

A New Anthology of Writings by Post-WWII Japanese Philosophers

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In this anthology, works of ten Japanese thinkers, many of whom are no longer alive but who have been household names among the Japanese intellectual community, are selected and translated into English, accompanied by a brief introduction of each thinker. An additional three substantial essays by scholars of Japanese philosophy make this volume a compelling read for anyone interested in the Japanese philosophical endeavor since 1945. This anthology clearly goes beyond the familiar parameter of the Kyoto School of Philosophy.

Key words: post-WWII Japanese philosophers; Ōmori Shōzō; moderate realism; experience, language, and worldview

This volume introduces contemporary Japanese philosophical works by opening up the horizon of “Japanese philosophy” over and beyond the “Kyoto School” or Zen (or Buddhist) thought. You will find ten contemporary Japanese thinkers whose work is considered “new and original” in the post-1945 period collected in this volume. Even so, the editor found it impossible to ignore such a notable thinker as Ueda Shizuteru (1926-2019), who, until his death last year, was generally considered the torchbearer of the Kyoto School of Philosophy. Also, one could argue that Nakamura Yūjirō (1925-2017) owed much of his philosophical endeavor to Nishida Kitarō’s notion of “*basbo*” (topos). Be that as it may, the essays selected for this volume span a wide and varied terrain, extending from the investigation into the nature of consciousness and language, a political implication of the contingency of being (or status quo) and action, human existence as interrelational, the body as the vital focal point of philosophical reflection, and so on. Apart from Ueda and Nakamura’s essays, short essays or chapter-excerpts from Maruyama Masao (1914-1996), Izutsu Toshihiko (1914-1993), Yuasa Yasuo (1925-2005), Ōmori Shōzō (1921-1997), Kimura Bin (b. 1931), Hiromatsu Wataru (1933-1994), Sakabe Megumi (1936-2009), and Karatani Kōjin (b. 1941) complete Part One of this volume. Except for the work by Yuasa Yasuo (which was translated by S. Nagatomo & M. S. Hull, 1993) and the essay by Karatani Kōjin (translated by Sabu Kohso, 1995), all other essays are newly translated into English by John Krummel, who also wrote the introduction to accompany each of these thinkers in further detail.

In Part Two informative essays by Fujita Masakatsu (on Tanabe Hajime and the postwar development of the Kyoto School), Naka Mao (on Japanese feminist philosophy concerning reproduction as well as debates on motherhood), and Uehara Mayuko (on the creative adaptation of Marxist thought by Hiromatsu Wataru) further buttress the mission of this volume. As such, it is a timely addition to the library of books on Japanese philosophy. I think the ten thinkers were well

chosen, as they do not overlap in their fields of expertise, and they do represent different strands of contemporary Japanese philosophical activity carried out since 1945.

It is impossible to go into each of the ten thinkers (Part One) or the three weighty essays (Part Two) and talk about their philosophical contributions, let alone to summarize each author's complex thinking. Therefore, I decided to take a different approach here below, a kind of experiment, instead of giving a general synopsis.

What I can do as a reviewer is to look into the readability and usability of this volume. I decided to follow this premise: if the book is well put together and the translation of each text is carefully produced, any chapter I choose for purposes of review should stand on its own. Since I am already somewhat familiar with some of the ten thinkers (and it might influence my reading of their texts), I decided that it would be good to choose someone whose work I have never read before. Thus, I chose Ōmori Shōzō (1921-1997). Ōmori's advanced training includes his studies in the United States, where he became interested in Michael Dummett and Wittgenstein. Ōmori was recognized as the leading thinker in the field of analytic philosophy in Japan, and was greatly influential in training numbers of younger generation of thinkers who succeeded his path.

Ōmori's essay "The Realism of 'Form qua Emptiness'" (*"shiki soku ze kō no jitsuzairon,"* 1993) constitutes chapter 5 (107-16), and the editor's concise exposition of Ōmori's thought appears in the introduction (15-18). As soon as I faced the first line of the opening paragraph of the translation, however, I began to wonder what the original Japanese text said. Krummel's translation opens with these lines:

Realism or the denial of realism [jitsuzairon 実在論]? I doubt that we can even today declare this dispute that has continued far too long to have been extinguished (107).

