace the kind of unhealthy thought that opposes or destroys National Morality.” As the above indicates, there was a close connection between the discourse on National Morality and the social disruptions it sought to control. Inoue advocated “the use of National Morality to regulate Japanese society” so as to ensure “the healthy existence of the Japanese people.”<sup>19</sup> As a threat to the health of Japanese society, Dangerous Thought had to be suppressed.

Inoue was not alone in his condemnation of this Dangerous Thought, which referred generally not only to anarchism, but also to socialism and individualism. In 1911, just after the conclusion of the High Treason Incident, the educator and materialist philosopher Katō Hiroyuki described socialism as an “extremely dangerous thing” because, he believed, it was inconsistent with the good of society and the state.<sup>20</sup> Two years earlier, the “elder statesmen” and former prime minister Yamagata Aritomo collaborated with legal scholar Hozumi Yatsuka to warn of the dangers of socialism:

The people...turn their efforts to the destruction of the foundations of the state and society. Herein lies the genesis of what is called socialism. Its immediate causes are the extreme division between

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<sup>18</sup> Inoue, *Kokumin dōtoku gairon*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> Katō Hiroyuki, “Shizen to rinri,” cited in Kaneko Takezō, *Rinrigaku Jiten* (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1957), p. 234.

rich and poor and the marked changes in ethics that accompany modern culture. It is now urgently necessary...for the sake of national and social self-preservation, to exercise the strictest control over those who espouse its doctrines. The spread of this infection (*byōdoku*) must be prevented; it must be suppressed and eradicated.<sup>21</sup>

As with National Morality scholars, Yamagata and Hozumi viewed the dangers of “social destruction” as a moral problem. “Changes in ethics” was one of the “immediate causes” for the emergence of socialism. The suppression of socialism, here represented as a disease to be stamped out, and the “exclusion of individualism,” were to be coordinated with the cultivation of “healthy thought” which involved the promotion of “wholesome and beneficial reading.”<sup>22</sup>

The High Treason Incident marked a high point of suppressive violence and violent reaction to suppression that had been taking place for some time. At the close of Japan’s war with Russia in 1905, rioting broke out in the Hibiya district of Tokyo. Rioters (numbering ten thousand by some estimates) attacked and burned more than 350 buildings, including police stations and police boxes, the prime minister’s residence, the foreign ministry, and private homes. More than one thousand people were injured and seventeen were killed (mostly by the police attempting to restore order with drawn swords).<sup>23</sup> In 1907, called “the year of the strike,” strikes at the Ashio copper mines, the coalmines of Koike, and the dockyards in Uruga led to violent rioting.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Yamagata Aritomo and Hozumi Yatsuka, “Shakai hakaishugiron,” in Yamagata Aritomo, ed., *Yamagata Aritomo ikensho* (Tokyo: Hara shobō, 1966), pp. 315-316. This translation is from Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, p. 176.

<sup>22</sup> See Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> The causes of this riot are a matter of some debate. See Tetsuo Najita and J. Victor Koschmann, eds., *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The Neglected Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 264, 275.

<sup>24</sup> Carol Gluck cites a Yokohama magazine: “Beginning with the Ashio copper mine riot, the disturbances at the Koike coal mines and the Uruga docks have followed one upon the other, and now there is the violence at

In June of the following year, with the release from prison of socialist activist Yamaguchi Kōken, his supporters took to the streets waving red flags and shouting “anarchism.” This was the so-called Red Flag Incident. Police moved in, charging demonstrators with violation of the Peace Police Law (*chian keisatsu hō*), and arrested fourteen, including anarchists Arahata Kanson and Osugi Sakae. In his autobiography, Arahata described his treatment at the hands of the police. “The police stripped Osugi and myself naked and dragged us by our feet through the corridors. They kicked and beat us...finally, they were surprised when I lost consciousness and relented.”<sup>25</sup> So intense were the social disruptions of this time that the entire period between the Russo-Japanese war and the rice riots of 1918 has been called “a period of urban mass riot.”<sup>26</sup>

This Dangerous Thought that National Morality scholars, bureaucrats, legal scholars, and others feared was the evil that Inoue spoke of in his definition of the good. It was “that which is not in accord” with the objective of complete personality. In other words, Dangerous Thought, inasmuch as it undermined state authority, constituted an obstacle on the path toward the ideal of complete loyalty to the state. Only through its eradication could the good flourish. To approach the ideal, therefore, required violence – the suppression of the alterity of the other, or the reduction of the other (i.e., Dangerous Thought) to the same (National Morality). But what steps were taken to increase the authority of the call for loyal subjects and to undermine that of Dangerous Thought? And how did proponents of the so-called Dangerous Thought respond?

### **National Morality’s Strategies for Self-Legitimacy and Suppression**

Proponents of National Morality made use of a number of strategies intended to shore up the authority of their own position while serving to de-legitimize and eradicate the variety of alternative normative orientations they collectively termed Dangerous Thought. These strategies included efforts to represent alternative moral views as dangerous, to

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the Horonai mines...there is no doubt that this year [1907] is the year of the strike,” in *Japan’s Modern Myths*, p. 175.

<sup>25</sup> Arahata Kanson, *Kanson jiden*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1999), p. 278.

<sup>26</sup> Najita and Koschmann, eds., *Conflict in Modern Japanese History*, p. 268.

establish the “timeless” (and therefore indisputable) features of National Morality, and to disseminate National Morality through lectures, imperial edicts, moral training textbooks, and so forth.

Inoue’s statements concerning the High Treason Incident were part of an effort to de-legitimize a collective outlook otherwise called Dangerous Thought. For Inoue, anarchism was not the only danger to National Morality. In the one epithet of Dangerous Thought, Inoue grouped together a wide variety of diverse views on society, the person, and nature. Individualism, socialism, anarchism, literary naturalism all became, under Inoue’s representation of them, the collective other of National Morality. Treating these diverse modes of thought as a single, unitary object facilitated their de-legitimation. All became “harmful,” “poisonous,” and “dangerous.” Indeed, the dangerous and destructive nature of one could be attributed to each of the others.

Moreover, Inoue, Yoshida Seiichi, and other proponents of National Morality made it clear that the claims this “other” made concerning society, the individual, and morality were not in any sense “Japanese,” rather, they were “foreign” imports from “Western civilization.” Yoshida, for example, in the preface to his *Essentials of National Morality* [*Kokumin dōtoku yōryō*], closely echoed the words of Inoue writing four years before. Yoshida discussed the disruption Western civilization had brought to the intellectual world of Japan. “Within Western civilization,” he stated, “is included a great deal of unhealthy thought of the kind that destroys national morality.”<sup>27</sup> The “unhealthy thought” referred to here included anarchism, socialism, and individualism, each according to Yoshida, a product of Western civilization. To admit that any view prioritizing the individual or calling for the abolition of the state was “Japanese” would have inhibited National Morality’s own claims to speak for what was authentically Japanese.

Through this collective representation, all of Japan’s social ills could be attributed to a single, “foreign” other, a single obstacle to moral homogeneity and social stability. In National Morality discourse, then, Dangerous Thought became as “the Jew” in Slavoj Žižek’s *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: “an intruder who introduces from outside disorder, decomposition and corruption of the social edifice...appear[ing] as an

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<sup>27</sup> Yoshida Seiichi, *Kokumin dōtoku yōryō* (Tokyo: Hōbunkan, 1916), p. 353.

outward positive cause whose elimination would enable us to restore order, stability, and identity.”<sup>28</sup> By representing anarchism, socialism, individualism, and literary naturalism in this way, Inoue and other proponents of National Morality legitimized their suppression. Thus, the suppression of the “dangerous other” was of central importance to the National Morality project. Yet, it was equally important, of course, to secure the legitimacy of National Morality.

The architects of National Morality devoted a good deal of effort to establish the timeless values of the Japanese people. There are, they claimed, certain unchanging moral sensibilities common to all Japanese, those living today and those of remote antiquity. By projecting contemporary constructions of National Morality into Japan’s past, that is, by rewriting the past so as to accord with the state’s need for loyal subjects in the present, National Morality discourse sought to mask the contingency of its claims and enhance its authority.

This required the essentialization of Japan’s past as well as its present. Situated within the national character discourse prevalent at the time, National Morality scholars developed a series of oppositions between Japan and other countries, and between Orient and Occident, to create the unique moral characteristics of the Japanese. Inoue Tetsujirō, for example, opposed the “instinctiveness” of Japan’s National Morality to the “intellectual” nature of “Western morality.” Implied here is that an intuitive or instinctive morality based on feeling is more authentic (or at least better suited to the character of the Japanese) than the rational, calculating, and “intellectual” morality of the West. Inoue also upheld the family-state, headed by the emperor as father figure, as a central feature of Japan’s National Morality and something unique in the world.

In regard to the virtue of loyalty, Inoue asserted that although China does know the teaching of loyalty-as-filiality (*chūkō ippon*), it lacks the actuality of it. China prioritizes filiality over loyalty, while in Japan loyalty to the state comes first. In the individualistic (*kojinshugi*) West, loyalty and filiality are not attributed the same degree of importance as they are in group-oriented (*dantaishugi*) Japan.<sup>29</sup> In each case then, essentialized

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<sup>28</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), pp. 127-128.

<sup>29</sup> Inoue, *Kokumin dōtoku gairon*, Chapter 7. Regarding loyalty-as-filiality in China, see Chapter 10.

conceptions of the other were used to assert the timeless features of a Japanese moral identity.

Fukasaku Yasubumi constructed an even more comprehensive set of oppositions with which to define Japan's National Morality, as well as the morality of the "Orient" generally. He described the morality of the West as individualistic, theoretical, concerned primarily with universal moral truths, and emphasizing independence. National Morality, on the other hand, he described by way of direct opposition to each of these characteristics of the West. It was group-centered, practical, concerned primarily with the particular moral sensibilities of the Japanese, and emphasized selflessness. In addition, he opposed Western morality's intellectual (*chiteki*) quality to Japan's emotive (*jōteki*) nature. As an example, he stated, "we must view the theory of utilitarianism, which has been called a morality of calculation, as an intellectual morality. We must view our country's morality of loyalty and filiality as one of feeling."<sup>30</sup>

Within this national character discourse, the essentialization of the other went hand in hand with the essentialization of the self. While National Morality scholars insisted upon a particular moral character of "the Japanese," they were constantly confronted by alternative moral positions within Japan that called their claims into question. Only through the annihilation of these alternative moralities could claims to universal status (within the localized space of Japan) for a unique Japanese moral sensibility be fully verified. The spirit of the Japanese people, the family system, and the values of the Japanese each drew its authority from the idea that they were unique attributes of Japan and common to all Japanese. Contemporary narratives on Japanese culture often reassert and sustain these same essentialized attributes. But it is worth noting that many of the supposedly "timeless characteristics" of the Japanese and Japanese culture are here – in early twentieth century Japan – being produced.

In addition to efforts to undermine the authority of Dangerous Thought through strategies of representation and measures for masking the contingency of National Morality, National Morality scholars worked closely with the state, particularly the Ministry of Education, to widely disseminate National Morality doctrine. In 1910, for example, the Ministry

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<sup>30</sup> Fukasaku, *Kokumin dōtoku yōgi*, pp. 37-38.

of Education organized a special lecture series in which Inoue and others<sup>31</sup> lectured on National Morality to students, middle school teachers, and instructors in charge of the departments of moral training at the Teachers' Colleges.<sup>32</sup> These lectures and the audience to which they were directed clearly reflected the state's awareness of the importance of education in the dissemination and legitimation of its own moral orientation. Such Ministry of Education sponsored lectures were an effective means of disseminating National Morality, particularly as they exerted a kind of hierarchical control over the education system through the indoctrination of both regular teachers and instructors at the Teachers' Colleges. Yet the state's most effective means for disseminating National Morality was through textbooks for moral training that were used by primary, middle, and high school students.

In 1897, state authorities announced that all school textbooks for moral training would be produced by the government rather than by private companies. Six years later, the first set of "state-authorized textbooks" (*kokutei kyōkasho*), were completed. After Japan's victory in its war with Russia in 1906, however, and with increasingly vocal and patriotic statements on Japan's unique and distinctive national essence or *kokutai*, dissatisfaction with these textbooks grew. Hozumi Yatsuka was among the more vocal of the critics who claimed that the current textbooks did not go far enough to emphasize the moral characteristics of Japan, in particular, the "great moral principle of loyalty and filial piety (*chūkō no taigi*)."<sup>33</sup> Siding with Hozumi, the Nihon Kōdōkai (a society for moral education established by the educator and Confucian scholar Nishimura Shigeki) issued an "Opinion on State Moral Education Textbooks" in which it was stated, "The Imperial House and the State in our country, of themselves, constitute one body. Since our national polity is one in which there is no State apart from the Imperial House and the Imperial House does not exist apart from

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<sup>31</sup> Legal scholar Hozumi Yatsuka also participated in this lecture series, during which he discussed "The Main Points of National Morality" and moral training textbooks for use in the third year of school education.

<sup>32</sup> The Teachers' Colleges (*Shihan gakkō*) were part of Japan's educational system from 1872 until 1945 when they were replaced by the departments of education within universities. They were established to train teachers for positions in primary and secondary schools. See Monbusho, ed., *Gakusei hachijūnen shi* (Tokyo: Okurasho insatsu kyoku, 1954), pp. 134-137, 195.

the State, loyalty to the ruler is patriotism and patriotism is loyalty to the ruler.”<sup>33</sup> The current textbooks, according to the Nihon Kōdōkai, did not make this identity clear.

In response to growing pressure, the Ministry of Education again revised its moral training textbooks, placing greater emphasis on the notions of family-state, filiality or loyalty-as-patriotism, and ancestor worship, as well as on expanding the sections on the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars.<sup>34</sup> Compared to the 1903 textbooks, the revised 1910 version de-emphasized personal and social ethics and placed greater emphasis on state and family ethics.<sup>35</sup> Of particular concern in these texts were the subject’s obligations to the state.

Inoue, for example, in his “Newly Edited Textbook for Moral Training,” asserted that a vital and well-organized state can only be secured when each subject “submits to the commands of the state.” “The state possesses an absolute and unlimited authority over the subject,” he declared, “and the subject may not defy it, whatever the situation might be.”<sup>36</sup> Such assertions of the authority of the state and demands for the obedience of the subject were common to the state-authorized moral

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<sup>33</sup> See Karasawa Tomitarō, *Kyōkasho no rekishi* (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1960), p. 278. This translation appears in Kosaka Masaaki, *Japanese Thought in the Meiji Era*, trans. D. Abosch (Tokyo: Pan Pacific Press, 1958), p. 387.

<sup>34</sup> Revised texts included chapters on “The Glory of the National Polity,” “The Unity of Loyalty and Filial Piety,” “Guard and Maintain the Imperial Prosperity,” and “The Teachings of Our Imperial Ancestors.” See Karasawa, *Kyōkasho no rekishi*, p. 286. Also see Wilbur M. Fridell, “Government Ethics Textbooks in Late Meiji Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 29 (1969-70), pp. 826-827; and Kosaka, *Japanese Thought*, pp. 387-388.

<sup>35</sup> The declines and increases in the 1903 texts and 1910 revised texts were: personal ethics (41.7% down to 37.9%); social ethics (27.6% down to 23.6%); state ethics (14.7% up to 18%); and family ethics (10.4% up to 14.3%). These figures are from Karasawa, *Kyōkasho no rekishi*, p. 228. Also see Fridell, “Government Ethics Textbooks,” p. 827.

<sup>36</sup> Inoue Tetsujirō, *Shinhen shūshin kyōkasho* (Tokyo: Kinkōtōshoseki kabushiki kaisha, 1911), pp. 20-21.

training textbooks of this time.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, these textbooks were disseminated more widely than the previous state-authorized textbooks, becoming the first truly nationwide textbooks for moral education.<sup>38</sup>

Further efforts to disseminate National Morality took the form of government edicts. Just several months after the Red Flag Incident of June 1908, the Home Minister Hirata Tosuke drafted and issued the Boshin Edict (*Boshin shōsho*). According to then Vice-Minister of Education Okada Ryōhei, the Boshin Edict was issued to combat the disunity brought about by “many undesirable phenomena...such as naturalism and extreme individualism.”<sup>39</sup> The edict called upon the “loyal subjects” of Japan to follow the “teachings of Our Revered Ancestors” which included frugal living, hard work, and diligence. Upon the careful adherence to these teachings, the edict proclaimed, rested the fate of the nation.<sup>40</sup>

In his study of education in modern Japan, historian Karasawa Tomitarō linked this edict to socio-moral disorder and to the government’s efforts to legitimize National Morality. “From the time of the proclamation of the Boshin Edict in 1908,” he observes, “the government viewed social uneasiness and confusion as the result of moral and ethical disorder, and consequently attempted to even more strongly compel compliance with the family-state morality of loyalty, filial piety, and so on.”<sup>41</sup> Of course, the Boshin Edict was itself part of the state’s struggle to authorize the “family-state morality” of National Morality. Moreover, the Boshin Edict invariably appeared, together with the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890, as a frontispiece in moral training textbooks.

These two key government statements on moral propriety, then, were not simply issued to state and local prefectural bureaucracies, but were

<sup>37</sup> For additional examples, see Yoshida Seiichi, *Shūshin Kyōkasho* (Tokyo: Hōbunkan, 1912); and Nakashima Rikizō, *Shūshin shin kyōkasho* (Tokyo: Bungakusha, 1911).

<sup>38</sup> On this point, see Imai Seiichi, *Nihon kindai shi*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1977), pp. 62-63.

<sup>39</sup> *Teikoku kyōiku* 323 (November 1908): 118-119, cited in Jay Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), p. 109.

<sup>40</sup> The text of the Boshin Edict is included in Monbusho, ed., *Gakusei hachijūnen shi* (Tokyo: Okurasho insatsu kyoku, 1954), p. 716.

<sup>41</sup> Karasawa, *Kyōkasho no rekishi*, p. 288.

efficiently disseminated so as to become central texts in the moral training of each Japanese student. Through various strategies then, National Morality proponents sought to de-legitimize Dangerous Thought while enhancing the authority of their own moral claims. Nevertheless, the National Morality position was by no means unassailable.

### Strategies for Resistance

Socialism, individualism, anarchism, and other forms of thought opposed to National Morality resisted its efforts to create a homogeneous moral space through a number of discursive strategies.<sup>42</sup> First, they sought to undermine National Morality's authority to speak for the good by depicting it, as well as the state that sponsored it, as a moral failure. Although National Morality scholars emphasized the subject's obligations to the state, the state itself was not without certain moral obligations to its subjects. National Morality's justification for its demands for loyalty to the state lay, in part, in the role the state played in protecting the lives and property of its subjects. Inoue, for example, wrote of this legal contract in his 1905 exposition on state and world morality. "The state protects us. It keeps our lives, our property, and so on, free from danger, and the inevitable result of this is that we in turn must carry out our proper duty to the state."<sup>43</sup> Fukasaku Yasubumi, Yoshida Kumaji, and other National Morality scholars spoke of the state in similar terms.<sup>44</sup> Many claimed, however, that the state had failed to fulfill this obligation, and as a result, had no basis for its demands of absolute loyalty. Defiance was justified by calling attention to the moral failings of the state.

The pollution of the lands surrounding Yanaka village in Tochigi Prefecture and the subsequent deaths due to copper poisoning caused by the Ashio copper mine provided critics of National Morality with a vivid

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<sup>42</sup> Obviously non-discursive strategies were carried out as well. A number of examples have been mentioned above, such as the Red Flag Incident, strikes, riots, and assassination plots. These, for the most part, have been well-documented. The discursive strategies discussed here, however, have not.

<sup>43</sup> Inoue Tetsujirō, "Kokka teki dōtoku to sekai teki dōtoku" *Teiyu rinrikai rinri koenshu* (February 1905), p. 62.

<sup>44</sup> See for example Fukasaku, *Kokumin dōtoku yōgi*, pp. 18-24, and Yoshida Kumaji, *Waga kokumin dōtoku* (Tokyo: Kodokan, 1918), pp. 285-288.

example of the moral failings of the state. Arahata Kanson, a proponent of socialism and editor of the anarchist journal *Modern Thought* (*Kindai shisō*), wrote of the effect of the copper pollution in *A History of the Destruction of Yanaka Village* (“Yanaka mura metsubō shi,” 1907): “The power of the government and the wealth of capitalists have brought the ruin of this tiny village in what can only be called a well-organized crime.”<sup>45</sup> Outraged by what he saw as “the government’s merciless cruelty,” Arahata wanted retribution. “Let us look to the day which will surely come,” he wrote, “when we will revenge ourselves on [the government], using exactly the same means and methods as they used on the people of Yanaka village.”<sup>46</sup>

Arahata believed that it was precisely through this kind of disregard for the people that the state created conditions for the growth of anarchism. “The government abuses people, mistreats them, and oppresses them. It mocks the people, has nothing but contempt for them, and governs them badly. And, in doing this, it is producing many violent anarchists, whom we will always regard with affection.”<sup>47</sup> Here, Arahata redirected blame. The state itself was responsible for any disruption the anarchists had caused because it had failed in its moral obligation to the people. Others were more concise in their criticism: “The emperor, the wealthy, the large landowners – they are all blood-sucking ticks.”<sup>48</sup> This was Buddhist monk and socialist sympathizer Uchiyama Gudō’s explanation for the poverty many had to endure. In his view, the powerful – the wealthy, those who governed, even the emperor – were concerned not with the well-being of the people but only with their own further enrichment. Uchiyama was among the anarchist activists executed in the High Treason Incident.

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<sup>45</sup> Arahata Kanson, *Yanaka mura metsubō shi* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1999), p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Kanson, *Yanaka mura metsubō shi*, p. 172 [translation from John Crump, *The Origins of Socialist Thought in Japan* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), p. 308].

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124 [translation, p. 308].

<sup>48</sup> Uchiyama Gudō’s statement is cited in Akiyama Kiyoshi, *Nihon no hangyaku shisō* (Tokyo: Buneisha, 1968), p. 33. John Crump also touches on this statement by Uchiyama. For an alternative translation, see Crump, *The Origins of Socialist Thought*, p. 310.

