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Framework

The idea that people of different cultures actually think differently has been slow to find its way into the heart of western philosophy. Over the past century or so, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists have often examined this issue and compared results. But until recently, the majority of philosophers in the West have exempted themselves from the debate, often assuming that philosophy’s kind of thinking is universal and transcultural. Others have claimed to the contrary that philosophy is so distinctively western an enterprise that there is little point to look for it elsewhere. In either case, “nonwestern philosophy” is dismissed as an oxymoron.

Meanwhile, Japanese studies has seldom focused specifically on the philosophical dimensions of the culture, typically treating them only in the background or margins of scholarly works in literature, religion, politics, intellectual history, or the arts. Although books dedicated to Indian philosophy and Chinese philosophy have played a central role in the development of Asian studies for many decades, this has not been the case for Japanese philosophy. This omission leaves the impression that, even compared with its Asian neighbors, Japan has not been very much engaged in philosophical reflection, analysis, and argument. Indeed, the romanticized image of Japan in much popular writing explicitly says as much. Japanese culture’s face to the western world is one of haiku, Zen gardens, tea ceremony, the martial arts, woodblock prints, novels, and, more recently, anime and manga. Behind those phenomena, however, are powerful critical traditions of thought and value for which there is no better word than “philosophy.” A focus on Japanese philosophy, therefore, can broaden and deepen not only our understanding of philosophy, but also of Japan.

This Sourcebook addresses these issues by making available, for the first time in a single volume, translations of a wide variety of texts from multiple intellectual traditions spanning the whole of Japan’s recorded history. Our working assumption is that the philosophical nature of a cultural heritage—its forms of analysis, its use of distinctions, its patterns of argument, its selection of issues on which to focus—cannot be fully appreciated by looking at any single work by any given author from any particular period. Rather, Japanese thinkers can
best be appreciated as philosophers only by seeing how they have argued with each other, how intellectual traditions have developed over centuries, and how individuals and traditions have responded throughout history to new ideas from continental Asia or the West. The Sourcebook not only tries to establish parameters for the study of Japanese philosophy in the West; it also aims to address readers intrigued by the question of how culture and systematic thinking have interacted in a sophisticated literary tradition radically different from that of Western Europe.

The perception of what counts as philosophy in Japan today is radically ambiguous. First, it has come to represent a meticulous study of mainline currents of western philosophy, and along with that a large number of minor currents, some of which are given attention disproportionate to what they enjoy in the cultures of their birth. As the discipline took hold in universities a little over a century ago, its study broadened to include parallels in Islamic, Russian, and Jewish thought, not to mention a healthy interest in the esoteric traditions accompanying them.

Second, Japanese scholars have not merely approached western philosophy as a subject of historical and objective interest; they have taken their own critical stance, making their own adjustments and contributions in light of their own experience and intellectual history. In a few notable cases, this has led to major contributions to philosophy that have attracted attention around the world. Most often, however, the changes have been more subtle and aimed at specialists in the field. In both instances, the primary audience for philosophical texts has been Japan and the language Japanese. What is known to scholars abroad through translation is a small, and often far from representative, sampling of the entire contribution.

Third, preceding the entrance of the western academic discipline, there were traditional Japanese systems of theory and praxis associated with Buddhism, Confucianism, artistic expression, and Shinto. These contained understandings of language, truth, human nature, creativity, reality, and society that were explained and argued in a variety of ways. For many Japanese today, these may not be “philosophy” in the modern academic sense, but they are parallel to traditions of what we call in English “classical Indian philosophy” or “classical Chinese philosophy.” They are part of the cultural background against which modern Japanese thinking develops. That modern Japanese thinkers have typically filtered so much of western philosophy through their own modes of thought, aesthetic feeling, and religious experience is hardly surprising. Such filtering belongs to the story of great ideas and great philosophical systems everywhere; as they cross back and forth between civilizations and from one epoch to another, they become transfigured, reoriented, even radically inverted.
Yet there are special circumstances that set the history of philosophy in Japan apart. The most obvious of these is that academic philosophy, and indeed the university system itself, as it is known throughout the West and much of the rest of the world, did not arrive until about one hundred and fifty years ago. As a result, the technical term *philosophy* came to be reserved for what was fundamentally a foreign import. Cut off from the long history of conflict and synthesis that led to the forms of western philosophy that came to Japan as completed systems of thought, Japanese thinkers at first tended to embrace the western import not so much as a colleague to be engaged in dialogue, but rather as a foreign dignitary to be shown respect and proper attention. This reception was further reinforced by the awareness, never far from the mind of Japanese scholars, that by the time literacy had come to Japan, this western discipline called *philosophy* was already into its second millennium.