I got hold of a copy of the article (via Interlibrary Loan service), which was first published in the journal *Gendai Shisō*, 21.11 (1993), 254-61. The essay begins with these words:

実在論か実在論の否定か、この少し長過ぎる程に続いてきた議論はいまでもまだ消火したとは言えない様に思われる。

I would simply translate it as:

Do we uphold or reject realism? This debate, which has gone on for almost too long, still seems to continue to smolder.

I would like to dwell on the matter of translation of a philosophical text for the moment. It strikes me that Krummel's translation of Ōmori's text is wordy and overly literal, which obfuscates the point the author wants to make. The English translation feels curiously "distant" from the original Japanese text. Could it be argued that in a philosophical writing, the proposition and the thought process (i.e., the reasoning) of a thinker matter more, and therefore a translation can (and should?) move away from a "faithful" and literal rendition? This is an age-old question for translators and readers alike. I understand that when Nishida's *An Inquiry into the Good* was retranslated in the late 1980s, a debate took place as to whether the English be geared at clarifying Nishida's philosophical ideas, or whether it was more important to retain Nishida's peculiar writing style. In the end, the key translator opted for the latter, and the rest is history, or so I am told. Debates of this nature continue to linger on. After all, many of us must rely on translations in one

way or the other in the field of intercultural philosophy, and the question of how to translate a philosophical text is an important philosophical matter that merits further reflection.

For the sake of familiarizing myself further with Ōmori's writings, I needed to get hold of writing by him. Fortunately, a copy of his book, *Gengo, chikaku, sekai* 『言語・知覚・世界』 [*Language, Perception, World*] (1971), was available through Interlibrary Loan. I also sought the expert clarification of some of the key terms that Ōmori developed. To start with, I wondered what Ōmori meant by “*jitsuzairon*.” Could it be “ontology”? I got in touch with a colleague who had studied with Ōmori, and knew his philosophy intimately and systematically. This colleague kindly explained to me that “*jitsuzairon*” is “realism” that stands opposed to “idealism” (and not scholastic “nominalism”). I also wondered if the expressions “*taikyokuteki kinōhō*” and “*zenkyokuteki kinōhō*” (109) were two major technical terms to unlock Ōmori's thought. The answer I received was that these two terms can be treated synonymously. Ōmori used these terms to designate a holistic or comprehensive induction based on the view that individual things are radically interrelated and only mutually do they affirm their own reality. Both “*taikyokuteki kinōhō*” and “*zenkyokuteki kinōhō*” are to stand over against “discrete induction” (*kobetsuteki kinōhō*) that considers individual things in isolation. Thus, he told me that “holistic induction” would nicely do the job for these two terms, instead of translating them into “perspectival induction” and “holistic induction.” I think it is over such issues that a translator constantly makes a judgment call. Should I or should I not use different words for a “variation” on the theme? Which is more philosophically beneficial—to over-translate or under-translate? Over-translation would take us onto the path of “excessive interpretation.” This is a kind of question that concerns all of us who engage in translation. Having read chapter 5 in the present translation, I feel that this chapter could use a few more rounds of revision to achieve a smoother flow in English, which would aid the reader's comprehension of the text.

For me it was most fascinating that Ōmori adopted the famous Mahayana Buddhist expression of “*shiki soku ze kū*” (which also implies its reversal, “*kū soku ze shiki*”) after his rigorous investigation into the study of the philosophy of science, and despite his knowledge of the rich resources of analytic philosophy. In this Buddhist expression, “manifestation” (or “*rūpam*,” *shiki*) is viewed as “emptiness” (or “*sūnyatā*,” *kū*) and vice versa. Ōmori settled on the position of “moderate” or nuanced realism (*hodo hodo no jitsuzairon*), which he dubbed a “realism of manifested form as empty” (*shiki soku ze kū no jitsuzairon*). This is striking. This position is a further development of his reflection on how the language of natural scientific observation is “layered over” by the ordinary commonsense language—our act of “*kasane-egaki*”—we layer on top of scientific-technical description an ordinary everyday description (see Ōmori, *Gengo, chikaku, sekai*, 207-10). Ōmori also came to recognize the durable presence of the past in the present in terms of the “root of the past” (*kakokon*). He explains this “past root” in this manner: Take any three-dimensional object, say, an ordinary desk. We view this desk as not having suddenly fallen from the sky, but instead “as an object that has been existing there for sometime and will probably continue to exist for a while. That is, the desk's ‘continuous existence’ contains past and future existence. Did not Dōgen point to this fact that being (*sonzai*) already contains past, present, and future time and called it ‘being-time’ (*yūji*)?” (cf. 112).