Sharing many of Uchiyama's views, socialist Katayama Sen described the moral failings of Japan's capitalist society just after the turn of the century. "In the world of socialism," wrote Katayama in his 1903 work *My Socialism* (*Waga shakaishugi*), "true morality will prevail." In the capitalist society of his day, however, he saw morality offered up in sacrifice for the benefit of the capitalist. Katayama asserted that his current society, characterized by severe economic competition for monetary gain, impeded the development of true morality. "To hope for the development of civic virtues (*kōtoku*) in a society governed by selfishness is like searching for a fish in a tree." He believed that in a capitalist society, it would be futile to expect any real development of a "true morality":

The religionist, the moralist, and the scholar are mere tools for justifying the capitalist's position, their knowledge, truths, and ideals are completely discarded and ignored. Their opinions and arguments are like those of the religionists and moralists of the slave states in the southern part of North America, who, during the American Civil War carried out to end slavery, taught soldiers in their camps that slavery is a fair and just institution.<sup>49</sup>

For Katayama, scholars of National Morality were nothing more than tools for the legitimization of an immoral capitalist system. Instead of joining the battle to bring about "true morality," they merely reinforced the conditions that impeded it.

National Morality was also criticized as an exploitative system of obligations. While *kokumin dōtoku* was upheld as "the people's morality," anarchists attacked it as a "morality created for the benefit of one certain class alone."<sup>50</sup> The well-known writer and proponent of individualism Natsume Soseki echoed this sentiment in a 1911 article on literature and morality. Soseki claimed that National Morality was less a set of virtues than duties, adherence to which was to the state's, but not necessarily to the individual's advantage. "When we look closely at the old Confucian moral slogans – loyalty, filial piety, chastity – we realize that they were nothing

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<sup>49</sup> This and the preceding citations are from Katayama Sen, "Waga shakaishugi" [My Socialism] (1903), in Kishimoto Eitaro, ed., *Nihon shakai undo shisōshi*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Aoki shoten, 1968), pp. 112-113.

<sup>50</sup> See *Kindai shisō* 1/5 (February 1913), p. 1.

but duties imposed solely for the benefit of those who possessed absolute power under the social system of the time.”<sup>51</sup> This statement, written in August 1911 (shortly after Inoue’s lectures on National Morality at Tokyo University and about half a year after the executions associated with the High Treason Incident), was not merely a critique of the moral views of Japan’s past; it was a thinly veiled critique leveled directly at National Morality.

Economist Kawakami Hajime, arguing from the standpoint of individualism, put forward yet another critique centering on National Morality’s neglect of the individual. Kawakami is perhaps best known as a Marxist social philosopher. But in 1911, before his association with Marxism, Kawakami (at this time a lecturer on economics at Kyoto University) developed a systematic and comprehensive critique of the ethics of “state-ism” (*kokkashugi*), a term he used to refer to National Morality. He criticized National Morality’s emphasis on the state and its disregard for the individual. “The value of the individual’s existence lies simply in being a tool for planning the development of the state.” Kawakami maintained that because the ethics of state-ism privileged the survival of the state over the needs – even the lives – of every individual, it was an absurd doctrine:

If this were a case in which killing every individual was necessary for maintaining the existence of the state, then the state would be kept alive even though all individuals would be sacrificed. This is the inevitable and logical conclusion of state-ism.

The ethical view of state-ism, then, demanded patriotism, loyalty to the state, and a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the good of the state. Kawakami contrasted Japan’s state-ism (*kokkashugi*) to the individualism (*kojinshugi*) he believed characterized Western countries. In the West, Kawakami explained, the individual is the end and the state the means, therefore, the state would be dismantled rather than allow the sacrifice of the individuals that it comprises. In Japan, however, the people are no more than “the slaves of the state.” Moreover, he noted that while the people of

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<sup>51</sup> Natsume Soseki, “Bungei to dōtoku” [Literature and Morality] (1911) in *Natsume Soseki zenshū*, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1985), p. 384. This translation is from McClellan and Rubin, trans., *Kokoro: A Novel, and Selected Essays* (New York: Madison Books, 1992), p. 245.

Europe and America have rights, Japan is “a country of obligations” where loyalty, courage, and public service are regarded as the highest virtues.

While National Morality proponents warned of the dangers of individualism, Kawakami asserted that the true danger was the ethics of state-ism because it led scholars to “sacrifice their truth to the state.” These scholars upheld the state as an “omnipotent” apparatus “for attaining the good.” “But the state does not do good for the people,” Kawakami insisted, “indeed, it cannot do good.” The state, he argued, makes demands on the people and can do nothing else. The individual is unable to set his or her own existential ends because the state demands the sacrifice of the individual to whatever is of benefit to the state.<sup>52</sup>

These descriptions of the moral failings of the state – its disregard for the welfare of its subjects, its encouragement of the “exploitative capitalist system,” and its emphasis on duties and obligations as opposed to the needs of the individual – marked the limits of the state’s ability to legitimize National Morality discourse and formed a basis for rejecting the state’s demand for loyalty, obedience, and self-sacrifice. From an emphasis on the state as a moral failure, critiques of National Morality moved to a more sophisticated level of engagement – the struggle for the meaning of key terms in the moral discourse of the day.

National Morality and the state did not have a monopoly on the meaning of morality and the terms closely associated with it. Resistance to efforts by the state to create a society of homogeneous subjects, all equally loyal to the state, took the form of redefining or inverting the meaning of terms deployed by the state for the purpose of instilling loyalty. It was when Dangerous Thought, upon whose “otherness” National Morality relied for its own legitimacy, began to openly assert its own configurations of moral action that it became particularly dangerous in the minds of National Morality scholars.

Moral positions were attacked and defended on the basis of the extent to which they contributed to the well-being of society or the state.

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<sup>52</sup> For these citations by Kawakami, see his “Nihon dokutoku no kokkashugi,” in *Kawakami Hajime chosakushu*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1964), pp. 189-194. Compare this statement with that of socialist Katayama Sen in 1903: “The religionist, the moralist, and the scholar...their knowledge, truths, and ideals are completely discarded and ignored,” in Katayama, “Waga shakaishugi,” p. 113.

Moral positions that somehow benefited society or the state were considered “wholesome.” Thus, the term *kenzen* (healthy, wholesome) and its opposite *fukenzen* appeared frequently in both National Morality discourse and in the writings of proponents of Dangerous Thought. In the wake of the High Treason Incident, for example, Komatsubara Eitarō, Minister of Education during the particularly repressive second Katsura Administration (1908-1911), sought to suppress “the popularity of naturalism and the penetration of socialism” by encouraging “wholesome (*kenzen*) reading beneficial to public morals.”<sup>53</sup> To this end, he appointed in 1911 a special committee to promote “wholesome” values in literature. In this context, wholesome literature was the sort that incorporated the values espoused in National Morality: loyalty, filiality, patriotism, etc., Literary Naturalism was the primary target of the Education Ministry’s committee. This genre of literature emphasized the authority of the individual and regarded National Morality “with defiance and disgust.” For naturalist writers, this committee was “nothing but a branch police station for thought control” and a transparent government effort to annihilate their literary genre.<sup>54</sup>

While the Katsura regime sought to suppress naturalist literature by emphasizing its “unwholesome” character, writer Soseki, inverting the term, defended it precisely for its “wholesomeness.” Soseki observed that in recent years “naturalism” evoked fear (particularly among those in government) and had been seen only as a “depraved” and “licentious” form of literature. But he asserted that such fear and hatred was in no way warranted. Soseki urged people to see naturalism’s “wholesome side,” as a form of literature that engages with human failings and human blunders, allowing the reader to reflect on his or her own weaknesses. In this sense, Soseki maintained, “the literature of naturalism is just as concerned with morality as the literature of romanticism.”<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the state viewed literary naturalism as “unwholesome” and as a threat to its authority. Despite the efforts of Soseki and others, the popularity of naturalist

<sup>53</sup> Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, p. 171.

<sup>54</sup> See Koboshi [pseudonym], “Bungei jihyō,” *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin*, (January 1908), pp. 55-57; and Togawa Shūkotsu, “Bungei iinkai shi-ken,” *Chuo koron* (June 1911), pp. 87-89. Both are cited in Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals*, pp. 207-209.

<sup>55</sup> Natsume Soseki, “Bungei to dōtoku,” pp. 382-383.

literature waned, a development that pleased Inoue who regarded it as good “for the sake of public morals.”<sup>56</sup>

In another example of this strategy of reconfiguring or inverting terms, Uchiyama Gudō, the Buddhist socialist mentioned above, attempted to reconfigure the “treasonous” act of defying state and emperor into an act of “heroism” by questioning the emperor’s divine status. Outraged by the government’s response to the Red Flag Incident of 1908, Uchiyama in the same year published and distributed an article calling for the abolition of the government and the establishment of “a free country without an emperor.” Justifying this to his readers, Uchiyama argued that such an act was not treasonous, rather, it was a just and heroic act. It would abolish an exploitative and oppressive system most had been tricked into accepting. The emperor, Uchiyama claimed, through the medium of primary school teachers, had tricked the people into believing he is the child of the gods.<sup>57</sup> Under Uchiyama’s reasoning, treason became heroism and the divinity of the emperor became deception. This reconfiguration of treason – describing defiance of the state as “heroic” – carried with it the implication that the loyalty to the state that proponents of National Morality were so concerned to instill, ought to be replaced by a higher loyalty to the needs of the destitute. In this sense, Uchiyama’s views clearly represented an obstacle to National Morality’s “approach” toward moral homogeneity.

“Anarchism” was another contested term. In 1908, Sakamoto Seima – among those convicted in the High Treason case – attempted to reconfigure the pejorative connotation of the term anarchism (*museifushugi*) by deflecting some of its negative characterizations:

People say that anarchism is the poison that comes from the mouths of traitors and that it is an extremely evil and dangerous doctrine. I do not know what they mean by traitors and rebels....The society that the great doctrine and spirit of anarcho-communism points to is a society without the state and without government. Indeed, it is a society that denies all authority. It is also a society which, by striving for the happiness and advantage of everyone, will encourage the progress and improvement of humankind....In such a society, all the rampage of the present

<sup>56</sup> Inoue, “Gendai shisō no keikō ni tsuite,” *Taiyō* (November 1910), p. 67.

<sup>57</sup> Akiyama Kiyoshi, *Nihon no hangyaku shisō*, p. 33.

monstrous private property system will disappear and the houses, fields, factories and all the other components of the economy will become the common property of everyone. Under these circumstances...[humanity] should be able to reach the limits of ethical and moral development.<sup>58</sup>

For Sakamoto, the “poisonous” doctrine of anarchism was in reality a “great doctrine” devoted to the promotion of the happiness, equality, and welfare of the people. To bring about the society he envisioned, however, the capitalist system of his day had to be overthrown. To this end, he called for a general strike to initiate revolution, yet in the wake of the High Treason Incident, support for such activism waned.

Perhaps just as threatening to the aims of National Morality scholars were anarchist efforts to reconfigure what constituted moral action, so that the term “morality” (*dōtoku*) itself became a highly disputed term. While Inoue lectured to Japan’s instructors of moral training about the “morality of the Japanese people,” anarchist thinkers, drawing on the writings of anarchist philosopher Peter Kropotkin, argued for the complete renovation of morality.<sup>59</sup>

Among a certain minority in society, now is a time in which conceptions of morality are completely changing. This is truly a dangerous time. The most moral of activities have now, by contrast, come to be seen as the most immoral of activities. The practices, the learning, and the morality created for the benefit of one certain class alone, conventionally held in respect and regarded as sacred, have all been completely abandoned. People have emerged who recognize so-called immoral actions as the

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<sup>58</sup> Sakamoto Seima, “Nyūsha no ji,” *Kumamoto Hyōron* (May 1908), p. 1. This translation is from Crump, *Origins of Socialist Thought*, p. 333.

<sup>59</sup> Osugi Sakae, “Dōtoku no kōzō” *Kindai shisō* 1/5 (February 1913), p. 1. In the listing for the author’s name, only the character “hae” (glory) appeared. This text was almost certainly based on the anarchist thinker Peter Kropotkin’s “Anarchist Morality” and reflects the impact of his thought in Japan. See Peter Kropotkin, “Anarchist Morality,” in Roger N. Baldwin, ed., *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970), p. 112.

highest duty to themselves and to the world. Truly, these are dangerous people. But, according to the teachings of historians, and according to these dangerous people living in this dangerous age, history is ever advancing. This is a matter of creating morality. How fortunate to be born into this time, to be counted among these people. Truly, this is the chance of a lifetime.

Here “morality” is turned upside down. The “most moral of activities” becomes in this piece “the most immoral” while “so-called immoral actions” become one’s “highest duty.” This article was clearly meant as an attack on the state, and more specifically, on National Morality. The “so-called immoral actions” mentioned here included violent activism directed against the state. But they were only “immoral” from the standpoint of the state and National Morality. The author of this text was fully aware of the dangers in “creating” a new morality. Circumventing the “false morality” emphasizing one’s duty to the state, and drawing upon a long tradition of self-sacrificing action for some higher good or ideal reminiscent of the “men of high purpose” (*shishi*) during the Meiji Revolution, this article emphasized a person’s “highest duty to themselves and to the world.” Finally, this statement on the creation of a new morality opposed National Morality because it was not truly a people’s morality (*kokumin no dōtoku*). Rather it represented National Morality in much the same way as Natsume Soseki did, that is, as “morality created for the benefit of one certain class alone.”

Arahata Kanson, writing two and half years after the High Treason Incident, contemplated the morality of terrorism. The following passage also provides an example of the reappropriation of the pre-Meiji *shishi* ideal of risk-taking in the name of a higher good, a higher loyalty:

As Kropotkin discusses in “The Morality of the Anarchist,” doing away with tyrants who oppose civilization and the way of humanity (*jindō*) is not a soap bubble that vanishes when it ascends into the air [i.e., a utopian illusion], it is the morality of the terrorist (*terorisuto no dōtoku*). It is the command of conscience. It is the victory of human feeling over cowardice.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Arahata Kanson, “Nakagi no kyomuto geki,” *Kindai shisō* 1/10 (July 1913), p. 20. The term “utopian illusion” is from John Crump’s translation:

This “morality of the terrorist,” according to Arahata, calls for the defense of the “way of humanity,” an explicitly moral term. In opposition to National Morality which required obedience to the state and its laws, Arahata’s defense of “the way of humanity” required moral action against the state in the form of terrorism. Those seeking to abolish the state and/or to realize a socialist society put this kind of terrorist morality into practice in the High Treason Incident of 1910.

Thus, a struggle to define the terms of moral discourse was an integral part of efforts to legitimize moral views, both for those who disseminated and those who opposed National Morality. While proponents of National Morality achieved a certain degree of success in establishing such terms as morality, treason, loyalty, wholesome/dangerous/poisonous thought as fixtures of early twentieth century moral discourse, they were unable to control the way these terms were received and reconfigured.

Finally, the questioning of National Morality’s truth-claims provided a third strategy with which to undermine its dominance. For example, even as Inoue, with the backing of the Ministry of Education, struggled to establish the authority of National Morality through scholarly articles, textbooks on moral training, lectures to the nation’s teachers, and so on, others represented this so-called people’s morality of loyalty and filiality as anachronistic, false, and devoid of authority.

Lecturing in 1911, Soseki discussed National Morality, referring to it as the “romantic morality” that was dominant prior to the Meiji Revolution of 1868. This morality, he claimed, “has by and large passed away.” Linking the progress of knowledge with the decline of this romantic morality’s credibility, he asserted, “although romantic morality was seen to be true originally, now...one cannot but think of it as lies. This is because [romantic morality] has completely lost its actual authority.” Soseki thus viewed the National Morality project as an attempt to impose outmoded values on a society that was no longer willing to accept them. “Even if people are coerced into following this romantic morality as in the past,” he claimed, “no one will practice it because human knowledge has advanced.”<sup>61</sup> While Soseki depicted National Morality as an anachronism

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“the overthrowing of the tyrants who set themselves up against civilization and humanity is not a utopian illusion,” see Crump, *Origins of Socialist Thought*, p. 317.

<sup>61</sup> Natsume Soseki, “Bungei to dōtoku,” pp. 383-384.

and as a collection of lies, socialist thinkers questioned National Morality's claims to moral particularism.

Katayama Sen, a leading Christian Socialist who spent time in prison between 1911 and 1912 for his role in organizing worker strikes, argued that morality in Japan is not a product of national character and a function of "the spirit of the people" (*minzoku seishin*) as National Morality proponents asserted, but rather a product of socio-economic conditions.<sup>62</sup> This view, insisting that National Morality was not tied to the character of a people, directly undermined National Morality scholars' assertion of moral sensibilities unique to Japan. The danger in this type of thinking for National Morality was that it conceived of morality as determined by factors that transcend national particularity. The morality of Japan, just like that of any other nation, was governed by universal economic principles. According to this view, then, if one wanted to understand morality in Japan, the study of economics rather than "the people's spirit" should be the focus of attention.

Even the sacred truths surrounding the emperor came under attack. National Morality affirmed the divine status of the emperor and, moreover, held that the emperor and the state were "of one body."<sup>63</sup> The emperor, then, was the concrete manifestation of the abstract spirit of the state (*kokka shin*). To disobey or plot against the one, then, was a show of disloyalty to the other. At the root of much anti-state activism during the late Meiji period, however, was an effort to strike at the state's key symbol for legitimacy, the divine status of the emperor. Miyashita Takichi, a machine operator at the Kamezaki iron factory in Aichi prefecture, provides an example. After his arrest in connection with the assassination plot in 1910 (the High Treason Incident), he is said to have stated in a preliminary hearing:<sup>64</sup>

Because the people of our country hold this sort of superstition about the imperial family [i.e., the emperor's divinity], it was totally impossible to realize socialism. Hence, I made up my mind

<sup>62</sup> Katayama, "Waga shakaishugi," p. 113.

<sup>63</sup> Fukasaku, for example, makes such an assertion, in *Kokumin dōtoku yōgi*, p. 233. Also see Karasawa Tomitarō, *Kyōkasho no rekishi*, p. 278.

<sup>64</sup> Akiyama, *Hangyaku shisō*, p. 41. This translation, with only slight revision on my part, is in Crump, *Origins of Socialist Thought*, p. 312.

to first make a bomb and then throw it at the emperor. I had to show that even the emperor is a human being that bleeds just like the rest of us, and thus destroy the people's superstition.

Miyashita, an anarchist activist, believed that the representation of the emperor as divine was the greatest obstacle to the spread of socialism in Japan and helped maintain what he viewed as an exploitative and immoral capitalist system. Like Uchiyama, Miyashita was executed for high treason.

Kaneko Fumiko, an anarchist activist imprisoned for treason in 1923, was even more outspoken in her views of the emperor:

We have in our midst someone who is supposed to be a living god, one who is omnipotent and omniscient....Yet his children are crying because of hunger, suffocating to death in the coal mines, and being crushed to death by factory machines. Why is this so? Because, in truth, the emperor is a mere human being.

As for "the concepts of loyalty to the emperor and love of nation," they were "simply rhetorical notions that are being manipulated by the tiny group of the privileged classes to fulfill their own greed and interests."<sup>65</sup>

Thus, the strategy of attacking National Morality's most central truth-claims, as with efforts to lay bare the moral failings of the state and to contest the meaning of the terms of moral discourse, disrupted the legitimacy of National Morality. National Morality discourse, then, was by no means merely abstract and philosophical; it was deeply intertwined with the thought and activities of anarchists, socialists, and others that called into question the state's own moral vision for society.

### **Conclusions: The Dangers of the Moral Ideal**

The conception of the good at the root of National Morality discourse was a product of its intellectual context. In his *Outline*, Inoue claimed that through his newly formulated moral theory, the question of good and evil could finally be settled. But Inoue's decisive solution to the problem of good and evil was in fact a contingent normative claim

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<sup>65</sup> Kaneko is cited in Mikiso Hane, *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Pre-War Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 124.

produced within a specific set of historical conditions. Contemporary accounts of National Morality devote inadequate attention to the historical conditions out of which National Morality emerged. These accounts represent National Morality as a set of statements about loyalty, filiality, the family-state, and patriotism. Centering solely on these elements, they abstract National Morality discourse from its philosophical and socio-political contexts, and consequently overlook National Morality's connections with the philosophical movement known as Personalism and the Dangerous Thought of anarchism, socialism, individualism, and literary naturalism.

Inoue's configuration of the good as the pursuit of an ideal, and the ideal itself as complete personality, reflects the appropriation of the language and concepts of Personalism. But National Morality scholars reconfigured the terms of Personalism in such a way that the only "truly good" action was action that served the state. Unlike Personalism's ideal of self-realization, the ideal of National Morality was the perfection of the state. The good was the attempt to universalize a contingent and highly local moral perspective, or to create a state-directed moral homogeneity through the suppression of difference. Read as allegory, Inoue's ostensibly apolitical treatise on National Morality was, in fact, a highly political effort to articulate the moral basis for Japan's national identity and thereby to provide philosophical justification for the state's cultivation of loyal subjects and its suppression of what it deemed Dangerous Thought.

Dangerous Thought was dangerous because both its existence and assertions undermined National Morality's claim to speak for the good. While National Morality proponents demanded the approach toward their moral ideal – the state of moral homogeneity in which all subjects faithfully served the state – the presence of Dangerous Thought served as testimony to National Morality's failure to attain its ideal. In short, Dangerous Thought was viewed as an obstacle to the good and as the cause of social disorder. The pursuit of social order and the cultivation of loyal action that served the state required its eradication.

But why did this new configuration of National Morality, one that began with Inoue's lectures in 1910-11, emerge when it did? The state's desire to create moral community produced various "other" moral communities (supporters of anarchism, individualism, etc.) who were unable to find a place for themselves in the National Morality vision for

society. As this article has shown, the process of creating community through exclusion was oftentimes violent, and with the twelve executions in the High Treason Incident, neither the state nor the population in general could ignore the violence carried out by the state in its pursuit of its ideal. The violence of the National Morality project had become apparent to its architects.

Attempting to justify the state's use of violence in the suppression of anarchism and other forms of Dangerous Thought, Inoue wrote, "Those who embrace destructive thought are, in history's judgment, in error."<sup>66</sup> Yet, through their engagement with Dangerous Thought, Inoue and other National Morality advocates were forced to confront the realization that National Morality was itself a form of destructive and dangerous thought that worked to legitimize the open, physical violence the state used against its enemies. Moreover, its efforts to reduce various other normative orientations to a single homogeneous moral space must be viewed as a form of violence as well – the violence of the suppression of otherness.