More important for the aims of the *Sourcebook* are the native resources on which Japanese philosophy as a modern academic discipline draws for its critical appraisal of ideas. These differ from those of traditional philosophy in the West. The ways of thought tacitly embedded in religious scriptures, literature, theater, art, and language that run between the lines and beneath the surface of western philosophical texts received from abroad are, at least until recently, largely absent from the Japanese mind. In their place we find different, no less rich and variegated, ways of thinking and valuing. Assumptions transparent to the western historian of ideas are often opaque to the Japanese, and vice-versa.

The range of resources open to the Japanese thinker is as broad and deep as the culture itself, and any attempt to generalize about them is fraught with danger from the start. One way to get at them is to probe the history of Japanese ideas for philosophical “affinities,” that is to say, comprehensive worldviews, systematizations of moral values, methods of analysis and argument, and, in general, reflection on what we consider universal questions about human existence and reality. This is the task we have set ourselves in the pages of the *Sourcebook*.

The *Sourcebook* is divided into two parts of unequal length. The first, historical part treats philosophical resources from the major traditions of Japanese intellectual history: Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto and Native Studies, and Modern Academic Philosophy. The second part, “Additional Themes,” picks up a sampling of recurrent topics that are not treated in detail elsewhere and that cut across the lines defining the traditional schools of Japanese thought. In settling on this dual method of presenting the material, we were aware that the story of philosophy in any cultural context not only has to respect the development of arguments and themes within schools of thought, but also has to take into account important topics that overlap traditions and involve the interface of philosophy and other forms of intellectual discourse.
Historical overview

Historical accounts of philosophy deal with both the chronological development of ideas over time and the timeliness of those ideas in response to the specific social conditions and challenges of their eras. The chronological perspective follows a particular line of thought as it develops through the years, emphasizing the progressive aspect of philosophizing. New ideas build on former ideas by expanding, modifying, or even rejecting them. In this way schools of thought emerge and the chronological perspective focuses on a community of thinkers who may agree or disagree, but who always share common ground: a cluster of problems, technical vocabulary, forms of analysis, and points of departure.

In the modern West, for example, it is entirely natural to understand J. L. Austin’s arguments about language if we see them as responding to ideas from Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and other logical positivists; or to follow Jean-Paul Sartre’s arguments by relating them to the thought of Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. Similarly, in the Japanese context, it is most natural to view the philosophy of Ōgū Sorai in light of Confucian predecessors like Itō Jinsai and Hayashi Razan, or to read the modern Pure Land Buddhist thinker, Kiyozawa Manshi, with an eye to predecessors in the Pure Land tradition like the medieval thinkers, Shinran and Hōnen.

However insightful and influential a thinker may be for history in general, that alone seldom guarantees a place as a major thinker in the history of philosophy. For that, we must also consider the aspect of the timeliness of ideas. The great philosophers—the ones who find their way into historical surveys and sourcebooks such as this—are those whose ideas not only push philosophical thinking forward, but also respond with insight to the surrounding spirit of their times.

To help us understand the aspect of timeliness, which is necessarily muted in the chronologically organized selections in the book, a brief historical overview of the times and contexts in which Japanese philosophies developed may prove helpful. It can at least give us a glimmer of the zeitgeist behind each of the various Japanese thinkers in history whose selections will follow. Thus, for example, we want to know what social, political, and economic factors influenced thinkers in each of the major periods of Japanese history. Regardless of their commitments to differing schools of philosophy, what issues of the day might be in the background of every major Japanese figure writing in the same century? The following historical overview, although too brief to take up these questions in depth, will be complemented in part by the overviews provided for each tradition and the short introductions to each of the thinkers treated in the appropriate chapters of the Sourcebook.
Prehistory to 794

Obviously, it is hard to claim there was philosophy in Japan before the introduction of writing. Even if there was thinking that might be classified as philosophical, there was no way to record it for posterity. Nevertheless, what we do know of the indigenous spiritual orientation of prehistoric Japan belongs to the general background against which Japanese philosophical thinking was to take shape in ensuing centuries.

