

# CONFERENCE REPORT

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*International Conference on Japanese Philosophy*

*Opening up Japanese Philosophy: The Kyoto School and After*

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Over three days at the beginning of October 2016, the city of Fukuoka hosted the first international conference dedicated to the ongoing study of Japanese philosophy. Organized by the International Association of Japanese Philosophy (IAJP), the conference took on the mission of “opening up” the academic field towards new horizons, as well as offering an opportunity to revisit the established research on the work of philosophers related to the Kyoto School.

As stated by the organizers from the International Association of Japanese Philosophy, the aim of the conference was threefold: to enhance the quality of research on Japanese philosophy, to provide a stable international platform for Japanese philosophy, and to reinforce the status of Japanese philosophy in academia. The inaugural conference presented the participants with the chance of attending presentations by some of the leading researchers in Japanese philosophy, and of having constructive discussion sessions on a high number of topics. These interdisciplinary discussions in particular have opened, in my opinion, the possibility of creating the international platform towards which the organizers were aiming. By offering a common ground to the various inquiries into Japanese philosophy, the conference brought closer the community of researchers and ensured their continued collaboration well after the end of the three days of sessions. As for the goal of reinforcing the status of Japanese philosophy in academia, the possibility appears well within reach, the panels' rich diversity hinting to the new, important insight philosophy can bring to a number of related academic fields.

The international aspect of the conference, as well as its interest in giving voice to young, critical voices, was a most refreshing approach to the discipline. Not only did the participants represent

research institutions from countries as diverse as France, Japan, Italy, Estonia, China or the U.S., but the organization of the panels themselves reflected the inter-cultural orientation of the gathering, as they were conducted in both Japanese and English. The opening panel is what I consider to be another example in support of this aspect. Concerned with the translation of Nishida Kitarō, and with the challenges such a solitary task might bring, it brought together two established translators of Nishida's books, in French (Jacynthe TREMBLAY) and Italian (Enrico FONGARO), and a third, young scholar (ZHANG Wei) addressing the reception of Nishida's work in China. Three different languages and cultural backgrounds bringing as many unique inquiries into the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō, and into the ongoing efforts of world scholars of making his thought known to a global audience. This brought forward a larger discussion on Nishida's philosophy, which in later sessions opened towards the complexities of what we today see as “Japanese philosophy” beyond the Kyoto School of thought. The challenging, original approaches ranged from comparative history of religion to consciousness studies, neuroscience and other fields of modern science.

A special mention goes to the first Keynote Speaker presentation, during which Professor UEHARA Mayuko addressed the subject of *The Possibility of Women's Philosophy in the History of Japanese Philosophy*. The thought-provoking speech declared the need for a new research method, and set as its goal a “broader investigation and examination of philosophical discourse concerning women that goes beyond a Western assertion of gender equality that is implied by the term “feminist”.” The research goes on to thoroughly examine the possibility of such a women's philosophy in Japanese history, by taking into account the writings of Fukuzawa Yukichi, Iwamoto Yoshiharu and Kuki Shūzō.

The following day continued in a similar register: while one session would bring to discussion the work of Watsuji Tetsurō, another one would challenge the established academic research by offering an interpretation from the perspective of aesthetics, ethics or the philosophy of religion. For example, one of the key presentations, addressing the philosophy of religion and its reception in East Asian thought, proposed a comparative look into the ideas of Inoue Enryō, Kim Iryōp, and Tanabe Hajime (Jin Y. PARK). The paper raised the question of religious nature and practice as seen from within and beyond the “limits of reason”, while taking into account the difficulties that may be encountered when addressing the subject from culturally and historically different points of view. Similarly, Leah KALMANSON of Drake University proposed a discussion on the perceived Eurocentric focus in the study of religious philosophy, and presented the case of scholar Arai Hakuseki in order to support an alternative category of the previously mentioned academic area.

The panel organized on this second day under the title *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*

*Research: Young Scholars of Kyoto University* offered a good example of the Association's goal of specifically encouraging young scholars to step forward and submit proposals, raising awareness and offering a platform for future research. I strongly believe that one of the most important accomplishments of the conference is the support and encouragement offered to young scholars. Unveiling the potential of Japanese philosophy depends on unveiling and nurturing the potential of present and future scholars.

The second Keynote Speaker, Professor John KRUMMEL, concluded the day's diverse perspectives with a rigorous research into the works of *Heidegger and Nishida on the Nothing*. As implied by its title, the paper compares and assesses the two philosophers' conceptualization of what many see as the defining aspect of Japanese philosophy.

The third and final day focused on the connections between past, present and future prospects of comparative philosophy, and thus gave priority to speeches on a number of social, linguistic or historical issues. Papers such as *Metanoetics for the Dead and the Living: Tanabe, Karaki, and Moritaki on the Nuclear Age* (KAZASHI Nobuo) brought into discussion the active role Japanese philosophy plays in the world and the specific manner philosophers and scholars relate to society and contemporary events. The theme of historicity and regional politics continued to be raised through thought provoking talks such as the one on *Shyunsuke Tsurumi and Yosimi Takeuchi* (GODA Masato), or those organized under the conference's final panel on *The Marginal Philosophy of the Japanese Empire*. If the previous discussions focused mostly on the connection between Japanese and Western philosophy, the ending remarks brought to attention the direct influence Japanese philosophy had on its neighboring countries. We must not ignore, I believe, the ways in which philosophy can be a (in)formative, active force in human society, beyond the confines of academic works.

The success of the first International Conference on Japanese Philosophy becomes evident when taking into account the aforementioned accomplished goals and it stands as an exemplary approach to the challenges brought today by the study of Japanese philosophy