Yet, the discourse on National Morality enabled, sustained, and reproduced Dangerous Thought even while seeking to annihilate it. In their quest to monopolize the authority to speak for the morality of the entire nation, National Morality proponents brought the issue of the moral ideal to the center of public discourse, thereby enabling those excluded by this ideal to question it. In other words, National Morality discourse opened up a space of dissent. It provided the discursive conditions for marginalized voices not merely to be feared, but also heard. Moreover, although National Morality and modes of thought opposed to National Morality posed a threat to one another, each needed the other to define and sustain itself. For National Morality, the dangerous other helped sustain its own vitality and urgency. In this sense, while National Morality and the state actively sought the annihilation of Dangerous Thought, the complete eradication of the other would have erased or at least greatly weakened the significance of National Morality.

To invoke the dangerous and destructive character of socialism, anarchism, and individualism was, therefore, not merely a descriptive activity, it was performative as well. That is, it served to create and re-create the other as the dangerous object to be opposed, suppressed, and feared. This constant condemnation of the other worked to sustain it. Every

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<sup>66</sup> Inoue, *Kokumin dōtoku gairon*, p. 10.

assertion on behalf of National Morality implicitly reinforced a negative conception of the other. To approach the moral ideal, then, was not to move forward or upward toward some “better” end, but to sustain the current heterogeneous social reality of conflict and dissension. In other words, to approach was always to remain within the realm of violence and suppression, and this meant the constant but incomplete annihilation of the other.

The idea of a “national morality” continues as a focus of moral discourse in contemporary Japan. In 2000, social critic, writer, and former lecturer at Tokyo University, Nishibe Susumu published a work entitled *National Morality* (*Kokumin no dōtoku*). In this text, there is much that is reminiscent of the National Morality movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. But Nishibe’s project is part of a new discourse with new objectives and new enemies. Unlike Inoue and others in the 1910s who sought to eradicate the Dangerous Thought of anarchism, socialism, and individualism, Dangerous Thought for Nishibe is “civil society” and its values.

Nishibe explains the crime and political corruption of contemporary Japan as a kind of moral decline brought on by the postwar diffusion of the values of American-style modernism. The specific culprits, says Nishibe, are progressivism, humanism, pacifism, and democracy, as these form the foundation for values that privilege not the public realm, but the realm of private benefit. In Nishibe’s view, “liberty destroys morality,” and the idea that “all are born equal” is an exaggeration and an “unproven proposition.” As for “humanism that stresses the dignity of the individual,” it is “nothing more than a rash, arrogant human narcissism.” Nishibe calls for a rebuilding of morality in such a way as to restore “public order” and to address the “loss of spirit” Japan suffered with its defeat in the Pacific War.<sup>67</sup>

The struggle to resist the hegemonic claims of civil society and its putatively universal values led Nishibe to the imposition of his own hegemonic claims about values common to all Japanese. His project is thus

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<sup>67</sup> Nishibe Susumu, *Kokumin no dōtoku* (Tokyo: Sankei shimbun nyūsu sābisu, 2000), pp. 212, 279. Also see Hamabayashi Masao, ed., *Tettei hihan: Kokumin no dōtoku* (Tokyo: Ōtsuki shoten, 2001), p. 17. The *Tettei hihan* text provides a collection of articles that oppose and critique Nishibe’s work.

predicated upon Nihonjinron (Japanese uniqueness)-style assertions of Japanese identity. But, as with National Morality discourse a century ago, will not the efforts of Nishibe and his supporters to universalize (within Japan) some formal conception of “Japanese values” involve the suppression of alternative moralities? It appears that the problematic notion of a “national morality” is as much in need of critical scrutiny today as it was in Japan a century ago.

## KARAOKE LEARNING IN JAPAN: INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION IN A GROUP CONTEXT

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### **The Problem of *Naraigoto***

There has been a dramatic jump in the number and the extent of the involvement of Japanese adults studying karaoke in the last decade. Housewives and retired people enjoy learning karaoke at community centers, private institutions, and karaoke bars. Many karaoke “circles” or clubs are organized by students and they practice singing with or without teachers. Some students take their karaoke practice more seriously and even take private lessons. These students participate in karaoke contests or shows in full costume. Such learning activities experienced outside of formal schooling are called *naraigoto*, which is similar to adult learning (or continuing education) in America.

Traditional forms of *naraigoto* have a long tradition in Japan and are often represented by tea ceremony and flower arrangement. Although learning karaoke, which is a newer form of *naraigoto*, is founded on the customs of traditional forms of learning, it is different in many ways. Karaoke learning offers more freedom and is self-directed. As a multi-purpose activity, it allows students many individual benefits. Karaoke learning functions in a traditional learning system, which is based on a group environment, while students’ behavior tends to be individualistic.

Nowadays, Japanese adults enjoy private time, individual expression, and self realization. This individualized pastime has a close connection with the postwar prevalence of individualism in Japan. Thus it is worth examining the emergence of karaoke learning in light of the historical debate of the group versus the individual. This study begins by addressing the following major themes: groupism versus individualism, traditional forms of *naraigoto*, and a newer form of *naraigoto* or karaoke learning. It continues with a variety of fieldwork observations on self-expression and the role of karaoke in releasing individual forms of conveying feelings and attitude among, for example, elderly Japanese. I argue that karaoke *naraigoto* is a tool for students to attain their individual goals and represents a successful reconciliation of individual expression with social dependency.

### Groupism versus Individualism

David Matsumoto mentions that groupism versus individualism is a frequently-cited cross-cultural indicator, in referring to an article written by H. R. Markus and S. Kitayama<sup>1</sup>:

Individualistic cultures encourage their members to be unique. Individual goals, values, behavior, and self expression take precedence over the group's collective needs. Collective cultures, by contrast, emphasize the needs of groups, and individual goals are subordinated to group goals. Individual identification in collective cultures comes through group affiliation.<sup>2</sup>

Many scholars have generalized the Japanese and described Japan as a group-oriented society as opposed to the individualistic society of the United States. Takeo Doi argues that *amae* (dependence) is the unique characteristic of the Japanese people and writes:

The Japanese are often said to be group-minded, to be strong as a group but weak as individuals. It is also said that the freedom of the individual is still not firmly established in Japanese society. Where general trends are concerned, these statements would seem to be true, and they accord well with, the prominence of *amae* in Japanese society.<sup>3</sup>

Although Edwin Reischauer mentions that group orientation cannot be overstressed in understanding Japanese society, his basic stance acknowledges and accepts the duality of group and individual: "The group emphasis has affected the whole style of interpersonal relations in Japan....Whereas the American may seek to emphasize his independence and originality, the Japanese will do the reverse."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. R. Markus & S. Kitayama, "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation," *Psychological Review* 98 (1991), pp. 224-253.

<sup>2</sup> David Matsumoto, *Unmasking Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd, 1973), p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese Today* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap

Joy Hendry regards *han* (a working group) as a group activity that characterizes Japanese school activities: "Throughout the school system classes are divided up into small groups, which are collectively responsible for various tasks. The behavior of each member therefore contributes to the overall ability of the group, and the children learn to help one another."<sup>5</sup>

This dichotomy seems to be an accepted notion among scholars; however, some scholars studying Japan question the duality by pointing out its shortcomings and limitations. Harumi Befu argues:

The group model of Japanese society compares an American definition of Western individualism with a Japanese cultural definition on the collectivity; however, such a contrast is seen as being a non-parallel comparison which totally ignores interpersonal relationships in the U.S. or in Japan.<sup>6</sup>

He emphasizes that there is in fact a very strong sense of personhood in Japan which is expressed as *seishin* (spirituality) or *jinkaku* (individuality).

Nancy Sato argues for a relations orientation. A relations orientation emphasizes the importance of one's relational situation in the world, but the relation is not always to the group. The relation can be with one or more persons, with the surrounding environment, with aspects of oneself, and with experiences....Within this framework, I argue that individual and group dimensions are complementary aspects of teaching-learning processes in Japan, and that both individual and group orientations are nurtured in Japanese elementary classrooms.<sup>7</sup>

I examine karaoke learning in the case of Japanese adults from the viewpoint of groupism versus individualism, but it does not fit this simple dichotomy. The rise of the blended culture makes it more difficult to believe the stereotype that Japanese are group-oriented and Westerners are individualistic. The scenes I encountered in my fieldwork indicate that self

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Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> Joy Hendry, *Understanding Japanese Society* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 100.

<sup>6</sup> Harumi Befu, "A Critique of the Group Model of Japanese Society," *Social Analysis* 2 (1980), p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Sato, "Honoring the Individual," *Teaching and Learning in Japan*, eds. Thomas P. Rohlen and Gerald K. LeTendre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 119.

expression is a basic desire of all human beings, and fear of embarrassment and consideration of others are universal human attributes.

One day, I came across a group of Americans singing karaoke in Japan. One took the microphone in hand and sang, and the rest sang along and danced disco.<sup>8</sup> When I encountered the scene, I thought that Americans were more group-oriented than Japanese. Later I found out that the Westerners were too timid to risk demonstrating their individual singing in public, and by participating in the group, they didn't have to worry about embarrassing themselves and losing their self-esteem. Since it is uncommon for Japanese to sing karaoke in a group like the Americans did, it could be argued that self-expression by some Japanese may be more individualistic and intense than by some Americans.

Experiencing various situations like the scene above, I believe that differentiating between Japanese and Westerners based on groupism versus individualism is not applicable to the karaoke cultural context. Japan is a collective entity of distinct individuals and cannot be explained by either groupism or individualism. Both collectivity and individuality are interactive in Japan and they are essential elements that constitute Japanese society.

### **Traditional Forms of *Naraigoto***

*Naraigoto* was initially called *okeikogoto* and became prevalent among common people in the Edo period (1600-1868).<sup>9</sup> The postwar economic affluence has greatly affected Japanese lifestyles, and qualitative and quantitative changes are seen in the educational sphere. Learning is no longer limited to school and Japanese adults have come to regard education as their lifework. In 1988, about ninety percent of Japanese adults wanted to participate in further study, and about forty-five percent of them took part in

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<sup>8</sup> I was surprised that this scene was very similar to Kōichi Ichikawa's description of karaoke scenes in the West, in "Karaoke kōdō ni miru nihonjin no taijin hairyo" [Japanese Concern for Others in Karaoke Behaviors], *Gendai no esupuri: Jōhōka to taishū Japan*, [Contemporary Esprit: Informationalization and Popular Culture], vol. 312 (Tokyo: Shibundo, 1993), pp. 192-193.

<sup>9</sup> Hideo Watanabe, "Japanese Adult Learning: Karaoke *Naraigoto*," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Pittsburgh, 2000), p. 109.

learning activities.<sup>10</sup> *Naraigoto* is a substantial source of Japanese adult learning and has been widely practiced at culture centers, community centers, and private homes. A variety of adult learning activities and newer courses came into being and more people became interested in *naraigoto*. Popular children's *naraigoto* are piano, swimming, and calligraphy, while golf, social dance, and English conversation are prevalent among adults.

Millions of Japanese also find self-expression through traditional dancing, music, and other art forms. The various types of dance associated with the premodern theater and with geishas are the focus for numerous well-organized schools of instruction, each with an ardent group of devotees. The same is true of all types of traditional music, and many more people acquire skills in the various instruments and forms of Western music.<sup>11</sup>

Traditional forms of *naraigoto* have been portrayed in previous research as the typical style of Japanese learning. Imitation and repetition are known to be the usual learning styles in many traditional forms of learning. Ikuta Kumiko describes how Japanese dance students reach the stage of mastery by copying and repetition, and this type of practice is basically true to the process of learning other traditional techniques (*waza*).<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Anderson observes that there is very little variation in the way in which individual tea-serving manners (*otemae*) are performed. *Otemae* have been created by the *iemoto* (the grand master) and cannot be altered by anyone else. Every hand movement and the placement of each utensil are strictly prescribed.<sup>13</sup>

*Kata* (form) is another feature of traditional *naraigoto*.<sup>14</sup> The observance of *kata* has contributed to the preservation of standards allowing students to study more efficiently and prevented them from being overly adventurous learners who try to develop original styles outside the

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<sup>10</sup> NHK Hōsō Bunka Kenkyūjō [The Japan Broadcasting Culture Research Institute] ed., *Nihonjin no gakushū* [Japanese Learning] (Tokyo: Daiichi hōki shuppan, 1990), pp. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Reischauer, *The Japanese Today*, p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Ikuta Kumiko, *Waza no rikai* [Understanding *waza*], in *Karada to kyōiku* [Body and Education] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1987), pp. 90-92.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer L. Anderson, *An Introduction to Japanese Tea Ritual* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 100.

<sup>14</sup> *Kata* refers to the stylized gestures or movements observed in Japanese traditional art and martial arts.

mainstream. Ryōen Minamoto discusses the positive and negative aspects of *kata*, which is both a model and a restriction to learners. It adds functionality, rationality and beauty to their behavior, and gives order and function to their social life, while it also creates pressures and constraints.<sup>15</sup>

Gail Benjamin explains the role of the *iemoto*, which is another major feature of traditional *naraigoto*.<sup>16</sup> Many groups in Japan are organized quite self-consciously on the model of the family. Within an organization following this pattern, each member has a strong relationship to the next higher link in the hierarchy. The lower-ranking member is bound to show deference to the higher; the higher is required to take care of the lower.<sup>17</sup> Under this structure, students are expected to obey exactly the standard set by the *iemoto*. The organization nurtures the relationship between students and teachers, but tends to force student conformity and suppresses spontaneity, self-initiative, and individual talents.

### **A Newer Form of *Naraigoto*: Karaoke Learning**

Karaoke is prerecorded instrumental accompaniment. Typically, it provides music and visuals for a singer via an on-line system or compact laser disks. The word “karaoke” is a combination of the Japanese word for *kara* (empty) and *oke* (a contraction of the Japanese loan-word for orchestra). This section explores how karaoke and karaoke *naraigoto* have developed.

#### *Prior to the birth of karaoke (before 1972)*

Even before karaoke appeared in Japan, the Japanese enjoyed both singing and listening to music. In 1925, the Japanese radio service started, and in 1953, TV began broadcast service. These forms of media contributed much to introducing popular music into Japanese homes. Juke boxes were popular at amusement centers, and the peak of juke boxes in Japan seems to have been in 1968. Cable radio (*yūsen* in Japanese) is a system where stations provide music non-stop to bars and restaurants upon the customers’

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<sup>15</sup> Ryōen Minamoto, *Kata to Nihon bunka* [*Kata* (Form) and Japanese Culture], author’s translation (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1992), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Iemoto* is a hierarchical social structure of classical arts under which various disciples are interlinked with other disciples through their masters.

<sup>17</sup> Gail R. Benjamin, *Japanese Lessons* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 71.

requests. Cable radio first appeared around 1955, and since then, customers have enjoyed listening to it and many hits later sung by karaoke singers were born from it.

Some Japanese people began to take an active role by singing in public in the postwar period. The amateur singing contest by the name of *NHK Nodojiman Shiroto Ongakukai* started in 1946, which marked the beginning of Japanese public singing with professional accompaniment. Strolling musicians called *nagashi* were seen at downtown bars, and customers enjoyed singing to the *nagashi*'s guitar or accordion accompaniment. *Utagoe kissa*, which are cafes where customers sing together with someone leading the singing, appeared in 1961.<sup>18</sup> Although *utagoe kissa* had some political associations, being linked to the activities of trade unions and leftist groups, the existence of the cafes shows that many Japanese gained experience in group singing at that time. In addition, the Japanese sang at drinking parties and other social gatherings, such as bus tours and wedding receptions.

All of these connected Japanese life with popular music and helped form the foundation for the acceptance of karaoke. According to Toshihiro Tsuganesawa, "One reason that karaoke achieved instant popularity in Japan is that public singing already had been established as a form of leisure. Years before karaoke appeared, public singing had been obligatory at many festivals and social gatherings."<sup>19</sup>

#### *The birth of karaoke (the 1970s)*

There are several theories regarding the origin of karaoke, but the explanation that karaoke was invented by a bartender living in Kobe, located in southwest Japan, is widely accepted. According to Toshihiro Tsuganesawa, "In 1972, Inoue and his colleagues recorded their own musical performances without vocals on 8-track tapes as accompaniment for amateur singers and manufactured ten tape juke boxes for those

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<sup>18</sup> Toshihiro Tsuganesawa, "Taishū bunka toshitenō karaoke" [Karaoke as Popular Culture], *Gendai no esupuri: Jōhōka to taishū bunka*, vol. 312 (Tokyo: Shibundo, 1993), pp. 99-101.

<sup>19</sup> Robert S. Drew, "Embracing the Role of Amateur: How Karaoke Bar Patrons Become Regular Performers," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 25/4 (1997): 449-468.

recorded tapes.”<sup>20</sup> In 1976, a manufacturer of car audio equipment commercially produced eight-track tapes of voiceless background music. The company named the device “karaoke” and began selling it. The merchandise was a big hit and spread throughout Japan instantly. Karaoke frequently drew middle-aged men to bars and became an essential entertainment form in Japanese nightlife. Every evening, neighbors were annoyed by amplified sound from karaoke bars, and karaoke noise became a social problem. Some karaoke addicts asked bar owners to teach them karaoke singing informally, and this is how karaoke *naraigoto* began.<sup>21</sup>

*The first karaoke boom (the early half of the 1980s)*

The first boom in karaoke was brought about by the technical improvement of karaoke equipment. In 1978 “a home karaoke” unit was created and was used as a means of family entertainment and individual practice. In the 1980s, video discs and compact laser disks appeared, and these accompaniments gave karaoke appealing visual effects. The words could now be displayed on a television screen, which freed the singers from dependence on lyric sheets. At the same time, video scenes were provided along with the songs, and this gave the singer and listeners information about the songs. For example, the monitor may show a broken-hearted woman traveling in Kyoto, trying to forget her lost love. While watching the scenery of Kyoto on the screen, the karaoke participants unconsciously learn about temples and gardens without visiting the city. This effect helped learners develop an image of the songs and was particularly useful for karaoke *naraigoto*.

*The second karaoke boom (the latter half of the 1980s)*

The second boom was the expansion of karaoke’s popularity in terms of gender and generation, and was brought about by the appearance of “karaoke boxes” (sometimes called karaoke rooms), which are small private rooms equipped with compact laser disks (or on-line units), and tables and chairs where customers enjoy singing over food and drinks. “It is said that the earliest ‘boxes’ appeared in 1985 on a vacant lot in Okayama as

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<sup>20</sup> Tōru Mitsui and Shūhei Hosokawa, ed., *Karaoke around the World: Global Technology, Local Singing* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> One of my karaoke teachers started teaching karaoke as a bartender in 1980.

converted large trucks.”<sup>22</sup> Previously, karaoke implied drinking at bars at night and thus was limited to male drinkers; however, since this new type of karaoke space was available even during the day and did not require alcohol, it was widely accepted for housewives, office ladies and students.

Nowadays, the use of karaoke boxes is varied. They often function as a party room, where customers enjoy drinks and food. They are also used for karaoke *naraigoto*. In fact, karaoke is not only taught in schools and regional centers, but many karaoke boxes are also used for private lessons. It is also common that karaoke students, who worry about noise in their houses, rent karaoke boxes for their personal practice.

*The third karaoke boom (the early half of the 1990s)*

During this period, the karaoke industry enjoyed prosperity and stability. At its peak, karaoke goers numbered 58.9 million in 1994, which means that nearly half the nation's population of 125 million enjoyed karaoke that year. There were 160,680 boxes in 1996.<sup>23</sup> The primary reason for this growth was technological development.

Technologically, the laser CD disks had two problems: space and speedy availability for required songs. These disks required extra space in tiny karaoke bars and small private houses. Karaoke practitioners demanded a wider selection of songs, especially in wanting to sing the latest hit songs. The introduction of “on-line” karaoke (*tsūshin*) solved both problems. By 1994, about 30% to 40% of the CD systems in approximately 115,000 karaoke boxes in Japan had been replaced by the on-line system.<sup>24</sup>

Another reason for this craze may be a social change that is closely related to karaoke *naraigoto*. Japanese society has been aging – seniors over 65 years old were 5% of the population around 1950, but that number more than doubled by 1985. Furthermore, this number increased to 16.7% in 1999.<sup>25</sup> To think about leading a meaningful life in one's old age has become an issue for the individual senior citizen and for the nation.

<sup>22</sup> Mitsui and Hosokawa, *Karaoke around the World*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> See <http://ad@japan-karaoke.com/05hakusyo/index.html>, Zenkoku karaoke jigyo kyokai [All-Japan Karaoke Industrialist Association], *Karaoke jigyo no gaiyo to shijo kibo* [The Outline and Market Size of Karaoke Industry] (2004).

<sup>24</sup> *Asahi Shinbun* (5/7/1994).

<sup>25</sup> *Asahi Shinbun* (9/15/1999).

Based on the national policy of lifelong education (*shōgai kyōiku*) or lifelong learning (*shōgai gakushū*), local governments began to treat karaoke as a means to enrich elderly people's lives. Public halls (*kōminkan*) and regional centers (*chiku senta-*) attempted to offer karaoke facilities. This ignited the fever for karaoke *naraigoto* among senior citizens. A lot of karaoke clubs were formed by seniors in the early 1990s, and karaoke contests and recitals started to take place in many communities. It is important to note that this karaoke popularity was sustained by a broad range of the population from younger people to the elderly. Furthermore, karaoke singing was practiced in every corner of Japan, including mountain and fishing villages, and was a major attraction at festivals and events in these local areas.

*The declining popularity of karaoke (the latter half of the 1990s)*

In 1991, Japan's Bubble Economy collapsed, and this calamity turned Japanese society upside down. The economy plunged into a long recession, and the karaoke industry went through a gradual, but serious, depression. As companies and individuals cut back on leisure expenses, karaoke bars and boxes began to lose their customers. Statistically the karaoke population declined to 48.2 million in 2003, and the number of karaoke boxes also showed a decrease to 135,400 in 2003.<sup>26</sup> Thus, all karaoke-related businesses had to undergo stiff competition for survival, and many karaoke bars and boxes went bankrupt.