Given both archaeological evidence and meager accounts by the occasional Chinese visitor in the fourth and fifth centuries, scholars generally assume that the preliterate Japanese culture was animistic: the ancient Japanese understood the world as filled with awe-inspiring *tama* or “spiritual power.” Where the locus of such *tama* was particularly discernible—be it in some object in the natural world, in an exceptional person, a ghost, or a celestial deity—it was referred to as *kami* and given deferential treatment in ritual, art, and architecture. Even spoken words could resonate with a power beyond the capacity of those who spoke them, a *kotodama* or *tama* of words.

In the sixth and seventh centuries, as Chinese texts began to find their way into the country from the mainland, often by way of Korean immigrants and traders, the Japanese adopted Chinese as their literary language. They often studied it much the way the Chinese themselves did—by reading the classics, typically texts revered as canonical by Confucian traditions at the time. Around the same time, Buddhism entered the country and the Japanese were initially attracted primarily to its cultural and ritual contributions. Immigrants from Korea and China, including some Buddhist monks and many artisans, introduced exotic Buddhist chanting, architecture, rites, sculptures, and paintings that fascinated the Japanese court aristocrats. This soon led to an interest in Buddhist texts (written in Chinese) as well.

Hence, by the dawn of the seventh century, an intellectual culture was in place among the aristocratic elite (and the occasional Buddhist monk not of aristocratic background). This elite culture had developed enough that by the first or second decade of the seventh century, the court was able to write a “constitution” for the courtiers running the state. If we can say with Aristotle (and most historians of western philosophy since then) that Thales’ claim that all things are water was the origin of western philosophy, we could say that Prince Shōtoku’s *Seventeen-Article Constitution* marked the birth of Japanese philosophy. It has been included in this Sourcebook as a Prelude.

Although evidence today suggests that the traditional biography, and maybe even the very existence, of the Prince may be more legend than history, it is the text, not the author, that most interests us. First, the constitution was definitely a product of Japan, even if the writer was not ethnically Japanese but a foreign scribe within the Japanese court, as some scholars argue. Most Japanese laws
and regulations at the time, as in centuries to follow, were either direct or modified codifications of Chinese models. The Constitution was different; it had almost nothing to do with laws and regulations. Instead, it prescribed extra-legal attitudes and behaviors for the courtiers, the elements that would make a lawful, centralized state “harmonious.” This seems Confucian in spirit but unlike Confucianism, the Constitution did not emphasize achieving this harmony primarily through *ri*, ceremonial propriety. Instead, it stressed Buddhist values of personal development and practice. Indeed, it suggested Buddhism should become a state religion.

Aristotle placed Thales at the birth of Greek philosophy because of his attempt to explain the world in physical terms without relying on religious or mythical narratives. From that time on, Aristotle maintained, the course was set for Greek philosophers. The Constitution had similar paradigmatic value in Japan. For the first time, a Japanese thinker broke away from merely borrowing ideas and systems of mainland thought to propose a consistent integration of two traditions. Basically, the Constitution argued that court behavior should follow Confucian norms, but that psychologically and spiritually one should cultivate a Buddhist egolessness and control of emotions. The Constitution suggested that only an egoless Buddhist could act appropriately as an accomplished Confucian courtier. Buddhism is for personal psychological and spiritual development; Confucianism for social standards. The model of philosophizing here is that one can borrow ideas and values from outside, but the goal is to integrate them into something new, a system more suitable to the Japanese cultural context. This is the course that most Japanese philosophers have followed ever since.