Further, from the perspective of viewing the past as non-substantial, porous, and vacuous (“*kūmu*”), Ōmori suggests the possibility of focusing on “empty space” instead of on the “things” themselves even in our ordinary perception—even if it may risk our very survival in the practical world—and shows a path different from a Kantian-Husserlian approach to reality that considered things as “perceptually composite things” (*chikaku ketsugō buttai*) (cf. 114).

My experiment of focusing on the chapter on Ōmori in order to assess the contribution of this volume brings me to the following reflection—namely, the enormity of the task even to understand one single thinker in depth. This makes me wonder if this kind of anthology might benefit from a collaborative effort, a teamwork of two or three philosopher-translators who may be familiar with the work of a respective thinker, and who select a representative text and produce an annotated translation, which is then put to their mutual critique and honed to insure consistency and accuracy of the translation. At any rate, I am impressed by the scope of this present *Reader*. It must have been a daunting and challenging task.

The merits of this volume are many. But, of course, one may list names missing from the present selections. Such names readily come to my mind: Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889-1961, who developed the aesthetics of folk art, *mingei*, inspired by his Pure Land Buddhist faith), Yanagida Kunio (1875-1962, an ethnologist who established the field of Japanese folklore studies), Mori Arimasa (1911-1976, who focused on the analysis of language and experience; he left his professorial position at the University of Tokyo and moved to Paris, where he lived for decades to deepen his reflections on Japanese culture and language), Kanze Hisao (1925-1978, the leading *nob* actor who developed his theory of acting by revisiting the ideas put forth by Zeami Motokiyo in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), Yukawa Hideki (1907-1981, the first Japanese Nobel laureate in theoretical physics; he actively engaged in the post-WWII peace movement, and talked about the global responsibility of a scientist in the nuclear age), Takemitsu Tōru (1930-1996, a composer of contemporary music, who moved away from western tonality to incorporate the sounds of nature into his composition), Kurosawa Akira (1910-1998, one of the most influential film directors and screenwriters of the twentieth century, who united traditional cultural experiences and filming technology), Hirayama Ikuo (1930-2009, a painter, who survived the Hiroshima A-bomb; he found his spiritual strength in the image of the Buddha, which aided his physical recovery from the illness caused by his exposure to radiation; he traced the route Buddhism took to reach Japan via Korea and China from India and Central Asia; this resulted in the grand scale painting project of the scenes from the Silk Road), Ōoka Makoto (1931-2017, a poet and literary critic, who brought added depth and respectability to the contemporary literary world in Japan), Kamiya Mieko (1914-1979, a female medical doctor who focused on the question of *ikigai*—what makes life meaningful—as a philosophical issue), and perhaps slightly controversially, Umehara Takeshi (1925-2019, who established his own genre of popular philosophy; he was also a playwright). But such a list of “thinkers” is inexhaustible, and it obviously depends on the definition of “what is philosophy?”

My next question is how best should this volume be adopted in the classroom? It is most likely too technical at an introductory level for undergraduates. For advanced students, a set of key words (each briefly explained) and study questions for each thinker would be helpful, as well as an index of philosophical terms.

Transliteration mistakes mar the texts. The pronunciation of Japanese words is easily corrected by a native check, which will clean up mistakes such as “*zekū*” in the phrase “*shiki soku zekū*” (it should be “*zekū*”) or “*maki*” (it is pronounced as “*kan*” as the counter for “volume,” such as “*kyū-kan*,” vol. 9).

These are minor points, however, in view of the enormous potential this volume has. Would it be too much to hope for a revised user-friendlier edition to be forthcoming in the foreseeable future?

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