This depression also had some influence on karaoke *naraigoto*. Judging from the karaoke students at my field sites, the decrease in karaoke customers had not immediately led to a decrease in interest in karaoke *naraigoto*, but some students avoided expensive schools and culture centers and moved to inexpensive institutions or student-run clubs in regional centers. Despite the long economic recession, the *Asahi* newspaper reported on the current boom of karaoke learning in late 1999, saying that a certain karaoke school had 150 classes and its membership was about 320,000.<sup>27</sup>

### **Findings from Fieldwork**

I conducted fieldwork on karaoke *naraigoto* for 15 months, mainly

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<sup>26</sup> See "Zenkoku karaoke jigyo kyokai," <http://ad@japan-karaoke.com/05hakusyo/index.html>, (2004).

<sup>27</sup> *Asahi Shinbun* (11/15/2003).

in the city of Yokohama. During my fieldwork, I studied eight karaoke learning groups, structured and unstructured, by participant-observation. I also conducted a quantitative survey of over 370 informants for the purpose of measuring their commitment to karaoke and karaoke *naraigoto*. Data was collected in Yokohama, a big city with a population of three million, and Nishio, a small city with 110,000 people located in southwest Aichi Prefecture. Most informants were housewives or retired people in their fifties or over, many of which were women.

The fieldwork showed that karaoke learning is an individualized multipurpose activity in which students participate for various reasons. Good health, not acquisition of skills, is the top reason for karaoke students' membership according to Table 1. They have their own definition of *naraigoto* and find their karaoke *naraigoto* significant for other reasons, such as social integration or a change of atmosphere.

**Table 1. Reasons for studying karaoke**

Why are you studying karaoke?	
80%	Singing is good for my health.
68%	I want to become better at karaoke.
55%	I want to make sure I learn the basics well.
49%	Karaoke is less expensive and easier than other <i>naraigoto</i> .

As a result of studying karaoke, individual students learn a variety of things, according to the responses recorded in Table 2. What they learn is not limited to technical knowledge and skills, but is broader and more comprehensive. For example, some students gained a sense of identity, worldly knowledge, or a feeling of physical and mental health. Eighty-eight percent of students chose "how to sing," which means that other students continue to study karaoke even if not primarily to learn.

**Table 2. What students have learned through karaoke *naraigoto***

What have you learned through studying karaoke?	
88%	How to sing.
46%	How to communicate with others.
38%	About myself (personality, ability, etc.)
30%	About the world (culture, history, geography, people's hearts, etc.) as the background of songs.

I also realized that karaoke learning is self-directed and is based on students' own interests and needs. My surveys reported that ninety-five percent of students began learning karaoke because they wanted to.<sup>28</sup> Typically there are about ten or twenty students and one instructor in one karaoke class when it is not a private lesson. Although the class has many students, lessons basically proceed on an individual basis. Each individual student demonstrates his/her song and sings in front of the class. The rest of the students sit and listen to the song and the instructor gives comments on the singing. Therefore, this learning style is individualized and is different from rehearsals of a chorus group.

Generally, the instructors' teaching methods do not attempt to mold the students but are quite flexible. The instructors function as facilitators of the group and encourage students to express themselves. Students are often free to choose songs and organizational rules are lenient.

### **Karaoke as Self-expression**

Self-expression of originality and creativity is crucial for measuring the degree of individualism. My informants were interested in expressing themselves, and karaoke learning is an accessible means of expression. However, self-expression through karaoke is debatable because karaoke is prerecorded background instrumentation and lacks flexibility. Christine Yano writes:

The self-expression afforded through karaoke exists within preestablished *kata*. As mentioned previously, tempo, dynamics, orchestration are set. Within an unvarying accompaniment taken from the hit song upon which the karaoke recording is based, a person sings prewritten lyrics and melody to a preconceived style. The degree of self-expression is limited to what is permissible within a set from which includes ornamentation, dynamics, and, for some, even bodily gestures.<sup>29</sup>

Yano's comment is especially true when karaoke is compared with

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<sup>28</sup> Watanabe, "Japanese Adult Learning," p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Christine Yano, "The Floating World of Karaoke in Japan," *Popular Music & Society* 20/2 (1996), p. 9.

live singing accompanied by piano; however, self-expression through karaoke can be assessed in other ways, too. It is important to examine how much karaoke increased opportunities for Japanese people to express themselves in the postwar period. It is also significant to compare the degree of self-expression in karaoke with traditional forms of singing. We could also argue how the technological innovation makes it easier for karaoke practitioners to realize self-expression.

Before the appearance of karaoke, it was less common for the Japanese to express themselves in public, particularly by means of solo singing. Certainly the Japanese sang together at weddings and other parties, clapping their hands, but that type of singing was group-oriented rather than individual-based self-expression, and it was more common among men rather than women. It was not until the appearance of karaoke that singing by Japanese women became prevalent in the public sphere. Of course, these comments do not mean that the Japanese did not have the desire to express themselves in public through singing, but that desire was suppressed under the social structure.

Whether or not “the preestablished *kata* of karaoke” limits self-expression, the reality is that numerous women and elderly persons actually stand on stage everywhere in Japan and reveal themselves through karaoke music. When I visited a senior citizen home, the karaoke instructor advised me to see how senior citizens enjoy karaoke in a big hall. The room is thirty square meters with big stage in the middle. A straw mat floor creates a traditional Japanese mood. In the hall, lots of seniors were chatting, drinking, and eating. I asked some how they felt about singing karaoke at this center. They replied, “It’s fun, but since many people want to sing on the stage, we need to wait a few hours for our turn.”

On stage, most people sang karaoke and some demonstrated Japanese dance, beautifully dressed. This scene convinced me that these senior citizens really wanted to sing, dance and express themselves, whether they were good performers or not. The traditional image of elderly Japanese people is that they are quiet, shy, and not very expressive, but this does not mean that they are born with an inability to be expressive. It simply means that they had limited opportunities to express themselves. Now, they have many more occasions to sing, dance and speak, etc. and enjoy expressing themselves.

Self-expression through karaoke singing becomes more meaningful when karaoke is compared with other forms of traditional singing, such as *utai* (Noh chanting), *nagauta* (the background song of

Kabuki<sup>30</sup>), *shigin* (the chanting of Chinese epic poems), and *min'yō* (a regional folksong). When I asked traditional *naraigoto* informants about how they study, they uniformly said, “by copying and repetition.” When I asked *nagauta* students, “How are originality and creativity treated in *nagauta*?” they replied, “When students become advanced, teachers will probably be more tolerant of each students’ own singing style.” My informants are over 60 years old and have experienced *nagauta* for more than thirty years. Even so, they still believe that they have not advanced enough to demonstrate their originality and creativity. It seemed to me that virtually no student would have an opportunity to perform as he/she likes at any time in his/her experience of *naraigoto*.

Compared with traditional singing, karaoke is much more tolerant of self-expression. The *kata* of traditional songs are the result of patterns which have been refined over a long history, but the songs sung in karaoke are much newer than the traditional songs – most were created in the postwar period. Karaoke students are allowed to sing in their own manner and it is easier to create their own original styles. They often do not know how to express their feelings, and so they just imitate professional singers’ original songs. In this sense, originality and creativity are not their major concern. Those students are satisfied just by singing in public because they have never done so. The other type of student is more committed to karaoke singing. Many of them are advanced students, who take part in karaoke contests. In such contests, judges would not be satisfied with great singers who merely follow the conventional style. Originality and creativity are emphasized in this scene, and contestants are expected to show their own interpretation of songs and their own expression. One of my karaoke teachers, Mr. Suzuki, said:

Mere production of melodies is not “expression” because there is no exposure of the singer’s self. Expression is to convey oneself (one’s feelings, emotions, thoughts, etc.) through one’s performance, and that is the essence of art. Expression is not just production of sound but must be supported by controlled emotion and voice. One needs to express oneself properly and so it is necessary to acquire appropriate techniques. It is my role as a

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<sup>30</sup> Kabuki is a stylized traditional Japanese play with singing and dancing for the common people created in the seventeenth century.

karaoke instructor to help my students learn such techniques and express themselves. In short, I am supposed to teach how to express, i.e., techniques, rather than what to express, i.e., the singer's self.<sup>31</sup>

To measure the degree of self-expression, we should also note that the innovation of the high technology karaoke machines allows singers to sing with more variation and creativity, thus making self-expression easier. At the early stages in the development of karaoke, karaoke machines were not sophisticated and people's singing was largely controlled by the machines. They had to sing with a fixed tempo and pitch, and thus their originality was not attained as they wished. Their repertoire was also limited because the old karaoke tapes were designed with professional singers' pitch and amateurs had problems with the voice range. However, recent technological developments in karaoke equipment allow for changes in pitch, speed, and rhythm. In addition, karaoke plays the role of a partner in duets, and even the creation of harmony is possible. All this allows singers to create a broader range of singing styles.

#### **A Blended Sense of Values**

Typical karaoke students were born around the time of World War II and were brought up in the postwar educational system. Such a background led them to nourish a blended sense of values. Postwar teachers stressed the egalitarian, individualistic, and participatory orientations that constitute a democratic sentiment, reflecting modern Western trends. At the same time, they taught traditional Japanese values of friendship, cordiality, cooperation, and discipline.<sup>32</sup>

Harmony, cooperation, and solidarity are important values in which Japanese adults have been educated before, during, and after their school years.<sup>33</sup> They believe in established values such as conformity, compliance, and cooperation. Collectivity and group consciousness have been significant factors in determining people's ideas and behavior in

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<sup>31</sup> Interview (1999).

<sup>32</sup> William K. Cummings, *Education and Equality in Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas P. Rohlen, *For Harmony and Strength* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1974).

Japanese society. In most phases of Japanese daily life, group-focused behavior is more appreciated than individual-focused behavior, which is sometimes considered selfish.

On the other hand, the Japanese agree with the importance of newer values, such as freedom, equality, and individuality. A participatory orientation emphasizes association rather than authority and encourages an individual's critical attitude toward power and any form of collectivity. It leads one to challenge older patterns of hierarchical authority in the family, the work place, the community, and the polity.<sup>34</sup> Such an education has made Japanese adults develop the feeling that group life is not absolute, and that it may in fact rob them of their spontaneity and freedom. Actually my informants sometimes told me that their past lives were restrictive, boring, and banal. Realizing that each individual is different and worthy of his/her own lifestyle, they are pursuing a way of life that fits them.

Naturally, a conflict between traditional and contemporary values exists in people's minds. Many of the karaoke students I observed who are in their 60s, or over, believe that teachers should be respected and therefore behave with a sense of loyalty toward them. Mr. Osa said, "I don't think that Mr. Tomita is a great teacher, but since he is our teacher, we should follow his instruction." Ms. Shimizu said, "To be frank, I don't care for 'teachers,' but teachers are teachers and should be respected after all." In spite of their fidelity to their instructors, however, they don't suppress their individual desire to sing in any other place, and that drives them to study with other teachers as well. Although karaoke students are free in their choice of tutors, in reality they usually feel they are being unfaithful to their original teacher and attend other institutions secretly.

My data shows that more than one-third of karaoke students are affiliated with more than one karaoke group. This is a significant contrast with traditional forms of *naraigoto*, where students are discouraged from attending other schools due to the distinctiveness of school styles. Ms. Kubo, a *nagauta* instructor, told me, during an interview in 1998, about the teacher-student relationship in traditional *naraigoto*, based on her experience of *nagauta*. To study *nagauta* with more than one teacher is difficult because each teacher has his or her own style. *Naraigoto* is to study the teacher's style, and so if students study one style, they cannot study

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<sup>34</sup> Cummings, *Education and Equality in Japan*, p. 178.

another style.<sup>35</sup> Teachers can easily tell whether their students are studying, or have studied, *nagauta* in other places, and to be dedicated to one school requires maintaining an unflawed relationship with the teacher.

### **Karaoke *Naraigoto* as a Tool for Individual Goals and Social Dependency**

Many karaoke informants told me that they spent most of their time at their home or workplace but wanted to change their lifestyle. They study karaoke because that is how they believe that they can make their lives more worthwhile. Some students have a genuine interest in singing, and to them, studying karaoke itself is their objective. Others regard karaoke as a means to realize other goals. Older businessmen, made to feel segregated by retirement, regain a connection to the world through karaoke *naraigoto* and feel that they are still a part of the community.

During my fieldwork, I heard many informants comment on karaoke as a tool for participating in the social world. Ms. Takeda said, “I am a regular housewife. Before my husband died ten years ago, I didn’t go out for *naraigoto*. But after his death, I began studying karaoke at the senior citizen home. I had never imagined that singing karaoke would be such fun.” Ms. Minami also emphasized social integration as her objective for studying karaoke. “Particularly, I enjoy chatting after lessons with friends. For example, Mr. Nomura is knowledgeable and teaches me many things – karaoke, economics, politics, and even cooking. It is also fun to accompany Mr. Hosono. He has a sense of humor and makes us happy.”

Karaoke students’ objectives are varied and fall into several categories in terms of goals, including those who:

- 1) integrate socially and make a change in daily life
- 2) release stress and maintain physical and mental health
- 3) become better singers and hope to be socially recognized through their participation.

The human network of the *naraigoto* helps the members greatly in attaining individual goals. There are also specific reasons why Japanese adults study in a group. Some Japanese think that they can gain necessary skills, knowledge, and insight more easily by working with their teachers and friends. Some think that the learning they seek includes not only the

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<sup>35</sup> Watanabe, “Japanese Adult Learning,” p. 318.

personal acquisition of skills and knowledge, but also a worldly connection, social integration, and a sense of physical and mental health. Some people find it easier to continue their studies in a group rather than to study by themselves. Involvement with others gives them joy, stimulation and even a sense of obligation, and their bond with others helps them continue their learning.

Since people usually do not expose their romantic feelings, this is not clearly expressed in my karaoke quantitative data. However, I assume that some people are looking for romance because I occasionally heard gossip about students in search of relationships. From a financial viewpoint, it is helpful for learners to study in a group. Regional centers provide local residents with good equipment at reasonable costs and group study makes reservations easier. Individual recitals are also simpler and less expensive as a group activity. Generally speaking, my informants are affiliated with a karaoke group because they think that the individual benefits are best achieved by studying in a group.

Thus far, I have argued that for Japanese adults, attaining individualized goals through karaoke learning and developing an appreciation of individual expression serve as the driving force for karaoke *naraigoto*. Thus, there is little doubt that private time, individual expression, and self-fulfillment are a significant part of Japanese adults' lives. The amount of individual action, creativity, originality, and other forms of individualism in Japan probably have been underestimated by outside observers. Nevertheless, the perception that Japanese are experiencing an increasing sense of individualism is pervasive among the Japanese themselves.

This emphasis on the individual, however, is not an imitation of the individualism of the West, which is based on the independent action of each human being. Individuals are more interdependent in Japanese society, therefore the group is indispensable. Japanese adults apply individual interests and benefits to collective contexts to amplify them. In this sense, karaoke *naraigoto* is an innovation by Japanese adults to make use of a group context.

Individual self-interest is the basic motivating force of human behavior,<sup>36</sup> and Japanese adults, men or women, young or old, are interested

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<sup>36</sup> Harumi Befu, "A Critique of the Group Model of Japanese Society," p. 39.

in self-expression. Personal expression blooms in a group environment in newer forms of Japanese adult learning. This is a successful reconciliation of individual expression with social dependency. This learning system closely meets Japanese adults' drive to make their lives more pleasant, meaningful, and rewarding. Such a development is highly valued at this point in history, when a great amount of attention is being paid to the individual in Japan.

### Implications of this Study

What does karaoke *naraigoto* mean in a larger Japanese cultural context? A significant number of students have quit traditional forms of *naraigoto*, and the number of karaoke *naraigoto* students is on the rise.<sup>37</sup> This shift implies that Japanese adults are reluctant to confine themselves to a group which limits their individualized behavior, believing that individual performance adds meaning and enjoyment to their lives. The number of temporary workers who forsake full-time employment has been increasing in Japanese society, and this current phenomenon is related to the issue of karaoke learning. These temporary workers are called "*furi-ta*," which is a combination of "free" and "part-timer." Typically *furi-ta* are engaged in sales jobs like convenience store clerk and limit their working hours. According to the estimate in the labor force white paper, this number has increased about threefold over 15 years, from about 500,000 in 1982 to 1.51 million in 1997.<sup>38</sup>

One reason for this increase is that high school graduates have had a hard time finding jobs due to the ongoing economic depression. However, a more fundamental reason is derived from the characteristics of *furi-ta*, which uniformly claims that they want to keep themselves free from social restrictions to seek what they want to do. They are more concerned about their personal growth and individual satisfaction than

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<sup>37</sup> *Nihonjin no gakushū*, pp. 54-55. Nationwide surveys on Japanese adult learning were conducted by NHK (the Japanese National Broadcasting Company) in 1982, 1985, and 1988. The findings of the surveys reveal that traditional forms of *naraigoto*, such as *min'yō*, tea ceremony, and flower arranging, are losing practitioners.

<sup>38</sup> Hideo Shimomura, "Chōsa kenkyū kara mita furi-ta" [Free-ter Observed from Survey Research] *Gendai no esupuri: Furi-ta* [Contemporary Esprit: Free-ter] 427 (Tokyo: Shibundō, 2003), p. 32.

public and social events; hence they are individualistic. Japanese adults, whether at work or off, young or old, all search for an environment that minimizes social constraints and maximizes the attainment of individual goals. In this sense, the phenomena of *furi-ta-* and *naraigoto* have the same root.

William K. Cummings wrote a book in 1980 entitled *Education and Equality in Japan*. His prediction about the Japanese society twenty years from now is very impressive:

The new individualism does not mean a rejection of group participation; rather, it seems to involve a new orientation to the group. The group is viewed as a collection of individuals, each of whom is seeking self-fulfillment. A group is appreciated insofar as it is responsive to individual needs. In contrast, a group that imposes rigid and nonnegotiable demands on its individual members is disliked.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cummings, *Education and Equality in Japan*, p. 197.

## **Featured Essay**



## A ONE-WEEK RETREAT AT A ZEN MONASTERY IN JAPAN: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION

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Zen is a sect of Buddhism that was adopted and embraced by the samurai warrior class in Kamakura era Japan in the thirteenth century. Its philosophy and teachings influenced and constitute much of today's Japanese culture and way of life.<sup>1</sup> Zen is, indeed, a civil religion of Japan, as much as Judeo-Christianity is so much a part of everyday American life.

The teaching of Zen is ineffable. The best way to understand *satori*, or enlightenment, is by directly experiencing it in daily life. According to D. T. Suzuki, "*Satori* must be the outgrowth of one's inner life and not a verbal implantation brought from the outside."<sup>2</sup> Zen should be "personally experienced by each of us in his inner spirit."<sup>3</sup>

In the last several years, I have participated in the retreats of a Roshi (Japanese Zen Master) who makes annual trips to the United States to teach Zen. I practice sitting meditation every day and have read more than 50 books on Zen. This Roshi invited me to attend a *dai sesshin*, a one-week retreat at his monastery in Japan during my sabbatical in the fall semester of 2003.

The Japanese word *sesshin* means collecting thoughts, and it refers to an intensive training period for monks to concentrate only on *zazen* (sitting meditation) in order to attain *satori*. During *sesshin* they are exempt from their everyday chores such as cleaning, laundry, bathing, yard work, or going to town for *takuhatsu* (begging). Throughout the duration of the retreat, the participants are supposed to find and understand their true nature by sitting and seeing themselves in a special, non-ordinary situation.

### Entering the Zen Monastery

I arrived at the Zen monastery, which is a *senmon dōjō* (literally "a specialized training center") of a *honzan* (the head temple of a sect) at 4:45 p.m. on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003. My American friend, Amy, and I were greeted

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<sup>1</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: MJF Books, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism First Series* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1961), p. 23.

with the shouting of “Doooooray!” by the head monk, who appeared smiling at the entrance to the monastery. He greeted us and showed us the shoe shelf next to the Entrance Hall where we took off our footwear. He then led us to the Roshi’s guestroom in the Main Hall, where there were several foreigners from Europe and North and South America who were to become our colleagues at the Zen retreat. Among them was Chris, one of my Zen friends from the United States, who participated in the same one-week retreat in November of the previous year and shared his experiences with Amy and myself.

The Roshi entered the room and greeted us with a *gassho* (bow with palm-to-palm greeting) and a handshake – he said he wanted to welcome us in a Western way as well. We sat down on the sofas, and the head monk brought some Japanese sweets and whipped powdered green tea called *matcha*. “Welcome to our monastery. You’ve come a long way to Japan. Please, help yourself to the sweets and tea,” the Zen Master said. Just as I was reaching out my tea bowl, he said, “Kinko-san, you take the sweets first and then the tea.” “I know, I know!” I thought. I had taken lessons in Japanese tea ceremony and flower arrangement before in order to increase my eligibility as a Japanese bride, but I had forgotten the manners and etiquette altogether in my 25 years in the U.S. I ate the sweet *yokan* and then sipped green tea. Both the arts of tea ceremony and flower arrangement are related to Zen.

The Roshi briefly explained the logistics of the retreat and asked us if we had any questions. “I wish you all luck in completing the one-week retreat,” he said, and added that it was very important for us to persevere and finish it instead of perhaps giving it up altogether at a midpoint.

The schedule of the Zen retreat was as follows:

- 3:00 a.m. *Choka* (Morning Service) Chanting of sutras in the Main Hall
- 3:50 a.m. Chanting of the Heart Sutra in the Meditation Hall (*zendo*)
- 3:55 a.m. *Baito* (Plum Tea) Time
- 4:00 a.m. *Shukuza* (Breakfast)
- 4:15 a.m. *Dokusan* (Private Interview with the Roshi) and  
    *Zazen* (Sitting Meditation)
- 5:00 a.m. *Zazen*
- 6:00 a.m. *Zazen*
- 7:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m. Break (Monks’ Study Hours)
- 8:00 a.m. *Teisho* (Roshi’s Lecture)
- 9:00 a.m. Chanting

9:30 a.m. *Zazen*  
 10:30 a.m. *Saiza* (Lunch)  
 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Break (Monk's Study Hours)  
 1:00 p.m. *Sarei* (Tea and Cake)  
 1:05 p.m. *Zazen*  
 2:00 p.m. *Dokusan* (Interview) and *Zazen*  
 3:00 p.m. *Kinhin* (Walking Meditation)  
 3:30 p.m. Chanting  
 4:00 p.m. *Yakuseki* ("Medicinal" Dinner)  
 5:00 p.m. Break  
 6:00 p.m. *Zazen*  
 7:00 p.m. *Zazen*  
 8:00 p.m. *Sarei* (Tea and Cake)  
 8:05 p.m. *Dokusan* and *Zazen*  
 9:00 p.m. *Yaza* (Night Sitting) Lights out at 9 PM  
 10:30 p.m. *Kaichin* (Going to Bed)

The Japanese and foreign male practitioners were given a few rooms in a small house adjacent to the Zen Meditation Hall, where the training monks slept and studied and which we used for meditation. The four female participants were given a small room next to the Main Hall that had several pieces of furniture with teacups for guests of the Zen Master and about two dozen books. The room was crowded, and we had to be meticulous about where to put our luggage to make space for one another's *futon* bedding placed on the *tatami* floor called *kashiwa buton*, in which you make a "taco" of yourself. Pillows were not provided. I went to bed early hoping to get a good night's sleep.