Prince Shōtoku’s Soga family, strong advocates of Buddhism, fell out of power soon after his death. The remainder of the seventh century was a time of political turmoil overlaid with repeated attempts to put into place a viable legal system, both penal and civil, adapted from Chinese models. There was little philosophical creativity in evidence here. During the Nara period (710–794) a greater degree of social stability was achieved as the imperial center of power began to crystallize and Japan began to look more like a unified state. For the first time, the Japanese built a permanent capital, located in the city of Nara. Previously, because of indigenous taboos concerning the polluting nature of death, the imperial palace had to be relocated after the death of an emperor or empress. The construction of a great capital city modeled on the Chinese capital of Chang’an brought with it a rapid increase in the number of Buddhist communities located in temples that were less like centers of monastic practice than scholarly academies where massive numbers of Chinese Buddhist texts were gathered and studied. In this way, Japanese intellectuals came to develop a sophisticated knowledge of Buddhist terminology and to acquaint themselves
with a variety of Buddhist philosophical systems. Philosophically speaking, however, the Japanese remained by and large in a phase of borrowing and assimilating with limited creative reflection and reconstruction.

The Nara period also produced two large chronicles, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*. The later was composed in Chinese and followed more closely the style of Chinese chronicles. Its narrative began with the time of creation, but went into greatest detail in describing court events from the earliest periods of recorded history. In contrast, the *Kojiki* placed more emphasis on myth and prehistory. It was also an early experiment in finding a way of writing Japanese by using Chinese characters or sinographs as phonetic rather than semantic units. The result at times was an almost unintelligible hybrid of Japanese and Chinese, which persisted until the ninth century when the Japanese succeeded in finding a way to put their language into writing satisfactorily by inventing two purely phonetic syllabaries: *hiragana* and *katakana*. Insofar as the two chronicles codified creation stories and established the ideology of an imperial family descended from the sun *kami*, Amaterasu, they set the ideological foundations for what would eventually become a Shinto justification for imperial rule.

In sum, after the Shōtoku Constitution (and three commentaries on Buddhist sutras also attributed to Shōtoku’s patronage), there was little philosophical development in the seventh and eighth centuries. Nevertheless, Japanese schools of learning, especially the Buddhist study centers in the capital, were acquiring the raw materials for creative thought, setting the stage for a breakthrough in Japanese Buddhist philosophizing that would take place at the outset of the ninth century, mainly through the efforts of Kūkai (774–835) and Saichō (767–822).

*The Heian Period (794–1185)*

The Heian period brought an increased centralization of power in the court and the capital city, which had since moved to Kyoto. It was a period of transition during which repeated efforts to import more of the cultural, philosophical, and religious traditions of China gave way to their assimilation and reformulation into a distinctively Japanese cultural expression. In subsequent centuries most Japanese thinkers would look back to the Heian period as a blossoming of creative Japanese intellectual and aesthetic activity. While the court and government system as well as the Buddhist monastic institutions maintained much of the superstructure of Chinese models, its thinkers gave freer rein to innovation in advancing ideas and values more attuned to native sensibilities, including the deliberate restoration of elements of ancient animism neglected by former generations. The Buddhist scholarly monastic institutions and the court with its intellectuals and aesthetes interacted extensively as the two elite centers of philosophizing.
The hubs of most creative Buddhist thinking during the Heian period were in the Shingon tradition founded by Kūkai and in the Tendai tradition founded by Saichō. We can single out three focal points in their philosophical analyses. First, they tried to make sense of the wide variety of Buddhist ideas, texts, and practices that had been flowing into Japan for the previous three centuries. Tendai constructed its interpretations around the classifications of teachings and texts developed in the Chinese Tiantai school, especially those centered on Zhiyi (538–597). The Shingon school, meantime, followed the classifications devised by Kūkai in what he called his “theory of the ten mindsets.” Each of the two schools made use of its own hermeneutical taxonomy to argue for its own superiority and comprehensiveness vis-à-vis other forms of Buddhism. Kūkai’s analysis even included non-Buddhist traditions from the mainland, mainly Confucianism and Daoism. Their aim of the classification systems was not so much to refute other schools as to locate them within a single hierarchy, with either Tendai or Shingon at the top. Hence, the teachings of other traditions were not dismissed as erroneous but embraced as incomplete parts of a larger, more universal doctrine.

The second major philosophical motif, also Buddhist in focus, had to do with the nature of enlightenment and its relation to religious practices. The impact of Buddhist esotericism was decisive here. On the one hand, Shingon argued for the preeminence of the esoteric over the exoteric. The exoteric was regarded as bound to intellectual understanding and unable to involve the whole person—body as well as mind. Participation in esoteric rituals (contemplating mandalas, performing sacred hand gestures, and chanting mantras) was taken as a fuller engagement, both physically and intellectually, with the workings of reality itself. The aim was to embody understanding rather than to observe and analyze it with a detached mind. In Kūkai’s words, enlightenment is achieved “with and through this very body,” a process inseparable from true intellectual understanding. On the other hand, the Japanese Tendai tradition diverged from its Chinese lineage by increasingly integrating esotericism into the exoteric Tiantai teachings received from the mainland. Whereas Shingon argued that the esoteric is the ground of all Buddhist teaching and practices, including the exoteric, Tendai typically viewed the esoteric and exoteric as complementaries, insisting its students be proficient in both. Shingon and Tendai philosophizing tended to focus on such issues as the relation between praxis and insight, the integration of the somatic and the intellectual, the metaphysical basis of enlightenment, the relation between words and reality, and the connection between the nature of persons and the nature of reality.

In the third place, the Heian Buddhists also engaged the indigenous animism then characterized generally in terms of kami worship, a tradition that would ultimately develop into a key aspect of Shinto. Whereas the animistic
orientation still profoundly influenced Japanese feelings about nature, there had been little doctrinal and intellectual development that could be called distinctively Shinto. Shingon and Tendai, employing predominantly esoteric Buddhist categories, were able to incorporate a great deal of animistic sensitivity and kami-related ritual practices into their own systems, including the idea that kami are surface manifestations of deeper Buddhist realities. Thus began a Buddhist-Shinto relationship that continued in full force until the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. Meantime, pockets of Shinto philosophizing took shape during that same period, drawing on Buddhist analyses but giving them a distinctively Shinto twist. For the most part, however, Shinto’s intellectual tradition was almost entirely absorbed into esoteric Buddhism and it was not until the medieval Kamakura period that it began to come into its own.

For their part, Heian court intellectuals discussed similar questions about theory and practice, though generally from a more aesthetic perspective, including especially the critical analysis of poetry. How does poetry arise? What is the relation between words and things? How does creativity integrate innovation with the mastery of traditional forms? How is the relation between fiction and reality different from the relation between nonfiction and reality? Their analysis was never fully detached from religious concerns. Indeed, poetic theory found itself time and again asking how aesthetic sensitivity can enhance the understanding of such Buddhist teachings as impermanence and egolessness.

The Kamakura (1185–1333), Muromachi (1333–1568), and Momoyama (1568–1600) Periods

The transition from the late Heian to the ensuing Kamakura period was one of de-centering. The political influence of the court had become increasingly effete. The aristocrats, who had been spending increasing amounts of time in Kyoto, had put the samurai in charge of administering their provincial domains. Eventually the samurai (often headed by distant scions of the imperial family who had been excluded from the direct lineage) took over control of the provincial territories and waged war with each other. This came to a head in 1192 when Minamoto no Yoritomo established the first military government, the Kamakura feudal system or shogunate. From then on it was the warriors, not the court nobles, who controlled the government, with the main administrative offices now moved to Kamakura. Kyoto remained the site of the court and the official capital. It also retained its status as the principal center of culture, although shogunal patronage became ever more important for cultural, intellectual, and religious institutions. As if the devastation of internal warfare were not enough, Kyoto suffered an unfortunate series of other disasters: typhoons, epidemics, fires, and earthquakes. With the dawn of the
Kamakura period, the mood in the capital city had darkened. As its former ebullience and confidence faded, the grand philosophical syntheses of the Heian Buddhist thinkers with their cosmic visions seemed ever less relevant. Philosophizing took a more personal, existential turn as the Japanese, rulers as well as commoners, sought a way through the turbulence of the times.