My alarm clock set off at 2:45 a.m. on Sunday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>. I left the room with my toiletries to go to the ladies' room that had only one sink and a cold water faucet. Autumn in this part of Japan can get very cold, especially in the wee hours of the morning! The cold water woke me up.

The women stood in front of the room waiting for the Japanese training monks, lay participants, and foreign men. The monk who was also the monastery's cook rang the bell that hung from the ceiling in the hallway across our "bedroom" with a mallet. In a Zen monastery, there is no need for oral orders since sound-producing instruments such as the ringing of different bells, a wooden panel, a bronze plate, or wooden clappers indicate every event and activity.

I followed the foreign men and entered the Main Hall at 3:00 a.m.

When walking around in a monastery, hands are to be held together right below the chest (*shashu*), and halls are entered with the left foot first and exited with the right foot first. Upon entering the hall, the monks opened all the *shoji* paper doors on the side of the garden, and very cool November air came in making me feel chilly. It was still pitch-black outside.

### Chanting

The chanting began as soon as everyone took a seat on the *tatami* floor. Japan is a hierarchical society, and here at the monastery, this was obvious in the seating arrangements, whether in the Meditation Hall (*zendo*), the Main Hall, or the dining room.<sup>4</sup> The best seats are reserved for the higher ranks, starting with senior monks with positions, then junior monks, lay Japanese men, and foreign men, with women holding the lowest rank – obviously a sexist tradition! The training monks usually formed one or two lines as they sat, depending on the activity – chanting, listening to the Roshi's lecture, waiting for their private interview, etc.

In the middle of the Main Hall near the *shoji* doors, there is a huge *mokugyo* (wooden instrument) and a gigantic bell, which is big enough to bathe a baby, and also a Buddha statue on the other side of the room with water, flowers, and incense that are offered every day. *Mokugyo* literally means "a wooden fish," and the sound it creates has an interesting hypnotic effect of making the audience's mind receptive to what comes next. These instruments accompany the chanting by keeping a rhythm.

According to Suzuki, chanting serves a dual function, "primarily as getting in touch with the thought of the founder, and secondarily as creating spiritual merit."<sup>5</sup> The monks chanted various sutras remarkably fast. The *Heart Sutra*, for example, was chanted in about 50 seconds, when it usually takes at least one and a half minutes to chant it. Sutra reading is comparable to prayers in other religions.

The chanting of the sutras went on and on until 3:45 a.m., when we exited the Main Hall (with our right foot first) and went to the Meditation Hall that we entered with the left foot first. My legs had been quite numb, and it was difficult to walk normally in the corridors on cold wooden floors. Rubber slippers are used on the stone floor between the wooden corridor

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<sup>4</sup> Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

<sup>5</sup> D.T. Suzuki, *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk* (New York: Grove Press, 1934), p.77.

and the Meditation Hall. At the entrance to the Meditation Hall, one makes *gassho* before the Buddha statue and walks to the assigned seat, a cushion. The rubber slippers are left together on the stone floor in front of the seat on the *tatami* mat. Zen prefers preciseness in everything.

### Eating

After everyone is seated, *baito* (plum tea) is served. We have to stand up and fetch the teacup from the shelf located on top of the windows, then sit down and place the cup on the right hand side of the cushion. After the head person puts his cup on the wooden railing in front of him, the next person follows, and then the next, and so on. It almost looks like synchronized swimming. The monk, serving the tea that is made of a small piece of pickled plum and hot water holds the kettle in his hand. The two people sitting next to him put out the cups together and the monk pours the tea into them swiftly. When the last person is served, we make *gassho* and drink it. It is very sour and is supposed to wake you up.

I really enjoyed eating the simple vegetarian cuisine, which consists mostly of rice, *miso* (soy bean paste) soup, cooked vegetables, and pickles, along with sweets for *sarei* (tea and cake time). Eating is considered part of Zen training, and only ten minutes are allocated for all of us to eat. Seating in the Dining Hall is also done according to rank, and we sit on our knees or cross-legged in front of the low wooden table on the *tatami* mats.

A few sutras are chanted before the meal as the highest-ranking monk opens his *jihatsu* (meal kit) brought from the shelf in the Meditation Hall. *Jihatsu* consists of five plastic or japanned (lacquered) wooden bowls that are of different sizes stuck together for each individual's use. The same bowls are used for every meal. The bowls are wrapped in a cloth napkin along with chopsticks. The highest-ranking monk opens his *jihatsu*, unfolds his chopsticks, and places the bowls on the table as he keeps chanting the sutras, and everyone follows suit.

Three monk/waiters served each meal. Serving food, a manual labor, is part of their Zen practice, and they sweat profusely from their forehead as they work at their task. They are not supposed to make any noise or spill food as they serve the food. They must concentrate on the task at hand, but they occasionally failed, and the head monk scolded them rather severely. It reminded me of a military command and the type of discipline and punishment used in that context.

Each meal is served in the order of rank, and the lowest rank has

much less time to eat than the higher ranked people, a risk for developing stomach pain and digestive problems. Eating takes place in silence to appreciate every single bit of food that is given. I found it very difficult to eat *daikon* (radish pickles) quietly, though. I needed to pay attention to every bite. "Silence!" the head monk would yell when he heard someone making some noise.

*Udon* noodles are the exception to this rule. You can slurp the noodles from the broth in the large *jihatsu* bowl to your heart's content. The monks made really loud noises as they slurped the noodles. This is called *udon kuyo*, or "blessing the noodles." Noodles were given for lunch in the Dining Hall on the first day, but were also served on a few nights at 8 p.m. as a night-snack in the Meditation Hall. I genuinely enjoyed the taste of *al dente* noodles, the broth, and the condiments of chopped green onions, tempura bits, sesame seeds, and grated ginger. I also enjoyed making noise.

Rice gruel, which is mostly hot water with a few dozen grains of rice at the bottom, was served for breakfast every day, and was given as three servings in three rounds. We had to offer *saba*, or a few grains of rice, to the hungry ghosts by leaving a few grains on the table. You "drink" the first round. In the second serving, you add a pickled plum and eat it. The third serving, just like the first one, is drunk. It took me a few days to do this right. Chris said that the best thing to do when you do not know what to do in the monastery is the principle of "Monkey See, Monkey Do." Simply observe what others are doing and imitate them. I had read the layperson's manual that Chris had given me on our flight to Japan but found that reading it to understand conceptually and translating the knowledge into action can be two entirely different things.

After every meal, *jihatsu* is washed with tea that a monk/waiter pours into the largest bowl. The tips of the chopsticks are washed first, and then wiped with a cloth napkin and left on the table temporarily. The tea is poured in the second largest bowl that is cleaned with the fingers and finally poured into the smallest bowl and then it is drunk mixed with the leftover taste of the food. There is no use of detergent or water to clean the utensils. How ecological! In a Zen monastery nothing gets wasted: all the vegetable parts are utilized in cooking, and no water is ever used to clean the bowls and utensils. The head monk claps the wooden clappers when the meal is over, signaling that it is time to move on to the next activity, whether a chore or meditation.

**Meditating**

We did not bathe for one week during the retreat. I brought dozens of disposable body wipes and baby wipes for my personal hygiene. I used them in the ladies' room every day in the evening, and we took turns. I brought lots of changes of clothes as well.

Meditating for ten hours a day was not really my forte. The meditation hours were dispersed throughout the day. We were not sitting ten hours straight per se. Feeling pain in the legs from the very start is quite common. I was told that learning to accept and overcome pain is the first test in Zen, and I really had to learn how to cope with pain as I sat.

*Kyosaku*, or *keisaku*, is a warning stick carried by the supervising monk during *zazen* in the Meditation Hall. He walks around checking on everyone's posture and concentration. When a monk slacks off in his concentration – for example, he falls asleep during *zazen* – four beatings of *kyosaku* are given on each of his shoulders. The sound of this warning stick is awful.

As I listened to the beatings of the stick and their echoes due to the acoustic effects of the very high ceiling and the stone floor, I thought it was nothing but violence, an abuse and a violation of human rights. The supervising monks broke the sticks into two pieces as they struck the junior monks. This happened at least a few times during the retreat. I had great sympathy for the beaten monks. "They must be hurting so bad!," I thought.

As for the lay practitioners, the supervising monks use the warning stick only when they deliberately ask for it. They spank them a total of four times, and rather mildly compared to the eight beatings the training monks received. My female colleagues asked for the warning stick on the first day. I was wondering about their reaction, but they seemed just fine afterwards.

On the next day, when the pain in my calves and legs became so bad that I could not concentrate any longer, I had the nerve to try *kyosaku* for the first time. You make *gassho* and bow to the supervising monk when he comes in front of you. He will make *gassho* and bow to you. The right hand goes under the chest and the left hand on the wooden railing as one leans to the left to have the right shoulder struck with the warning stick. The supervising monk strike there twice. Then, one leans to the right, and he strikes the left shoulder another two times.

It was painful at first, but I forgot the pain in my legs, and my concentration became much better than before. My shoulders had been hurting from so much typing and filing that had taken place two weeks before, and they were tense and stiff. After taking the *kyosaku*, I felt very

relaxed and my shoulders did not hurt anymore. The monk must have hit the acupuncture pressure points to release my pain. I asked for the warning stick as often as twice during a one-hour sitting period in order to deal with the pain in my legs and lower back.

Starting on the fifth day, I experienced an excruciatingly bad pain as I did *zazen*. My back, fortunately, was okay, but my lower back, buttocks, and legs were in severe pain, as I had never experienced before in my entire life. I thought that if someone had pulled my legs, they would have come right away from my body. They did not feel like they belonged to my body anymore. I knew that they were there, but they remained mostly numb and asleep. The pain was so severe that my soul was saying, "I want to get out of this body!" I could not concentrate much after the pain began, and also, I could feel my blood moving through my legs, calves, and feet. It was a very weird sensation, one that I had never experienced before.

Pain is considered a necessary part of attaining enlightenment, but how much pain you can endure is a totally different question. I am not a masochist. I bought ten small, disposable, adhesive heating pads in a convenience store near the monastery and used one or two at a time to relieve pain in my lower back and legs. I knew I should not have done this, but the warm heat helped me with the circulation of my blood and relieved much of the pain. I gave extra pads to two young Japanese laymen who told me that they had been suffering from pain in the back, buttocks, and legs, as well. They really appreciated my kindness.

The heating pads helped somehow, but we still had to tolerate a lot of pain. The situation seemed like death. My spirit was screaming from pain, and wanted to detach itself from my aching body. All I could think about was a way to become free from the agonizing aching body, which did not feel like mine any longer. There was no other way but to sit, cope with the pain, and wait for time to pass. The pain was so bad that the distinction between my mind and body got blurry. When the bell rang, indicating the end of the meditation, I was so thankful and appreciative. Now I was free to walk, get out of the hall, use the bathroom, etc.

The week passed rather quickly. During the first few days, I needed to orient myself to a new "lifestyle," which made me contemplate its relation to an alternative way of life that seeks convenience and efficiency above everything else. I started to enjoy the next few days, especially the food. It was interesting to note that my five senses became more powerful and enhanced as time went by. For example, the national election was going on at the time of the retreat and several candidates came over to the

neighborhood in campaign cars blasting their messages from the loud speakers, and I could hear them approach the monastery from very far away.

### Aftermath

One night I caught a glimpse of the full moon on my way from the Main Hall to the Meditation Hall, and the silver moon glittered like the sun. It was very bright and beautiful. I saw the huge bell right outside the toilet from the window and was mesmerized by the beauty of the green color of the bronze bell mixed with the bright orange color of the sunrise. The colors were very vivid. I could smell the night-snack noodles being brought into the Meditation Hall from the kitchen, and sometimes I could smell what the cook was cooking for the meal.

My tongue also got more sensitive, and I could pick up subtle tastes in food. For example, I could taste every single ingredient in the cream puff that was served at *sarei*. I started to have a different perspective on whatever existed in the universe, and it seemed to have resulted from a transformation of my consciousness. Birds sang differently at various times. The rays of the sun changed as time went by. Trees make different sounds when there is wind. These are all obvious facts about the universe, but I had never paid attention to them before.

Life after the retreat has definitely been different. I appreciate people and things around me a lot more. For example, I am thankful for my meals, thinking of the people who are involved in making it – farmers, truckers, wholesalers, retailers, cashiers, etc. Many people support me in my life, and I am truly allowed to live by virtue of the powerful forces of the universe. Now, when I am teaching at the university, I am appreciative of my students who helped make me a professor by paying tuition, which becomes my salary. I am provided with just about everything I need in my life. My concentration is also much better. I thoroughly put myself into whatever I am doing at the time and focus, forgetting that there is an “I” that exists who is doing the chore. I become one with the job and do not think about anything else. I am effective and a productive actor in whatever I do.

According to D. T. Suzuki, Zen meditation helps “to make wisdom grow from personal, spiritual experience”<sup>6</sup> and to acquire “a new point of

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<sup>6</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen* (New York: Grove, 1961), p. 81.

view in which life assumes a fresher, deeper, and more satisfying aspect.”<sup>7</sup> This new point of view concerning life and the universe is the essence of *satori*.<sup>8</sup> The one-week retreat was an eye-opening experience for me. It was a world apart from my everyday life experiences.

I felt like I had slipped into thirteenth-century Japan, and I did not miss modern efficiency and conveniences too much. While adjusting to the monastic lifestyle, I found was able to overcome physical pain. The long hours of meditation brought me a new world through the transformation of consciousness that continues to enhance my five senses and increases appreciation, understanding, and compassion.

If someone were to ask me if I would want to do it again, I would say, “Yes!”

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

# **Student Essay**

## GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

*Inger Sigrun Brodey*  
*University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

The following four essays were all presented by students at the conference called "Aesthetics of Nirvana: Truth, Beauty, and Enlightenment in Japanese Buddhism" held November 7-8, 2004 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This conference featured the annual meeting of the Southern Japan Seminar (SJS), sponsored by the Japan Foundation, as well as several ancillary events sponsored by a variety of academic departments, programs, and institutes at UNC-Chapel Hill as well as the Asian/Pacific Studies Institute at Duke University. One of the purposes of the conference was to honor the careers and contributions of Carolina Professors Emeritus James H. Sanford and Jerome P. (Sandy) Seaton. The conference was co-directed by Professors Inger Sigrun Brodey from the Curriculum of Comparative Literature and Jan Bardsley of the Asian Studies Department, both of UNC-CH.

In addition to the fine panels sponsored by SJS, we also included two student panels entitled "Cross-Cultural Approaches to Buddhist Aesthetics" and "Viewing Kurosawa, Teaching Kurosawa." Each panel included graduate as well as undergraduate presenters recruited from local area universities offering fall semester classes relating to Buddhism or to Japan. Professor Norris Johnson (UNC-Chapel Hill) served as both chair and discussant for the Aesthetics panel. Professor Hiroko Hirakawa (Guilford College) served as chair for the Kurosawa panel, assisted by Professor John Mertz (North Carolina State University)

The Carolina Asia Center generously offered a prize for the best graduate student and undergraduate student paper presented at the conference. The above-mentioned chairs and discussants of the papers served as judges for the prizes, in addition to Professor Dottie Borei (Guilford College). Both the prize-winning papers are included in this volume: Matthew Dale's "Paths Present and Future: *Yojimbo* and the Trail of the Zen Detective" won the prize for the best undergraduate paper, and Jeff Wilson's "Aesthetics of American Zen: Tradition, Adaptation, and Innovation in the Rochester Zen Center Garden" won the prize for the best graduate student paper.

After consulting with the Editor and Jan Bardsley, I invited student panelists to revise and resubmit their papers for this volume. All the papers

included here have been significantly revised since their oral presentation; for some, this has resulted in slight changes in the scope of the subject matter treated and therefore also some modifications to the original titles. Since most of the conference presentations also included visual components, we have attempted to recreate the visual aspect here through selected illustrations.

Matt Dale is an undergraduate Senior at UNC-Chapel Hill, majoring in Comparative Literature; Jeff Wilson is a Ph.D. student taking classes at both Duke and UNC, pursuing a degree in Religious Studies from UNC; Jeff W. Russell is currently pursuing an M.A. in Comparative Literature at UNC; and Paul Worley is pursuing a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at UNC.

All four of these papers treat a cross-cultural theme in the transmission of Buddhist thought, whether in terms of film, landscape and garden architecture, poetics, or narrative techniques. In addition, all four papers explore the shape and meaning of Zen Buddhist thought when it is transferred to art forms or settings that differ from those more traditionally associated with Japan or China. As such, they offer multidisciplinary responses to the central questions raised in the Aesthetics of Nirvana conference.

Matt Dale's "Path Present and Future: *Yojimbo* and the Trail of the Zen Detective" analyzes Kurosawa's 1961 film, which aesthetically and commercially revitalized the *samurai* swordsman genre by combining Zen religion with Western action. Jeff Wilson's "Aesthetics of American Zen: Tradition, Adaptation, and Innovation in the Rochester Zen Center Garden," investigates the influence of Asian and North American traditions in an emerging American Zen aesthetic at the Rochester Zen Center Garden. Paul Worley's "Taxicab Enlightenment: Zen and the Importance of Performing Kerouac in *Satori in Paris*," examines how Kerouac frames and embeds his frustrating trip to France in search for his European heritage/identity in Zen traditions. Finally, Jeff W. Russell's "Mother Gaia: A Glimpse into the Buddhist Aesthetic of Gary Snyder," discusses the infusion of T'ang poetics and Rinzai Zen Buddhism in Snyder's poetry.



**PATHS PRESENT AND FUTURE:  
YOJIMBO AND THE TRAIL OF THE ZEN DETECTIVE**

*Matt Dale  
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

Akira Kurosawa's 1961 film *Yojimbo* is a classic work of Japanese cinema, a highly influential period piece that aesthetically and commercially revitalized the *chambara*, or *samurai* swordsman genre. As Kurosawa's biggest hit and one of the lasting successes at the Japanese box office, *Yojimbo* still resounds with audiences around the world because of its highly entertaining, artfully realized tale of evil shrewdly pitted against evil by a wily *ronin* wandering the countryside.

This *ronin*, or masterless *samurai*, is the central figure in the film's visual and philosophical cosmologies. For some, his crowd-pleasing antics leading to the film's status as an overwhelming commercial triumph detract from critical considerations of its aesthetic and thematic value. However, close examination of *Yojimbo* reveals a subtle synthesis that renders the *ronin* a unique cinematic creation. Enlisting a key practice from an ancient style of Zen with a narrative loosely adapted from the novel *Red Harvest* by Dashiell Hammett, Kurosawa seamlessly melds Eastern religion with Western action, creating a cultural amalgam: the Zen detective, who solves mysteries in the moment.<sup>1</sup>

As the spiritual foundation for such a character, Kurosawa revives *shikin Zen*, or spontaneous, improvisational Zen. This style of Zen derives from the Chinese masters who adapted Zen to their Japanese audiences, predominantly members of the *samurai* class of ruling warriors during the late thirteenth century. As Zen scholar Trevor Leggett writes in his book *Samurai Zen*:

The warrior pupils of the early period of Kamakura Zen had no bent for scholarship and could not be taught by means of the classical *kōans* from the Chinese records of the patriarchs. The Zen teachers of this time trained them by making up *kōans* on the spot, in what came to be called *shikin Zen* or on-the-instant Zen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929).

<sup>2</sup> Trevor Leggett, *Samurai Zen* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 21.

These *kōans* drew heavily on familiar aspects of everyday existence, such as "water buckets, pieces of paper, iron fans and even loin cloths" and were tailored to harness the potential of each individual pupil.<sup>3</sup>

Traditionally presented in an interview format between teacher and student, the *kōan* is the entryway into Zen instruction. An example of a *shikin Zen kōan* is "Wielding the Spear With Hands Empty," in which a spear master is told that until he experiences "the state of wielding the spear with hands empty" he will fail to "penetrate to the ultimate secret of the art."<sup>4</sup> With the words, "No spear in the hands, no hands on the spear," the teacher proffers an individualized lesson that the spear master fails to grasp.

Under ideal conditions, however, such a *kōan* positions the pupil on the path towards transcendence. By answering, the pupil passes through a moment and if he succeeds in giving a correct response, arrives in the now, in a state of unity with the immediate. If he fails, he arrives back in the past or far in the future. For the warrior pupil such as the spear master, often this path seeks a totality of being in which the mind and the body balance to liberate the warrior from a fear of death.

This spiritual background is vital to the protagonist of *Yojimbo* as he confronts an elaborate web of alliances and feuds suffocating a village with violence and vengeance. Kurosawa distills this scenario directly from *Red Harvest*, transposing the troubles of an early 1920s American mining town packed with hired muscle and riddled by corruption to 1860s Japan in the wake of the dissolution of the Tokugawa shogunate.<sup>5</sup> Kurosawa moves from "Poisonville," as it is known to the locals in *Red Harvest*, to a nameless, poisoned village, both grim sites of dusty death.

Within this basic narrative structure, Kurosawa also borrows a distinctive plot device from *Red Harvest*. Both the nameless protagonist of the novel, an operative of the Continental Detective Agency, and Kurosawa's *samurai* succeed in their tasks of eliminating evil from their respective locales by masterfully playing both sides against the middle. As each character engineers and manipulates events to goad the opposing sides into a decisive showdown, they gradually extract themselves from the fray. Their timely exits allow them to return and dispatch any survivors.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> Other than a brief mention in Stuart Galbraith's *The Emperor and the Wolf* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2002), to my knowledge there has been no scholarly examination of the connection between *Yojimbo* and *Red Harvest*.