As the Heian court watched its influence as a center of intellectual activity erode, so did the scholarly communities of Buddhist monks suffer a decline. At the beginning of the Heian period, Buddhists had primarily addressed their writings to the educated elite, namely, the Heian courtiers and the other educated scholar-monks. Gradually, however, highbrow, sophisticated doctrines began to interact more directly with popular Buddhist folk practices that had flourished from the time Buddhism was first introduced into the country. As a result, Buddhist thinkers found themselves addressing two audiences: ordinary people with a limited education, and a cultivated intellectual elite.

In the Kamakura period, the juxtaposition of these two worlds in Buddhist ideas had become commonplace. A clear example was the belief that the country had entered an age of degeneracy called mappō, in which the teachings of Buddhism could no longer be understood in depth and its practices could not be performed in a way conducive to enlightenment. It was a time for extraordinary measures. The despair—or at least the potential for despair—behind this idea was as evident to ordinary people as it was to philosophers. Even those who rejected that reading of the historical situation—Zen philosophers such as Dōgen, for example—still acknowledged that desperate times called for a different, more focused kind of practice. Virtually all the new spiritual traditions of the Kamakura period emphasized paring down the complex practices of Buddhism to simpler forms, such as invoking the name of Amida Buddha, or simply sitting in meditation, or trusting oneself solely to the saving power of the Lotus Sutra.

Here, too, the two sectors of society that Kamakura philosophers aimed to address came into play. For the ordinary laity, the great advantage of focusing on a single practice was that, unlike the demanding and complicated rituals of Shingon and Tendai, it was open to anyone regardless of educational background. The greater philosophical problem was how to justify such practices to the other audience, the educated elite and especially the Buddhist scholars among them. By themselves, the individual practices all belonged to the comprehensive Tendai and Shingon repertoire, but the claim now being made was that a single practice sufficed to achieve enlightenment. What is more, each of the new Kamakura schools—the Pure Land schools, the Zen schools, the Nichiren school—had to prove that their single practice, and theirs alone, was truly efficacious. This in turn gave rise to other issues. Among the general problems that affected all the schools alike was how to explain the attainment
of enlightenment. Does it come about by doing something or by ceasing to do something? Is one to assume that the path to awakening entails the initiative of “commencing enlightenment”? Or is it rather a matter of acknowledging an “original enlightenment” that has been there from the start, whatever one does? Not only did both ideas enjoy currency in medieval Japanese Buddhist thought; often enough they were held concurrently, which called for some philosophical justification of how one could logically hold two such apparently mutually exclusive views.

Other questions calling for analysis and explanation were more tradition-specific. For traditions like Pure Land and Nichiren that advocated the mappō theory, a nest of interrelated issues appeared: Is mappō an actual historical event? If so, what sense of history does it imply? Or does it merely describe a mental attitude? If so, what are the psychological dynamics behind it and how can they be given general philosophical validity? The burden for traditions like Zen that rejected the theory of mappō was how to explain why Buddhist practice seemed so difficult in the circumstances of those times. If the cause does not lie in history but in human failing, what is the nature of that failure and how can it be overcome? Another set of tradition-specific questions had to do with the focus on a single practice. How should one characterize the mental attitude involved in a particular practice? The Pure Land philosopher Shinran, for example, maintained that the calling on the name of Amida (nenbutsu) arose from a special state of mindfulness called shinjin or trusting faith. What exactly is this shinjin and how does it fit into broader Mahayana Buddhist understandings of mind, thought, and affect? How does it strike the traditional balance between willful practice and practiced surrender of the will? How can it be said to lead ultimately to enlightenment, the engagement with reality as it is? Zen Master Dōgen, meantime, argued instead that seated meditation or zazen was the only thing needed for enlightenment. But what is the mental state achieved in meditation and how does it relate to the broader Mahayana teaching of practice as a means and enlightenment as a goal? What is it that makes zazen the single most definitive practice?

While Buddhist philosophy concentrated on those sorts of questions, there were also advances in aesthetics, permeated with Buddhist sensitivities but more secular in nature. From the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, new modes and theories of aesthetic expression were taking shape (such as waka poetics) and new art forms such as the tea ceremony and Nō drama were emerging, each of which called for its own philosophical reflection. Parallel to developments in Buddhist thought, there was greater attention given to analyzing the states of mind involved in artistic performance and appreciation. How does an artist cultivate the proper attitude for creative expression? What is the proper balance between tradition and innovation? Is it possible to articulate
steps in the creative process? What is the relation between the artist and reality or between the performance and audience? What distinguishes art from imitation? In tackling these questions, philosophers came to rely increasingly on Zen Buddhist ideas and metaphors, especially in the Muromachi and Momoyama periods.

*The Edo or Tokugawa Period (1600–1868)*

From the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, the struggle for power among samurai groups continued intermittently. A long-lasting peace arrived for the nation only with the establishment of the Tokugawa family’s shogunate. For nearly the whole of the Edo period (1600–1868) Japan severely restricted its interaction with the outside world, confining its foreign relations to Korea and China and its western interaction to a minimal trade agreement with the Dutch. The practice of Christianity, which Catholic missionaries had brought to Japan in the sixteenth century, was proscribed. The Tokugawa shogunate negotiated agreements with the provincial daimyō, granting them considerable autonomy but also reserving certain hegemonic powers for itself. The shōgun established a highly bureaucratic government, giving them unprecedented oversight on Japanese society, from the education system to business practices to religious institutions. The imposition of peace brought with it an increase in nationwide trade and the rise of urban centers as the hubs of mercantile activity. These large cities—especially Edo (present-day Tokyo), Osaka, and Kyoto—became the major cultural and intellectual centers as well. The need to educate the emerging merchant class brought secular urban academies into prominence as the major centers of philosophical activity.

The arrival of neo-Confucian thought from China was the most important intellectual import of the era. During the fifteenth, and especially the sixteenth century, Japanese intellectuals, many of them Zen monks, had traveled to China and returned with new texts, among them the writings of the great neo-Confucian thinkers, Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and Wang Yangming (1472–1529). Chinese neo-Confucian philosophers had developed a grand synthesis of Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian thought by broadening traditional Confucian categories. Integrating Confucian concerns for appropriate behavior and social harmony with metaphysical and psychological ideas borrowed from Daoism and Buddhism, they were able to construct an epistemological framework for both moral values and natural phenomena. Importing these ideas meant both a new vocabulary and a new set of problems for Japanese philosophizing: What is the metaphysical relation between pattern or principle (*ri*) and generative force or vital energy (*ki*)? Does principle determine force, as Zhu Xi claimed? Or is principle no more than an abstraction for the way *ki* functions, as the Japanese thinker Kaibara Ekken proposed? In the end, most Japanese followed
Ekken, but the whole framing of the problem and the vocabulary used to solve it derived from Chinese tradition.

Due in part to the influx of western science starting in the sixteenth century, and its continued inroads throughout the Edo period under the rubric of “Dutch learning,” the number of philosophers interested in the natural world was on the rise. For example, thinkers from the merchant class like Yamagata Bantō (1748–1821) skeptically regarded both commonsense observations of natural phenomena and received interpretations of history and morality, and insisted that they be related to a universal theoretical principle he called the “center.” The problem of how to categorize natural phenomena and their interaction also prompted creative and distinctively Japanese approaches, such as Miura Baien’s (1723–1789) theory of jōri to explain natural phenomena in terms of the dialectical dynamic between a complex catalog of oppositional pairs.

Meantime, Japanese mathematics, astronomy, and medicine were finding their own direction. Mathematicians like Seki Takakazu (1640–1708) made discoveries in algebraic studies, sometimes preceding comparable developments in the West. Initially astronomy and medicine were more reliant on Chinese thought, but the entry of western astronomy and anatomy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries eventually began to erode that dependency. The real impact of western medicine would not occur until the modern period. Yet, the model of science as the rational and empirical study of nature enabled Japan to assimilate western science quickly when it became important to the agenda of the modern period.