In the case of Kurosawa's wily *ronin*, this device draws heavily on the ability of *shikin Zen* to liberate the warrior pupil from a fear of death. Once this type of transcendence is achieved, the warrior engages death in everything he does, defeating it through a constant awareness of its presence. As such, others must die for this defeat to occur, as the warrior harnesses through physical violence the "freedom of action and creativity" associated with his transcendence.<sup>6</sup> As this state is vital to the actions of his protagonist, Kurosawa meticulously establishes the Zen fabric of the film in his opening sequence. This accentuates the later threads of *shikin Zen* that appear at key intervals.

The movie opens with a wide-angle shot of a mountain range. A figure strides in from the right, stops, fidgets, scratches his head, then thrusts his hand back into his robe. The camera moves left, following the figure as it draws in closer to his back. This back is towards the audience, suggesting distance and inapproachability, but the camera now in close-up implies an intimacy with that distance, a familiarity within that space. The fact that only a back is shown encourages a consideration of anonymity: Is it a burden to be borne or a freedom from entanglements that becomes burdensome?



**To pass the second installment of the film's living *shikin Zen*, the *ronin* sees himself along the path.**

Next, a languorous long shot that cannot fully match the speed of the *ronin* in motion furthers this sense of anonymity. Even as the camera gradually glides accordingly from left to right, it reveals only small swaths of the *ronin's* profile. His features persistently eschew scrutiny, implying that the audience will be forever on his tail, trailing just behind, never quite catching up. Foreshadowing the Zen detective's own living unpredictability, we will never know what he is thinking, or how he will act.

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<sup>6</sup> Leggett, *Samurai Zen*, p. 15.

Kurosawa's mysterious treatment of the main character immediately arouses the audience's curiosity and attention, and intensifies the presence of the *ronin* on the screen. This supports the strength and stature suggested by earlier shots of his back, and emphasizes the swiftness of the *ronin's* stride. This emphasis distills the samurai's physical form to pure movement.

Kurosawa maintains this movement with a pan down from the *ronin's* profile to a tracking shot detailing the *ronin's* sandals in the dust. Anchoring the *ronin's* feet in the bottom of the frame, Kurosawa firmly plants him on multiple paths. With a simple pedestrian image, Kurosawa vividly illustrates the wanderlust of the *ronin* intersecting with the warrior pupil's pursuit of transcendence. Kurosawa delineates this further with a directional variation between the camera's movement to the left during the profile sequence, and its subsequent shift towards the right to capture the *ronin's* sandals in the dust.

This intersection converges at a crossroads, where Kurosawa finally reveals the full figure of the *ronin* in a wide-angle shot that places him at the center of the film's universe, balanced, attuned, and whole. His many paths have been reduced to one; his disunity of mind and body has been resolved. When the *ronin* picks up a stick lying by the road, throws it in the air, and departs in the direction it lands, this simple act captures the atmosphere of the Zen detective.



As the *ronin* follows the path, it becomes evident that he alone is poised to rid it of its poisons. The path leads him to a village wracked with crime and corruption, and a wide-angle shot places the *ronin* in perspective with the evil entrenched in the village. This wickedness looms as large as the ominous background of the village architecture, but is most volatile in the village streets. The very first village dweller the *ronin* encounters is a dog carrying a human hand in its mouth. This initiates Kurosawa's living *shikin Zen*, a visual trial for both samurai and audience.

The *shikin Zen* in question is almost an irreverent variation on that most clichéd of *kōans*, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Kurosawa's answer, whether a paradox of horror and tenderness, a perverse meditation on loyalty, or merely extremely sharp black humor, dramatizes the depravity and desiccation seizing the city. As he adapts the *kōan* to fit the demands of cinema, Kurosawa intertwines entertainment and enlightenment, replacing the interview with the image to test the Zen aptitude of his characters and his viewers. The *ronin*'s response to the visual riddle posed by the image of the dog demonstrates precisely how "*shikin Zen* alludes to answers that, when attained, give freedom from the fear of death and from entangling concerns about what is happening and what is going to happen, which leads to freedom of action and creativity."<sup>7</sup>

For the audience, this also ensures freedom from the fear of boredom. The *ronin*'s wry look as the dog scurries past earns him passage through this initial installment of cinematic *shikin Zen*, setting the tone for the chain of events that immediately follows. Slicing off an arm with ease, the *ronin* finds his answer to the living *shikin Zen* of the dog in a show of strength that causes his worth as a *yojimbo*, or bodyguard, to skyrocket. As he enters into the conflict between Seibei and Ushitora, the two crime bosses vying for the village, the *ronin* advances to the second example of *shikin Zen* in the film.

Joining the ranks of Seibei for a princely sum, the *ronin* overhears his new boss scheming to dispose of him once he has helped dispatch his rival Ushitora. In response, the *ronin* immediately assumes a self-effacing air, downplaying his skills and identity. When questioned for his name, the *ronin* peers through an open door towards blooming mulberry bushes swaying in the breeze, and replies "Kuwabatake Sanjuro," or "Mulberry Field, Age 30." His irreverence disarms just as much as his sword, displaying the range of "freedom of action and creativity" he wields.

The *ronin*'s response to this rendition of the hackneyed *kōan*, "Wherever you go, there you are," aligns his external environment with his internal identity, preserving his anonymity while heightening his status as a variable, unpredictable presence. Transparently comical or vengefully lethal, he embodies intangibles that could tip the scales between the feuding gangs. Only the *ronin* himself knows who he is and what he is capable of.

His potential is enough to precipitate Seibei's attack on Ushitora in a midday showdown between the rival gangs. However, as both gangs

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

assemble along the village's main road, the *ronin* dramatically rejects Seibei's contract in a public gesture of severance. Scrambling up the village's bell tower, the *ronin* gleefully awaits the end of evil in the village as both gangs begin to brawl. Visually, his vantage point emphasizes his own transcendence, illustrating the effects of his "freedom of action and creativity" when harnessed in the pursuit of good.

However, the surprise arrival of a government official interrupts this decisive battle, triggering assassination, an aborted truce, multiple kidnappings, the dreaded double-cross, hostage swapping, murder, and torture. Throughout these grisly episodes, the *ronin* once again relies on his freedom of action and creativity to eradicate the evil he faces. His presentation of strength, his presence as a warrior, and his honed spontaneity merge in the final illustration of *shikin Zen* in the film.

Imprisoned and tortured by Ushitora for aiding a peasant family's escape from the village, the *ronin* himself escapes, and convalesces in a small temple in the village cemetery. Gradually regaining his physical strength, he restores his Zen balance through the practice of knife throwing. Releasing leaves into the gentle breeze blowing through the temple, the *ronin* submits his skills to randomness, which he conquers with each successful strike. This beautiful juxtaposition of precision and unpredictability, attention and detachment, and spontaneity and strategy, punctuates the Zen detective's readiness to face Ushitora and his gang in a final confrontation. As he triumphs over the last vestiges of evil in the village, the Zen detective, bodyguard of randomness, spontaneity, and death, exits the village exactly as he came, penniless, with the wind at his back and a smile on his face.

## AESTHETICS OF AMERICAN ZEN: TRADITION, ADAPTATION, AND INNOVATION IN THE ROCHESTER ZEN CENTER GARDEN

Jeff Wilson

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Enthusiasts of Japanese Zen gardens are used to juggling terms like *wabi-sabi* and *yugen*.<sup>1</sup> But how often do they find themselves talking about the use of red bricks to evoke a flowing stream or contemplating an abstract Buddha figure made out of cement fondue? Such unusual approaches must be applied when investigating the Rochester Zen Center's Japanese-influenced garden, where Asian and North American traditions meet to produce an emerging American Zen aesthetic. This aesthetic, emerging from the fluid contact of two cultural, religious and artistic spheres, can be seen in numerous Zen centers throughout the United States. Examining the garden at the Rochester temple, one of the country's first and most influential convert Zen centers, provides a particularly clear window into this phenomenon.

In America, where immigration has played a key role in shaping the religious landscape, scholars have often studied how Old World religions are transmitted and adapted to New World situations.<sup>2</sup> Those few who have looked at Buddhism's transplantation have mainly explored theological concepts like enlightenment or ritual practices such as meditation.<sup>3</sup> Much rarer is the detailed study of material culture. Yet Buddhist America is undeniably full of material items, ranging from *zafu* cushions to plastic power beads to ancient imported statues. Careful attention to architecture and artifacts can provide useful information about

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<sup>1</sup> See Lennox Tierney, *Wabi Sabi: A New Look at Japanese Design* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> See Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972). Immigration plays a much smaller role in American Zen's history than in most American religions. Zen has mainly been transmitted by individual Japanese teachers to a Western audience, presented as a therapy or spiritual practice rather than an ethnic, family-based traditional religion.

<sup>3</sup> See Charles S. Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

American Buddhist groups. Three important points can be employed when analyzing American Buddhist material culture. “Tradition,” the form used historically in Asia, is the starting point for all Buddhist lineages in the New World. “Adaptation” occurs when the new situation demands modifications to tradition, such as materials more suited to the new environment or the use of unusual objects because the traditional ones are unavailable. “Innovation” is a more radical response to new surroundings – it involves actively seeking new expressions or methods of manufacture for the sake of expanding the range of possible forms.<sup>4</sup> Motivation is the most important distinguishing factor between the latter two categories: adaptation is undertaken due to necessity and is practical in orientation (though often quite imaginative in execution), while innovation is pursued for its own sake, to play creatively with the untapped potential of Buddhist material culture.

It takes a certain kind of determination to live in Rochester, New York, where the average temperature is below freezing five months of the year and winter typically dumps more than seven feet of snow over the city. With the same latitude as Sapporo in Hokkaido, Japan, Rochester presents a very different environment from that of Japan, and it might seem like a strange place to find a garden designed along Japanese models. But in fact, for thirty years, the students at Rochester Zen Center have been working on

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<sup>4</sup> While I use these terms to analyze American Buddhist material culture, they may also be employed in other areas, such as analysis of theology or ritual. For example, *zazen*, the basic form of seated Zen meditation, is a traditional practice in Japan, usually performed by priests and monastics. The way in which it is widely performed by the laity at Rochester Zen Center is an adaptation to a new situation, where middle-class Western laypeople are the primary group interested in pursuing meditation practice. Americans have started to alter the practice in significantly innovative ways, such as the creation of “Zen driving”; see K.T. Berger, *Zen Driving* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988). Despite the presentation of three separate terms, it should be acknowledged that these are not static categories. Traditions are always in flux, adaptation can be quite innovative, and innovations may be pursued with the goal of reaching some state imagined to be more traditional or authentic. This typology is meant to suggest lines of investigation, not pronounce the final word on any phenomenon.

their large and distinctive garden, finding a middle path between the demands of Japanese tradition and the need to adapt to the realities of bleak Northeastern winters.

The center was founded in 1966 by Philip Kapleau, who studied Buddhism in Japan for thirteen years.<sup>5</sup> Kapleau actually viewed the unforgiving climate as a plus, believing it would help his disciples more readily direct their attention inward.<sup>6</sup> By 1968, the group had purchased a house at 7 Arnold Park, but a disastrous fire soon after they moved in kept them busy with renovations for several years.<sup>7</sup> The back garden benefited from some landscaping and a small pool with a fountain in 1972, but this was only the prelude to what was shortly to follow.<sup>8</sup>

In 1974, the Center purchased 5 Arnold Park, and students began transforming the yard behind the Zen Center's two buildings into a garden based on Japanese aesthetics. At that time, the center's community included James Rose, a famous landscape architect who studied design and architecture in Japan. The suggestion for a garden designed with Japanese Zen aesthetics came from Rose and was quickly picked up by the other American students.<sup>9</sup> Casey Frank, a senior member of the community who was on the building committee at the time, explained:

In the beginning, us young people were enamored with the Japanese aesthetic, more so than Roshi. He never, ever wanted the place to look Japanese. At the same time, he appreciated the beauty and practicality of the Japanese forms. That theme was in all our minds.<sup>10</sup>

Original center member and master gardener Audrey Fernandez echoed Frank's sentiment:

I've been very interested in Japanese gardens right from the beginning. I read the original article in *House Beautiful* on shibui

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<sup>5</sup>Audrey Fernandez, *American Zen Twenty Years* (Rochester, NY: Rochester Zen Center, 1986).

<sup>6</sup>Bob Schrei, "Roshi Takes a Bow," *Zen Bow* 9/3-4 (1976): 53-57.

<sup>7</sup>Casey Frank, "Arnold Park-ji," *Zen Bow* 18/2 (1996): 18-22.

<sup>8</sup>Philip Kapleau, "Editorial," *Zen Bow* 5/3 (1972): 3-5.

<sup>9</sup>Casey Frank, Phone interview (10/29/2003).

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. Roshi is a term for a Zen master, applied here to Philip Kapleau.

and wabi and sabi, and oh! I was just thrilled, I just couldn't imagine anything more beautiful. And I actually contributed a book on Japanese gardens to the library, it's up there now. So I was very aware of this...it just seems natural to get some things that people also use in Japanese gardens.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Kapleau's apparent reluctance regarding the creation of the garden, other members of the center forged ahead.

The garden debuted on October 26, 1974. Drawing heavily on the dry Zen garden tradition of *karesansui*, it featured long, curving swaths of white pebbles that swirled around islands of grass or leafy ground cover.<sup>12</sup>



Interesting rocks and trees rose here and there from amongst the greenery, aligned in ways that suggested balance and asymmetrical relationship. In his design, Rose relied on the traditional Japanese aesthetic notion of *wabi*, which conveys a sense of distance, age, quiet, and loneliness, like an abandoned fisherman's hut on a gray, windy day.<sup>13</sup> Rose and his assistants drew upon the *wabi* aesthetic in choosing weathered rocks, and in designing

<sup>11</sup> Interview (5/14/2004). *Shibui*, *wabi*, and *sabi* are terms used in Japanese aesthetics. They will be defined in the course of the article.

<sup>12</sup> Frank, "Arnold Park-ji." *Karesansui* is a Japanese gardening style that uses dry elements such as rocks and sand to suggest water. All photographs included in this article were taken by the author.

<sup>13</sup> Vincent T. Covello and Yuji Yoshimura, *The Japanese Art of Stone Appreciation: Suiseki and Its Use with Bonsai* (Boston: Charles E. Tuttle, 1984), p. 30.

the garden as an interplay between gravel streams and grassy islands.<sup>14</sup> Several small bridges, especially a miniature curved bridge, added to the sense of scale by making the scene appear distant and unattainable. Irregularly-placed stones allowed people to move carefully along a few prescribed paths, but as with many of the traditional Zen gardens of Japan, the garden was primarily for contemplating, not exploring.<sup>15</sup>



However, the beautiful and traditional Japanese design soon presented problems. The bridges froze and became precarious.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, space was at a premium, and the popular Zen center was already bursting at the seams, creating a dilemma. The gravel river was not meant for walking on, and the intrusion of human beings inevitably destroyed the sense of scale, turning strolling Zen students into giant monsters marching across the landscape.<sup>17</sup> Tradition was all fine and good, but necessity demanded adaptation.

To remedy the “Godzilla effect,” in 1975 the Zen center hired David Engel, another important architect. Like Rose, Engel was an American strongly influenced by Japanese design aesthetics, and he quickly hit upon an elegant solution. Directing teams of Zen center volunteers, Engel removed the immaculate gravel flows and laid down 28,000 red bricks in their place.<sup>18</sup> The bricks were laid down lengthwise, providing a flowing sense to the paths, thus preserving the *karesansui* tradition of utilizing solid materials to evoke the fluidity of water.

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous, “At the Center...,” *Zen Bow* 7/4 (1974): 22-23.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Tadgell, *Japan: The Informal Contained* (London: Ellipsis, 2000), pp. 156-157.

<sup>16</sup> Audrey Fernandez, Interview (5/14/2004).

<sup>17</sup> Casey Frank, Phone interview (9/29/2003).

<sup>18</sup> Frank, “Arnold Park-ji.”



In some places they actually swirl into a circular pattern, creating an eddy or pool effect. Some trees and rocks were shuffled around and the miniature bridges were removed, eliminating the distant look of the garden and returning to it a normal sense of scale.

The introduction of red brick into the garden, a building material absent from Zen gardens in Japan, was not such a departure for Rochester itself. Brick of this type is a staple construction material of the city – several of the Zen center's own buildings are made out of it. Here we see the use of adaptation in the transformation of Zen in the West. Adding in brick, Engel and his helpers created a new look unfamiliar to Japan, yet tied to the aesthetic familiarity of the Rochester environment. Brick provided needed practicality. With the paths now fit for walking and with benches to sit on, the garden became a fully interactive space to be viewed from within, not without.

Engel further modified the garden by designing a new area, characterized by staggered box shapes and right angles, departing from the curving elements that Rose relied upon. Benches placed in this open yet



ordered space invited people into the garden for exploration and rest. While the garden continued to be used as a place for meditation, it lost its role as a tool for abstract contemplation.

People could now poke around in the garden, but Engel deliberately arranged trees and other elements so that visitors could still only see a portion at a time:

One shouldn't be able to see the whole garden from one view. There should be some taller things in the foreground. Occasionally the view should be interrupted to increase the perspective. There shouldn't be all just one space – there should be some compartmentalization, a progression from narrowing down to opening up. It should have some strength and structure.<sup>19</sup>

The only way to discover the shape and character of the garden is to experience it directly, walking from area to area and focusing on the changing surroundings. This simultaneous revealing and masking of the garden plays on the Japanese notion of *yugen*, which is characterized as dark, mysterious, subtle, and unknown, like the moon behind a veil of clouds.<sup>20</sup> In Japanese Zen gardens, *yugen* is achieved by arranging elements in such a way that they partially obscure each other, so that one cannot take in the entirety of the garden from any single viewing point. The *karesansui* at Ryōanji in Kyoto is a classic example – from no vantage point can all fifteen stones be seen.<sup>21</sup> Engel also added an important new element which drew on another feature of Japanese aesthetics, known as *shibui*. The notion of *shibui* is one of order, propriety, elegance, and refinement, like a formal tea ceremony.<sup>22</sup> The solid brick and right angles of the new resting area provoke a definite sense of *shibui* in the viewer. Compared with the rest of the garden, this section feels most civilized and ordered.

In 1976, a third architect further modified the Zen garden. Once again, the center was privileged to call upon the talents of a major artist, in

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<sup>19</sup> David Engel, Casey Frank, Tony Caprino, and John Botsford, "Meeting: afternoon, trip to stone quarry" [minutes] 5/6/1976.

<sup>20</sup> Covello and Yoshimura, *The Japanese Art of Stone Appreciation*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>21</sup> Loraine E. Kuck, *The World of Japanese Gardens: From Chinese Origins to Modern Landscape Art* (New York: Weatherhill, 1984), p. 258.

<sup>22</sup> Covello and Yoshimura, *The Japanese Art of Stone Appreciation*, p. 83.

this case George Nakashima, an architect and furniture maker whose woodwork is preserved in the Museum of Modern Art. The Zen center had decided to convert the 1896 carriage house in the back of the garden into a formal Buddha Hall.<sup>23</sup> Nakashima supervised the renovation, adapting the old structure for its new use.<sup>24</sup> His most important contribution was the addition of a covered wooden walkway that runs along the outside of the Buddha Hall and the main building, connecting them in a seamless flow that crosses through the garden itself. At the same point where this walkway crosses the garden, it is also penetrated by it, as this is conspicuously the only section that lacks a waist-high wall of wooden planks, allowing movement into the garden and creating a sense of spaciousness.



Furthermore, the brick pathway that navigates the garden leads to and under this nexus point, evoking the old *shinden* style of Japanese architecture, which included streams known as *yarimizu* that run under and through the buildings of the estate.<sup>25</sup> Ever so subtly, the walkway actually rises at this point, as if it were a bridge spanning a flowing brook.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, "Work," *Zen Bow* 8/4 (1975): 22.

<sup>24</sup> There is only space in this paper to mention the most prominent designers who directly made their mark on the Zen Center's grounds. However, this is not intended to slight the work of the many other architects, carpenters, gardeners, and volunteers who worked alongside Rose, Engel, and Nakashima. There is no room to go into detail about the contributions of such workers as Barry Keeson, Pat Simons, and John Botsford, but this should not diminish the fact that the garden arises from the visions and labor of many people.

<sup>25</sup> Gunter Nitschke, *Japanese Gardens: Right Angle and Natural Form* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Casey Frank, Phone interview (9/29/2003).

The circumambulating manner in which the walkway snakes along the outside of the Buddha Hall, rather than simply leading directly from door to door, mirrors the exterior walkways that surround Shinto shrines. The walkway is an intentionally interstitial space that belongs neither wholly to the inside nor completely to the outside. Beneath its overhanging roof, one is sheltered from precipitation yet exposed to the temperature. The circuitous route invites walkers to pay attention to their journey, rather than simply hurry along the straightest line between two points. This emphasis on attention to the present moment, free from wandering thoughts or preoccupations, is emphasized as the path to enlightenment among practitioners of American Zen. Here we see one of the ways in which architecture is marshaled to the cause of producing *satori*.<sup>27</sup>

Particularly interesting, wherever the walkway is fully open to the garden, as in the entrance to the Buddha Hall, a further mediating element is introduced in the form of a strip of gravel bounded by small rocks, with larger flat stones providing diversion and places for stepping into or out of the garden.



The outer edge of the border is exactly aligned with the edge of the walkway's sloping roof, indicating that it is meant to further blur the distinction between interior and exterior. Such borders can often be found in both Zen gardens and traditional Japanese tea houses.<sup>28</sup> All of these

<sup>27</sup> *Satori* is the Zen experience of spiritual insight, the goal of practice at Rochester Zen Center. See Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

<sup>28</sup> Masao Hayakawa and Richard L. Gage trans., *The Garden Art of Japan* (New York: Weatherhill, 1973).

techniques for diminishing the separation between the outer natural spaces and the inner human world point back to a key concept in Japanese aesthetics, the non-differentiation of nature and humanity.

Cleverly, Nakashima managed to suggest an alignment between the straight support poles of the walkway and the straight trunks of the trees in the *shibui* section, increasing the sense of order and relationship between the buildings and garden elements.



The snaking, weather-beaten walkway, which is perpetually gloomy and suggestive, continues the theme of *yugen*, and the *okarikomi*, a type of clipped bush, obscure the path and buildings.<sup>29</sup> Yet, the very mysteriousness of the walkway also serves to highlight the general cleanliness of the garden in the patio section it borders, enhancing that area's feeling of *shibui*.

All of these developments – the gravel paths, the replacement with bricks, the Asian foliage, the winding walkway, the carriage house turned into a Buddha Hall – demonstrate the creative tension between tradition and adaptation seen at numerous Zen centers in America. But there is one more aspect of the contemporary Rochester garden that must be analyzed. While it includes elements of tradition and adaptation, another concept, that of innovation, best describes this next feature.

The heart of the garden is found toward the back, a little beyond the entrance to the Buddha Hall. From a distance, it appears to be a tall mountain, rearing up from the sea of green foliage like a classical *Horai* stone, a type of vertical rock that suggests the land of the immortals. Up close, it resolves into a clear though abstract seated figure. This six-foot high sculpture is known as the Universal Buddha, and it directly evokes the

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<sup>29</sup> William Morrow, *Japanese Gardens* (New York: Harper Collins, 1979).

traditional images of Buddha seated in the full-lotus posture of *zazen* prized by Zen Buddhists. The full-lotus is the most stable seated configuration,



good for long periods of intense meditation, and its triangular peaked shape replicates the feel of a mountain, a recollection that Zen teachers frequently explained. Philip Kapleau makes use of this metaphor in *The Three Pillars of Zen*:

According to Dogen, one must sit with a sense of dignity or grandeur, like a mountain or a giant pine. Moreover, since body is the material aspect of mind, and mind the immaterial aspect of body, to assemble the hands and arms, and the feet and legs, into a unity at one central point, where the joined hands rest on the heels of the locked legs, as in the full-lotus posture, facilitates the unification of mind. Finally, however intangibly, the lotus posture creates a sense of rootedness in the earth, together with a feeling of an all-encompassing oneness, void of the sensation of inner or outer.<sup>30</sup>

For Zen Buddhists, sitting in *zazen* like a mountain is ideal. As students approach the Buddha Hall, the Universal Buddha silently manifests to them the proper form for *zazen*, acting as a mirror and model for which to aspire.

However, while the sculpture alludes to elements of Zen tradition, it is in fact highly innovative in design. This sculpture draws more heavily on North American principles of abstract art than any Japanese precedents – it is neither purely symbolic like the *Horai* stones, nor plainly representative

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<sup>30</sup> Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, p. 10.

like the fully articulated Buddha statues of Japan. Its prominent placement and size is also innovative, driven not by the practical need to adapt to different circumstances, but by a new imaginative conception and use of space and balance absent from Japanese Zen gardens. Also innovative is a secret that this deceptive abstract Buddha holds. To all appearances, it is a rough jumble of individual stones, artfully arranged to evoke the idea of a Buddha seated in meditation. But in fact, this Universal Buddha is a single piece, molded by the sculptor to look like discrete stones.

In the mid-1980s, Kapleau decided that there was an element that he would like added to the garden. He enlisted John Filion, a Toronto-area sculptor, to create a Buddha without a face based on designs Kapleau had sketched out. Filion decided to mold the Buddha out of a curiously-named industrial construction material: cement fondue.<sup>31</sup> Cement fondue is actually a powder, which is mixed with water and massaged into whatever shape is necessary. The material is so pliable, in fact, that it can be used to take casts of individual fingerprints. Therefore, the rough-hewn look of the Universal Buddha is a deception – rather than a gathering of venerable, weathered stones, it is actually a block of construction-grade cement fondue, deliberately crafted to disguise its true nature. The sculpture does succeed, as visitors are unaware that the piece is not in fact a rock statue.<sup>32</sup>

At first, the Zen center's more Japanophilic students were not quite sure how to take the introduction of this unusual figure into the garden. "I could never make up my mind whether it was a stroke of genius, or he was completely *meshuggeneh*," said Casey Frank.<sup>33</sup> Yet the Buddha did eventually win the community over. One reason was that the Universal Buddha manages to convey a range of interpretations. As Frank explains, "The Buddha has no ethnicity; it is all humans, transhuman."<sup>34</sup> The name and shape point to the universal Buddha-nature of all beings, to which the practice of Zen is designed to awaken the practitioner.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the Universal Buddha lays out both the path and the goal to the Zen student who stops to

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<sup>31</sup> Casey Frank, Phone interview (9/29/2003).

<sup>32</sup> Jason Martin, "Triple Specials: A visit celebrating Roshi's birthday at the RZC," *Toronto Zen Centre* (9/30/2003): [www.torontozen.org/tzc\\_article\\_triple.htm](http://www.torontozen.org/tzc_article_triple.htm)

<sup>33</sup> Phone interview (9/29/2003). *Meshuggeneh* is Yiddish for "crazy."

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Audrey Fernandez, Interview (5/4/2004).

contemplate its features. This aspect was intended by Kapleau, and points to innovation more than simple adaptation.<sup>36</sup> Kapleau sought to present a new, non-traditional look, not for purposes of adaptation to the environment, but to highlight an aspect of Zen thought. The Universal Buddha is a thesis advanced in cement fondue.

Also notable is an elongated section on the left-hand side (when facing the sculpture) that can appear to stretch to the ground. There seems to be a suggestion here of the *bhumisparsa mudra*, the gesture of touching the Earth with his right hand which the Buddha performed at the moment of his enlightenment. This gesture signifies the Buddha's great awakening and the intimate connection with the Earth which is a natural subject for any garden.

The awakening motif was further suggested by a magnolia tree (since removed due to disease), whose branches stretched out to shelter the Universal Buddha. The Buddha was born beneath a tree in the garden of Lumbini, which suddenly bloomed as he appeared. In springtime, the magnolia burst with color like a nimbus of blossoms, visually recreating this mythic motif. Significantly, this blossoming usually occurred in April, the month associated with the birth of the Buddha in Japan. The Buddha also attained enlightenment under a tree, and he passed away between two trees. On the approach to the Buddha Hall, the Universal Buddha appeared to be situated between two trees, the magnolia on the left and the Japanese maple on the right. Thus, this arrangement simultaneously evoked the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha, as well as demonstrating the proper form of *zazen* and suggesting a mountain with all the attendant associations in Zen.

On a final note, the proper understanding of a Zen temple garden includes not only its aesthetic appeal and evocative suggestions, but also an understanding of its role as a place of Zen practice. While *zazen* is emphasized in Zen, the true goal is to carry the attitude of meditation away from the cushion and out into the world. Thus, Zen practitioners at the center also engage in mindful activities, such as sweeping, raking, shoveling, planting, and pruning.<sup>37</sup> Other activities conducted in the garden

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<sup>36</sup> Scott Jennings, Interview (5/13/2004).

<sup>37</sup> Richard von Sturmer and Joseph Sorrentino, *Images From the Center: Daily Life at an American Zen Center* (Rochester, NY: Rochester Zen Center, 1998), p. 15.

include seated and walking meditation, ceremonies, picnicking, and relaxation.<sup>38</sup>

The *Sakutei-ki*, a classic manual of garden architecture written in the eleventh century, says, “when copying the gardens of famous masters of old, bear in mind the intention of your patron and design your version according to your own taste.”<sup>39</sup> This illustrates that for more than one thousand years, a certain level of flexibility, spontaneity, and freedom of expression has been part of the Japanese gardening tradition. Norris Johnson has suggested that careful observers can trace a phylogenetic lineage of Buddhist architecture from India to China and Korea, and then to Japan.<sup>40</sup> Now it appears that the lineage has successfully made the transition to a new land, mixing with the native aesthetics and construction materials to produce unique offspring that nevertheless bear the stamp of the old forms. When fire is passed to a new torch, the flame is neither exactly the same fire as the original, nor is it entirely different. Likewise, the transmission of Japanese Buddhist aesthetics to America has resulted in the creation of something that is neither the same nor altogether new. Through combining traditional, adaptive, and innovative elements, this blend of new and old, Asia and North America, defines the emerging American Zen aesthetic.

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<sup>38</sup> Christopher Taylor,).

<sup>39</sup> Gunter Nitschke, *Japanese Gardens*, p. 57. Though not specifically Buddhist in origin, the *Sakutei-ki* was often consulted by designers working on temple gardens.

<sup>40</sup> Norris Brock Johnson, “The Garden in Zuisen Temple, Kamakura, Japan: Design Form and Phylogenetic Meaning,” *Journal of Garden History* 10/4 (1990): 214-236.

## TAXICAB ENLIGHTENMENT: ZEN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMING KEROUAC IN *SATORI IN PARIS*

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On amazon.com's web page for Jack Kerouac's *Satori in Paris*,<sup>1</sup> readers have logged the two following contrasting comments:

*Satori in Paris* explores a trip to France by Mr. Kerouac....Like many of his other great works, *Satori* perfectly captures the vibe and feel of the pre-sixties, pre-Vietnam era Beat generation.

This is by far Kerouac's most enlightening book...a must lead for anyone who wants to share the experience of Eastern wisdom and thought.<sup>2</sup>

While one reader sees a snapshot of beatniks on the verge of becoming hippies, another finds a man so enmeshed in Eastern religious experience that the text, according to the reader, has inserted itself into the canon of "must-read" religious works. While presumably not written by scholars, these assertions demonstrate distinct, seemingly contradictory responses to Kerouac's work. Certainly, *Satori in Paris* relates the author's frustrating trip to France during which he sees few of the sites he tells the reader he wants to see and does none of the things he tells the reader he wants to do. Stereotypical Kerouac is on full display as he is perpetually drunk, looking for women, and long-winded. The story's backdrop, however, provides insight into the patchwork of his often times confused, yet complex, mind. As with many of his other works, the story centers on a journey through which the main character is seeking to reclaim some lost part of himself, in this case, Kerouac's European heritage.

This journey, through luck and Kerouac's own self-destructive machinations, ends up achieving none of his original intentions. *Satori in*

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Satori in Paris & Pic: Two Novels* (New York: Grove Press, 1985); citations of the book are from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0802130615/qid=1092509018/sr=1-1/ref=sr\\_1\\_1/102-6730725-8814534?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0802130615/qid=1092509018/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/102-6730725-8814534?v=glance&s=books).

*Paris*, however, is not meant to be the story of yet another of Kerouac's legendary binges. Drawing on Zen tradition, Kerouac attempts to frame the book documenting his search for identity as a *kōan*, the purpose of which, in the words of Nyogen Senzaki, is to "point out that Reality is not to be captured in a thought, or a phrase, or an explanation. Reality is the direct seeing of the world as it is, not as our intellects describe it, map it, or conceive it."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, through his use of an implied reader to whom he refers throughout the book, Kerouac establishes a relationship between author and reader similar to that between a Zen Rōshi and pupil. While in Zen tradition the Rōshi recites *kōans*, which will jolt the student into awareness of the real, *Satori in Paris* provides a series of statements that jolt the reader into awareness of who Kerouac is. Instead of giving a straightforward answer to Kerouac's initial search for his roots, the work itself is left to stand on its own as a continual performance of the author's identity.

In going to France, Kerouac intends to trace his family's roots and reestablish a relationship with the main branch of his family tree. Turning up nothing in several libraries, he finally asks:

Well, why do people change their names? Have they done anything bad, are they criminals, are they ashamed of their real names? Are they afraid of something? Is there any law in America against using your own real name? I had come to France just to look up this old name of mine (72).

In a book about the author's journey to find his own French roots, the passage is more than a series of rhetorical questions. He draws the implied reader's attention to the infinite number of reasons and circumstances that compel immigrants to change their names, in effect becoming someone else. Coming from a nation of immigrants that is, even now, increasingly more obsessed with retracing old-world lineages, Kerouac attempts to guide the implied reader into realizing the crisis of American identity by posing these questions and then outlining his own search for a European family background.

He does not provide an answer to this quandary on either the personal or national levels, but instead points to the situation and lets the

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<sup>3</sup> Nyogen Senzaki, *The Iron Flute: 100 Zen Kōans* (Boston: Tuttle, 2000), p. viii.

reader address the problem of American identity as he/she will. Though the spelling and/or pronunciation of his name was never changed per se, retaining enough of its French origin for him to trace it etymologically, Kerouac's search fails to turn up an undeniable heritage. Unable to find any of the genealogical records he set out for, he comments at one point:

Because Johnny Magee around the corner as anybody knows can, with any luck, find in Ireland that he's the descendant of Morholt's king and so what? Johnny Anderson, Johnny Goldstein, Johnny Anybody, Lin Chin, Ti Pak, Ron Poodlewhorferer, Anybody (52).

Kerouac indirectly dislodges the reader's own sense of having a family tree, claiming a pervasive sameness for the American experience and shocking the reader into this same realization. There is no heritage waiting to be claimed in the old world, and all one can do is grasp the American present. Without editorializing, then, he aims to show the implied reader the essence of his/her own life story: that history exists only insofar as we continue to live it in the here-and-now.

In this reading, Kerouac's failure either to obtain genealogical records or to visit the landmarks he wants to see is not failure as such. In a sense, he lives out the just described present tense of history. Separated from his ancestors by centuries and books, which were supposedly burned in the Nazi bombardment of Paris, his family history can only be endowed with as much meaning as he, Kerouac, intends to give to it. This point is driven home throughout the novel as Kerouac provides the reader with wildly conflicting accounts of his family name by claiming, among other things, that the name itself comes from both the Russian "to love" and the French for "house in the field." As much as these connotations may or may not be a part of his name, they become a part of his name in the present because he believes them to be so. More so than heraldry records, he, like the Johnny Anybody he chides above, is master of his own ancestry, able to create or recreate both himself and his lineage at a whim.

The spiritual side of this awakening comes from more than his appropriation of the Zen term *satori* as a means to define the enlightenment resulting from his journey. The two churches he plans to go see are St. Louis de France and Sainte Chapelle. While he immediately goes to see St. Louise de France, a church that shares its name with the one where he was baptized in Lowell, Massachusetts, he never makes it to Sainte Chapelle, passing it on his way to the airport. The fact that he goes to one and not the

other, reflects his own spiritual ambivalence, highlighted by his inadvertently passing by Sainte Chapelle in the cab of the taxi driver whom Kerouac claims gives him his *satori*. The first church, St. Louis de France, represents Kerouac's childhood as seen in the woman at the church giving Kerouac twenty centimes in order to teach her children, in the author's words, *caritas*, or charity.

As such, the church itself stands for what can be learned in the world through instruction. Sainte Chapelle, on the other hand, which Kerouac points out more than once houses a piece of the True Cross, represents, in Zen terms, that which cannot be taught. Although he desires to go there, he does not until, unexpectedly, he passes by it in the cab, saying "Is *that* la Sainte Chapelle? I meant to see it." As with the questions he poses to the reader, Kerouac himself receives no answer from the cab driver, who merely addresses the other passengers, "Ladies....you're going where?" (117). Whether or not the edifice in question is even Sainte Chapelle is irrelevant. On his way out of town, Kerouac believes he *does* see the cathedral, and this confident perception of the exterior world serves as the basis for his enlightenment. Without being shown or told, he knows.

From the outset of the book, Kerouac tells the reader, "Somewhere during my ten days in Paris, I received an illumination of some kind that seems to've changed me again," and relates this experience to "*satori*: the Japanese word for 'sudden illumination,' 'sudden awakening,' or simply 'kick in the eye'—Whatever something *did* happen" (7). Although unsure about what to call his experience, beginning with the book's title, he frames it as *satori* and continues to call it that throughout the work. This label is significant in that, as a self-professed though questionable Catholic, Kerouac is aware of Christian mystical traditions through the lives of the saints.

Indeed, Kerouac and those of his milieu, rather than having a spiritual affinity for Christian figures, are more apt to identify themselves with "the so-called 'Zen lunatics.' These are the great Zen figures of old China and Japan like Han Shan and Ikkyu, who were less known for living a disciplined monastic life than for manifesting their spiritual depth and freedom through outrageous behavior."<sup>4</sup> Kerouac, having nothing but the aforementioned vague notion that something happened to him on his trip,

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<sup>4</sup> Robert S. Ellwood, "Conservative and Radical Themes in American Zen: Three Writers," in *Zen in American Life and Letters*, ed. Robert S. Ellwood (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1987), p. 148.

cannot even reference the exact moment it happened, claiming it came from either just talking to French people, on a train, in a hotel, or in a cab, among other places. That he relies on his understanding of Zen to define his experience and resultant enlightenment is more than affectation. In doing so, he attempts to make sense of an experience that Western traditions provide him no means to interpret.

The constant in all the above situations is that he is talking to people, and coming to realize that, whatever claims he makes to the contrary, and though no one tells him this directly, he is not French. He says he is already homesick (43), despite the fact that, in a sense, he has come to find his ancestral home, and ends the book by leaving France abruptly, without accomplishing anything he sets out to do. While his goals are frustrated, he is not, as one critic says, “the tourist as postmodernism’s representative man,” unable to engage his surroundings on any level.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, he uses the term *satori* as a way to interpret what happened to him in France, make sense of his experience, and bring it to the reader.

The intent of this paper is not to posit that Jack Kerouac was a Zen Buddhist. As he points out, “I became a drunk. Why? Because I like ecstasy of the mind” (28), and “I’m not Buddhist, I’m a Catholic” (69). It is true that Alan Ginsberg and many others feel that these and other, more vulgar, comments are representative of a man operating in the mode of a true Zen master.<sup>6</sup> Alan Watts, on the other hand, places Kerouac squarely into a category he calls Beat Zen. Too self-conscious, subjective, and strident to be representative of what he sees as true Zen, Watts relegates Kerouac to a group of rather half-hearted hangers-on.<sup>7</sup>

Watts’ opinion, however, while useful to an interpretation of the sincerity of Kerouac’s religious stance, cannot be used to discount Zen’s influence on his method of composition and the ultimate goal of his work. As Kerouac states at the beginning of Chapter 2, the intention of *Satori in Paris* is to be a “tale that’s told for companionship and to teach something

<sup>5</sup> Udo Nattermann, “*The Last International Novel*,”

<http://english.cla.umn.edu/travelconf/abstracts/Nattermann.html>.

<sup>6</sup> See Alan Ginsberg, “Kerouac’s Ethic,” in *Un Homme Grande: Jack Kerouac at the Crossroads of Many Cultures*, ed. Pierre Ancyol (Ottawa, Carlton University Press: 1990), pp. 41-44.

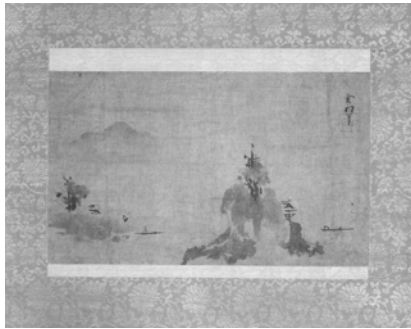
<sup>7</sup> Alan Watts, *Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1959), p. 9.

religious, of religious reverence, about real life, and in this real world which literature should (and here does) reflect" (10). Kerouac's method of getting at this unmitigated reality is one of unpremeditated, spontaneous composition. While not necessarily something he always practiced, writing down the record of an experience immediately in the fashion in which it is recalled, in Kerouac's words, allows him to "speak for things," freeing himself of artifice and permitting an almost supra-linguistic communication to take place between author and reader.

Kerouac's work could not replace the real world, but it could provide a perfect, blow-by-blow account of it, leading to the reader to perceive it directly in the manner of a Zen *kōan*. Referred to as typing, not writing, by Truman Capote, this process has both Western and Eastern roots. While the moment of composition itself is frequently likened to Yeats' trance writing, the ultimate goal behind Kerouac's ambition lies beyond *mimesis* and closely resembles Zen traditions in the visual arts like the flung-ink style of painting.

An "expression in form of the self without form" these works, of which Figure 1, Sesson Shukei's "Splashed Ink Landscape," is an example, are companions to the Zen *kōan*, exercises that "block understanding so that sudden Enlightenment might result."<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1 Sesson Shukei, *Splashed-ink Landscape*, c. 1504-1589**



(Reproduced courtesy of the Ackland Art Museum  
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ackland Fund, 88.21)

<sup>8</sup> Diane Divelbes, "Zen and Art," in *Zen in American Life and Letters*, ed. Robert Ellwood (Malibu: Undena Publications), pp. 36-48.

Similarly, the book as expressed in Kerouac's meandering, non-linear style is to be a performance of the experience, not an imitation of it. I will stop short of saying that Kerouac specifically meant the work to be read in this Japanese tradition, but, when reading a book like *Satori* in which he is consciously drawing on non-Western constructs, the reader must take this possibility into account. His verbosity, abrupt chapter breaks, and obscure rambling draw attention to Kerouac's own confusing experience, bringing the reader directly into contact with what he experienced as "enlightenment" rather than telling about it.



## MOTHER GAIA: A GLIMPSE INTO THE BUDDHIST AESTHETIC OF GARY SNYDER

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Gary Snyder's study of classical Chinese poetry as a graduate student at Berkeley and the subsequent ten years he spent studying Rinzai Zen Buddhism in Japan had a major impact on his poetry.<sup>1</sup> The Sino-Japanese influence is apparent from Snyder's early translations of the T'ang Dynasty Buddhist monk and poet Han Shan (literally Cold Mountain) in 1955<sup>2</sup> as well as in his later incorporation of T'ang<sup>3</sup> poetic forms and a cryptic Buddhist rhetoric that transgresses conventional language and is linked to the experience of enlightenment. The theological aspects of Buddhism in Snyder's poetry have been widely researched,<sup>4</sup> but no study has explicated the infusion of T'ang poetics into Snyder's Buddhist aesthetic,<sup>5</sup> particularly in relation to how form, grammar and a Zen Buddhist perspective of language informs his poetry.

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<sup>1</sup> Ch'an Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the thirteenth century where it is known as Zen Buddhism. Zen as it is used in this paper refers specifically to the teachings of last classical master of Chan Buddhism Yun-men or "Cloud Gate" in China during the tenth century. Yun-men's teachings emphasized and popularized the transmission of enlightenment via the study of the *kōan*. Today, in Japan, the Zen sect known for placing an emphasis on *kōan* study is known as Rinzai Zen.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Snyder's translations of Han Shan or "Cold Mountain" were read for the first time on October 13, 1955 at Six Gallery on Fillmore Street in San Francisco following Allan Ginsberg's famous reading of *Howl*. This Six Gallery happening is often referred to as the birth of Beat literature.

<sup>3</sup> Most critics consider the first half and middle of the eighth century as the height of T'ang Dynasty poetry.

<sup>4</sup> See Sherman Paul, "From Lookout to Ashram: The Way of Gary Snyder," part I, *Iowa Review* 1/3 (Summer 1970): 76-91; Nathan Mao, "The influence of Zen Buddhism on Gary Snyder," *Tamkang Review* 5/2 (1974): 125-134; and Ayako Takahashi, "The Shaping of Gary Snyder's Ecological Consciousness," *Comparative Literature Studies* 39/4 (2002): 314-325.

<sup>5</sup> Paul mentions in passing a relation between Snyder's Zen technique and sparseness and omission in "From Lookout to Ashram," p. 82.

The following poem is sometimes referred to as “Mother Gaia” or “Coaldale.” In 1979 it first appeared in a small printing run of 300 copies titled *Songs for Gaia*,<sup>6</sup> and in 1983 it was included in *Axe Handles*. The following is Snyder’s original version from *Songs for Gaia*:

24: IV:40075. 3:30 PM, n. of Coaldale, Nevada,  
A Glimpse through a Break in the Storm  
of the White Mountains

O Mother Gaia

sky cloud gate milk snow

wind-void-word

I bow in roadside gravel

This poem offers prime examples of Snyder’s use of parataxis. Whatever message is conveyed in “Mother Gaia,” it is not spelled out grammatically. Giles explains parataxis, a primary structural feature of Chinese lyric poetry, as follows:

A Chinese poem has no inflection, agglutination, or grammatical indication of any kind, the connection between which has to be inferred by the reader from the logic, from the context, and least perhaps of all from the syntactical arrangement of the words.<sup>7</sup>

Although spoken Chinese often lacks verb inflection, context is easily grasped in conversation, unlike classical poetry, where countless connotations are often present.<sup>8</sup> The lack of both punctuation and prose sentence construction in “Mother Gaia” mirrors the formal elements of a classical Chinese poem. As in classical Chinese poetry, there is a compact quality and no punctuation in the body of the poem, except for the neologism created by two hyphens: wind-void-word. This lack of

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<sup>6</sup> Gary Snyder, *Songs for Gaia* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> H. A. Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature* (New York: D. Appleton, 1901), p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> The characteristics of spoken classical Chinese are highly debated.

punctuation and sentence construction suggests the idea of an ever-expanding or circular universe common to many T'ang dynasty poems. Also identical to classic Chinese poetry and in large part Chinese language in general, "Mother Gaia" takes place in the present tense. Even "I bow," the only verb found in the poem, is present indicative and active, conforming to the sense of a continuous present.

Snyder utilizes two paratactic strategies. The first is the visual space between sky, cloud, gate, milk, and snow. In line three, he provides a second strategy, the compound ideograph "wind-void-word." This second strategy engages parataxis not only through style but through character construction as well, since two characters in Chinese can carry two separate meanings and one meaning in combination. The character "dusk" (昏) combining the character "sun" (日) and "roots-into-the-ground" (氐) is a compound Chinese pictograph.<sup>9</sup>

The compounded images create one single Chinese character with one specific meaning made up of multiple visual components similar to Snyder's neologism "wind-void-word." The five words in line two echo the T'ang Dynasty form of five characters per line, as do the five syllables in line one. The relationship between the lines is also not readily apparent, although an experience of passing through a "gate" or "void" is gestured in the poem's center.

Gary Snyder's "Mother Gaia" places itself directly in the tradition of later tenth-century classical Buddhist texts by placing Yun-men, translated literally as Cloud Gate, within the poem itself. Yun-men was one of the last classical Ch'an Buddhist masters. A Chinese calligraphic representation of Yun-men appears in the margin of the second to last page of the small press run of Snyder's *Songs For Gaia*, providing another mode of access into "Mother Gaia," where "cloud gate" appears in the second line: Sky cloud gate milk snow. 雲門 or Cloud Gate not only refers to Yun-men, but also to the sect of Buddhism started by Yun-men, which is

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<sup>9</sup> "Pictographs and ideographs...comprise fifteen percent of the nearly fifty thousand characters included in the largest Chinese dictionaries. The earliest types of characters invented name the most obvious and important nouns and verbs of human life, and thus, they often, particularly in poetry, occupy a much higher percentage of a given text than you would expect them to" in J. P. Scaton, "Once More, on the Empty Mountain," *Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing* 12/1: 126-133.

located on Cloud Gate Mountain in Guangdong.<sup>10</sup> This sect expressed the relation of the sky or heaven to nature and enlightenment through highly cryptic Buddhist rhetoric.

Yun-men helped popularize a rhetorical Buddhist teaching style called the *kōan*. Gary Snyder states that one of his reasons for choosing to study Rinzai Zen in Japan was the challenge of *kōan* study: “Not only do they deal with fundamental riddles and knots of the psyche and ways of unraveling the Dharma, it’s done in the elegant and pithy language of Chinese at its best.”<sup>11</sup> A *kōan* is a type of Zen challenge that prompts its students to step outside of traditional concepts of dualism, language and rationalism, and beyond conventional truths to ultimate truth or awakening.<sup>12</sup> Dale S. Wright describes the rhetorical Zen style of language in detail: “The crucial or focal word in a dialogue came to be called a ‘turning word,’ the word upon which the point of the encounter ‘turns’ and the word carrying the power to turn the mind of participants, audience, or reader.”<sup>13</sup>

Yun-men’s turning words encourage meditation and self-reflexivity, and rouse the listener to ponder the world from multiple angles. These turning words often take the form of communicative acts, silence or “direct pointing,” and are not outside language but paradoxically form part of the Zen Buddhist enlightenment rhetoric. Some examples of Yun-men’s use of turning words or communicative acts include strikes from his staff, threats of striking or just turning his back, and walking out of the hall where he is giving a discourse to disciples.

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<sup>10</sup> Digital edition of Soothill and Hodous' *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*: [http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~acmuller/soothill/soothill-hodous.html#body.1\\_div.1](http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~acmuller/soothill/soothill-hodous.html#body.1_div.1).

<sup>11</sup> “The Real Work,” *The Gary Snyder Reader: Prose, Poetry, and Translations 1952-1998* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 1999), p. 96.

<sup>12</sup> “A *kōan* is a Zen presentation in the form of a Zen challenge,” Richard DeMartino, “On Zen Communication,” *Communication* 8/1 (1983): 13-28, as cited in Urs App, *Master Yunmen: From the Record of the Chan Master “Gate of the Clouds”* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994), p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> Dale S. Wright, “Rethinking Transcendence: the Role of Language in Zen Experience,” *Philosophy East and West* 42/ 1 (January 1999): 127.

Urs App translated the *Record of the Chan Master "Gate of the Clouds"* with insightful and extensive commentaries, which is a rare study of the role of *kōans* in Yun-men available in English scholarly circles:

Master Yun-men cited the following episode:

Master Chuyuan of Shishuang said: "You must know that there is a phrase of special transmission outside the written tradition."

A monk asked Shishuang: "What is this phrase of special transmission outside of written tradition?"

Master Shishuang replied: "A non-phrase."

Master Yun-men said: "A non-phrase is all the more a phrase."<sup>14</sup>

Yun-men's *kōans* are a vehicle to understanding Zen enlightenment as not being separate from language but a highly nuanced rhetoric of silence. They are a reinterpretation of Boddhidharma's direct pointing to the mind. They are not merely pointless riddles but are designed to displace dependency on conventional concepts of language and rationalism, reorienting the receiver's perception.

Like Yun-men's *kōans*, the props of conventional language – grammar, syntax, punctuation – are removed in "Mother Gaia." The connections between words are left to the reader to interpret. The one case of punctuation in the body of the poem, "wind-void-word," functions as a sort of turning word, the point where conventional linear truth and language are most strongly transgressed. The standard signification for "word" is destroyed and simultaneously the neologism "wind-void-word" is created.

The heart of the poem is also mirrored within this one compound word and multiple connotations must be explored to grasp its significance. Heaven or wind passes through void, a complete absence of wind, where it is transformed to become earth or word. Also, word passes through void to become wind. The center of the newly coined word void points towards a nonduality of heaven and earth along with the death and rebirth of the subject. Much like wind, this emptiness is not completely unseen or unspeakable, it has in effect been spoken and, like the wind, leaves a trace of its existent emptiness.

Word, in its standard truth and signification, has been voided or emptied. This mirrors the primary action of the poem, which is also that of a void. This void functions much like the eye of a storm, sucking every object

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<sup>14</sup> App, *Master Yunmen*, pp. 179-180.

in proximity to its center and jettisoning them. In this loaded action, even the reader's view/attention focuses on passing through absolute and marvelous emptiness taking place in this void. Wright has written extensively on the function of language within the Zen experience:

Upon a Zen cultural-linguistic foundation, and often with a discursive impetus, Zen 'awakening' is commonly conceived as a 'sudden,' 'overpowering,' 'breakthrough' experience. Its power is precisely its 'otherness,' its inability to cohere perfectly with any conventionally established form, linguistic and otherwise. Its most decisive metaphors figure it as an experience of the 'void' at the heart of all things, as emptiness, openness, groundlessness.<sup>15</sup>

Not only is the void a central metaphor for Zen awakening, it is also linked to simultaneity. The experience central to the poem takes place in an instant of time, encapsulated in "A Glimpse:"<sup>16</sup> a momentary shining, or flash. In Ezra Pound's terms, the poem "Mother Gaia" communicates via the image, it "presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."<sup>17</sup> Although many comparisons have been made between Pound's Sino-Japanese imagist project and its influence on Gary Snyder, "Mother Gaia" has much more to do with cryptic Zen rhetoric and the transgression of conventional language linked via Zen Buddhism to the experience of enlightenment.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wright, "Rethinking Transcendence: the Role of Language in Zen Experience," p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> See title of "Mother Gaia:" "24: IV:40075. 3:30 PM/n. of Coaldale, Nevada,/A Glimpse Through a Break in/the storm of the Summit of/the White Mountains."

<sup>17</sup> Ezra Pound translated Fenollosa's notebooks, which were derived from Fenollosa's study of Chinese in Japan. He later edited these notebooks into *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* that was first published in the *Little Review* in 1919. Pound popularized Chinese poetry in English and his poems are still the most well known, in "A Retrospect Including A Few Don'ts," *Modern American Poetry*: [http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m\\_r/pound/retrospect.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/pound/retrospect.htm) (10/04/2003).

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed account of the relationship between Pound and Snyder's orientalizing of American verse, see Robert Kern, "Seeing the World

D.T. Suzuki published his second series of *Essays in Zen Buddhism* in English in 1952, three years prior to Snyder's first public reading of "Cold Mountain" in 1955. Suzuki's book helped to popularize Zen in the United States and is often considered to be a sort of canonical textbook for Beat writers. "Suzuki sometimes assumes a dichotomy between silence and verbalism, placing Ch'an at one extremity of this dichotomy."<sup>19</sup> Although Snyder often quotes Suzuki in his essays and discussions of Zen, the interplay between speaking and silence in Gary Snyder's poetry is more in line with current interpretations of the paradox between speech and silence. In more recent commentary, Zen silence and communicative acts are considered a mode of communication that circumvents more conventional modes. According to Youru Wang:

By sustaining the position that their words are not different from silence, and that no word has been spoken about any hypostatizable reality, the Chan masters move away from entifying and help people detach from their words. On the other hand, by underlining the non-saying or silence, by treating their saying as something like the finger pointing to the moon (as they always say), pointing to what has not been spoken or what cannot be adequately spoken, Chan masters virtually say a great deal. In this way, Chan masters play on and around the boundary of language without being obstructed.<sup>20</sup>

In a 1970 interview, two years following his return from Japan, Snyder explains the relation of poetry to the heart of the Buddhist experience as the razor's edge between what can and cannot be said:

The true poem is walking that edge between what can be said and that which cannot be said. That's the real razor's edge. The poem

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without Language: Gary Snyder and Chinese as American Speech," in Robert Kern, ed., *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> From Youru Wang, "Liberating Oneself from the Absolutized Boundary of Language: A Liminological Approach to the Interplay of Speech and Silence in Chan Buddhism," *Philosophy East & West* 51/1 (2001), p. 85.

<sup>20</sup> Wang, "Liberating Oneself from the Absolutized Boundary of Language," p. 93.

that falls all the way over into what can be said can still be very exciting, but the farther it is from the razor's edge the less it has of the real magic.<sup>21</sup>

"Mother Gaia" utilizes the unspoken, visual space between images. This becomes a kind of communicative silence. We can find similarities in classical Chinese poetry and the Zen rhetoric of speaking the unspoken, in which the relationships between images and ideas are not spelled out grammatically but suggested through parataxis, or pointing towards meaning.

"Mother Gaia" places the reader simultaneously outside space and time. The experience that takes place within the "glimpse"<sup>22</sup> is an epiphany recording of Pound's "precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."<sup>23</sup> However, unlike Pound's objective transforming into the subjective, overcoming the subject/object dichotomy or duality as it is called in Zen Buddhism, is a central concern of Zen and thus functions differently in Snyder's "Mother Gaia." The poem functions much like Yun-men's kōan, which turns the listener or reader back upon him/herself for the answer, pondering his words and images from all angles and unshackling the subject/object bond.

O Mother Gaia

sky cloud gate milk snow

wind-void-word

I bow in roadside gravel

A sense of understanding the self or a non-dualistic "I" is central to awakening. The "I" in "Mother Gaia" appears after a grocery list of objects.

<sup>21</sup> Gary Snyder, *The Real Work: Interviews & Talks 1964-1979*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>22</sup> See title of "Mother Gaia." "24: IV:40075. 3:30 PM/n. of Coaldale, Nevada,/A Glimpse Through a Break in/the Storm of the Summit of/the White Mountains."

<sup>23</sup> This comes from Pound's *Gaudier-Brzeska* (1916) essay on poetic process that expands upon Pound's imagist project; see *Modern American Poetry*, ed. Cory Nelson, [http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m\\_r/pound/metro.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m_r/pound/metro.htm).

This “I” simultaneously participates as both object and subject or both observer and observed.

The reader is in a privileged position to view both Mother Gaia, representing the spiritual, while at the same time viewing the “I,” bowing in “roadside gravel.” Placing the subject “I” as the reader of the poem places the subject outside of himself, looking at himself viewing the scene. However, this subject and its object are forever receding:

When a human being observes itself or its own thoughts, it finds there is always an observer and something observed. The observer as such is always unobserved; he or she always stands at the center and looks. He or she is in one way like someone in a watchtower; whatever this observer chooses to throw light on it sees, but it itself cannot but stay in the dark. Yet, unlike a watchtower man, the self-conscious human observer can recede, put itself into another watchtower and throw light on the first one, and then into one more and so on-but the observer always remains invisible, a black hole forever unable to grasp itself as subject.<sup>24</sup>

In Zen, this ever-receding subject is often referred to as the first noble truth. It is a starting point sometimes described as suffering or desire. Only by gaining full understanding of the self, can that self can be given up. The title of “Mother Gaia” can be viewed as a type of metaphor for this search and gives the reader a strong sense of this endlessly receding subject or gaze:

**24: IV:40075. 3:30 PM, n. of Coaldale, Nevada,  
A Glimpse through a Break in the Storm  
of the White Mountains**

The first line of the title appears to refer to U.S. Geological Survey map coordinates, and the summit referred to is most likely near Boundary Peaks in the White Mountains, 30 miles north east of Coaldale, Nevada. This could be the exact location where the subject is standing. The lines are arranged as an inverted pyramid emphasizing the glimpse becoming more focused and in the distance, seen “through a break in the storm.” In a later version of the poem from *The Gary Snyder Reader* the title reads:

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<sup>24</sup> App, *Master Yunmen*, p. 40.

24: IV:40075, 3:30 PM,  
 n. of Coaldale, Nevada,  
 A Glimpse Through a Break in  
 the Storm of the Summit of  
 the White Mountains

This version has a very similar effect. Looking up, the “glimpse” expands outward from the storm, to the summit, to the White Mountains and beyond. There is also a sense of the “glimpse” passing through this space or “in” mirroring the subject bowing “in roadside gravel.” In the central line in this later version of the title, “A Glimpse Through a Break in” also forms a kind of visual mirror image that reflects both towards and away from the subject. Simultaneously a literal rift is visible as the storm breaks and the clouds open up. A break in the summit is also visible, as the mountains appear to open up. It is a “void,” a lack or want. Overcoming the duality of subject/object-hood, of observer and observed, is often described as overcoming man’s fundamental rift. In order to overcome this rift, the subject/object dichotomy must be completely jettisoned.

For Snyder to conclude “Mother Gaia” on such an everyday object as “roadside gravel” may seem surprising after passing through the void of language and truth. However, this conclusion is consistent with overcoming an inner rift or duality. According to Yun-men, “My brothers, if there is one who has attained it [enlightenment], he passes his days in conformity with the ordinary.”<sup>25</sup> In a later publication of “Mother Gaia” in *The Gary Snyder Reader*, each line of the poem is center aligned. In this first version however, aligning “O” and “wind” directly over and below the space, between “sky” and “cloud” emphasizes this same space. The effects are the penetration of the space as well as an unbalancing that is recovered in the last line, which is center-aligned and a syntactically complete sentence: “I bow in roadside gravel.” Conformity with the everyday has also been realized grammatically. Earlier in *Songs to Gaia*, we find a similar

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<sup>25</sup> The following is an excerpt from lecture 547a4-b17 by Yun-men: “My brothers, if there is one who has attained it, he passes his days in conformity with the ordinary... You must not waste your time, and you need very much to pay close attention! Anyway, try to get a firm hold [on the meaning of the sayings], pondering them from all angles – and after days or years an entrance will open up by itself!” in App, *Master Yunmen*, p. 108.

conclusion of transcendence in the everyday, in the ironic tongue-in-cheek rhetorical tradition of the Zen master, in this case, “grease”.<sup>26</sup>

Emptiness, anti-entropy ultimate  
No friction whatever.  
Let it all slide.  
The holy, the perfect, transcendent,  
“grease”

Overcoming this fundamental rift requires the death of the subject as a duality and awakening or birth of the unfettered formless self:

The ‘I’ that was full of itself and desire and attachment yet tried to forget itself – the ‘I’ that was immersed in life and death and was unable to cope satisfactorily with either, this ‘I’ dies. Indeed, its “Great Death” is the breakthrough to the True Self: the “Great Birth.” This is the awakening to the unfettered and formless self that is ‘at ease in the ordinary,’ happy and content with what it is and is not, has and has not.<sup>27</sup>

This scene of death and the locus of rebirth is the void. It is the eye of the storm where the subject/object duality and desire is jettisoned, and unshackled. It is here that enlightenment occurs and the non-dualistic self appears.

The “void” and “gate” are not only central to “Mother Gaia” but also located in the center of the poem itself. The poem describes a marvelous emptiness at its center, “a void” or “gate.” On the left side of the gate/void are objects related to heaven – “Sky, Cloud, Wind” – and on the right are objects related to the earth – “milk, snow, word.” This duality of heaven and earth implodes to form a Zen view of wholeness or complete nature. The spiritual (Mother Gaia) and the everyday (roadside gravel) are bridged by the gate/void as well in a type of Zen awakening or enlightenment. Placed outside of conventional language, truth becomes emancipatory.

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<sup>26</sup> There are no page numbers in *Songs for Gaia* although this is approximately p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> App describes a recurring theme of “breakthrough,” in *Master Yunmen*, pp. 61-62.

Many similarities can be found between Gary Snyder's description of Chinese nature poetry and the Zen aesthetic at work in "Mother Gaia." In the "Great Clod Project," Snyder describes Chinese nature poems:

Mountains and rivers were seen to be the visible expression of cosmic principles; the cosmic principles go back into silence, non-being, emptiness; a Nothing that can produce the ten thousand things, and the ten thousand things will have that marvelous emptiness still at the center. So the poems are also "silent." ...Chinese poetry steps out of narrow human-centered affairs into a big-spirited world of long time, long views, and natural processes; and comes back to a brief moment in a small house by a fence.<sup>28</sup>

By utilizing T'ang poetics in the context of the English language, "Mother Gaia" succeeds in expressing the beauty of the Chinese nature poem and simultaneously disorienting a reader unfamiliar with a poetic tradition that plays in and around the boundaries of language or Snyder's "razor's edge." There are many levels of participation possible in "Mother Gaia," not the least of which is encountering a "fundamental riddle" or "knots of the psyche" as Snyder describes his interest in *kōan* studies. The dual importance of poetic language in describing both nature and verbalizing a transcendent Zen experience are unmistakable in *Mother Gaia*. Many parallels can be seen between "Mother Gaia" and Snyder's description of Chinese nature poems: "The nothingness that produces the ten thousand things will have that marvelous emptiness still at the center" can be easily explicated in terms of "wind-void-word."

The *kōan* structure at work in "Mother Gaia," strongly influenced by Snyder's Sino-Japanese study of Rinzai Zen in Japan, places pressure on subjectivity and disorients the reader in ways that T'ang poetics or what Snyder calls "Chinese nature poetry" does not. In one brief moment, Snyder simultaneously succeeds in having the reader step outside him/herself as if into the eye of the storm and returning to firm ground "bowing in roadside gravel." The entire experience functions in the simultaneity of a void where the reader's view expands and contracts in a glimpse.

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<sup>28</sup> Gary Snyder, "The Great Clod Project" from the *Gary Snyder Reader*, pp. 293-294.

## 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 Suginami 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 26<sup>th</sup> 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].<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> Citing the

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<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup> 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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,<sup>5</sup> or is it possible to define the Kyoto School philosophy by method or content as the title *Philosophers of Nothingness* implies?

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

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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 Agustín 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

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<sup>6</sup> 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?”<sup>7</sup> 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

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<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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.

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<sup>8</sup> James W. Heisig, “Foreword,” *Philosophy of Metanoetics*, trans. Takeuchi Yoshinori, Valdo Viglielmo, 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.

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