Given the need to stabilize the social order and to provide a clear set of values for the growing urban population, most creative philosophizing in the Edo period focused on moral, social, and political theory. Confucianism, in both its neo-Confucian and in its classical revival forms, dominated the intellectual terrain and its primary questions: What are the essential human virtues? Are they learned or innate? How are virtues related to feelings or emotions? What is the ideal structure of social relations for maximum harmony to be achieved? Are virtues like loyalty values or affects? Confucian philosophers like Itō Jinsai (1627–1705) and Ōgyū Sorai (1666–1728) disdained the metaphysical ruminations of the neo-Confucians, but also followed those neo-Confucians who focused on returning to the fundamental meanings of the ancient Confucian terms. Their philosophy of language maintained that by understanding the significations, functions, and interrelations of key terms, one could clearly fathom the basis for harmony in the world with all its ethical implications and logical rationale. Their methodology, although philological in form, was philosophical and moral in purpose. It also stimulated the application of this approach to the study of native Japanese texts and terms.
Inspired by the methods of the new breed of Confucian scholars, the Native Studies or Kokugaku School adopted philology and the close reading of ancient Japanese texts (principally classical poetry and the Kojiki chronicle) as a basis for reconstructing the supposedly indigenous Japanese—and thus “Shinto”—answers to many of the questions raised by the Confucians. In the early nineteenth century, certain currents in the Native Studies tradition turned their philosophizing to developing an ideology of Japanese ethnicity centered on the imperial state.

While Confucian and Native Studies philosophies defined the intellectual horizons of Edo-period thought, Buddhism focused more on institutional developments, a few of which had philosophical implications. For example, the Tokugawa peace brought many unemployed samurai into civil life, some of whom gravitated toward vocations as Buddhist monks, especially Rinzai Zen monks. In response, we find Edo-period Zen thinkers like Takuan (1573–1645) and Suzuki Shōsan (1579–1655) referring explicitly to the values of the samurai and the importance of death as a major spiritual theme. In relation to the increasingly explicit public discourse about Confucian values, other Zen masters like Bankei Yōtaku (1622–1693) and Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1769) took pains to explain Zen principles in relation to everyday life and to Confucian values like filial piety.

Some philosophical thinkers, like the previously mentioned Miura Baien, Tominaga Nakamoto (1715–1746), and Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856) do not fall easily under any of the three great traditions of the period—Confucianism, Buddhism, or Native Studies. Baien developed basically a system of his own without concern for allegiance to any school, Tominaga sharply criticized all three schools, and Ninomiya found it convenient to think of them as complementary. For the sake of simplicity, we have placed selections of such Edo-period philosophers in the Confucian section, since Confucianism more than any other tradition defined the intellectual discourse of the era.

One further comment is relevant in discussing Edo-period thought—the place of bushidō or the Way of the samurai. Although it is commonly believed that this tradition had its roots in the early Edo-period, in fact, what we normally think of as the system of bushidō thought is a modern construction. This tradition is more fully explained in the chapter devoted to it in the “Additional Topics” section of the book.

The Modern Period (1868 to the Present)

The government policy of relative seclusion ended with the western demand that Japan open itself to global trade, resulting in the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate and the restoration of the imperial system in 1868. To protect itself from colonization by western powers, Japan set out to become a
modern industrial and military power in its own right. The government sent its brightest young intellectuals to Europe and the United States to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for modernization. Along with medicine, engineering, agriculture, postal systems, and education, knowledge of western thought was prized as a means to understand the foundations of modern society and the ideas behind western science and technology. Naturally, this would involve intimate familiarity with western philosophy. After a brief period of interest in British utilitarianism and American pragmatism, Japanese philosophers began to look to Germany for guidance. As philosophizing left the Tokugawa academies and Buddhist scholarly centers for the newly established secular universities, it took on the form of a western academic discipline, calling itself *tetsugaku*, a loose translation of philo-sophia. Although defined initially as the study of western philosophy, *tetsugaku* slowly took on its own connotations as Japanese philosophers began to diverge from western systems to forge their own philosophical positions, often as direct critiques of western thought. In the background of these developments lay a newfound confidence that came from the highly successful modernization processes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

At the outset, the explicitly expressed guiding principle of modernization in Japan was to borrow western technology and science but maintain Asian values. As the process unfolded, however, it became clear to many leading Japanese intellectuals that modernization brought with it ideas of self, society, knowledge, education, and ethics that ran counter to many traditional Buddhist, Confucian, and Shinto values. In many ways, this was nowhere more visible than in the rethinking of the status of women in Japan. As in other countries, East and West, modernization in Japan brought a heightened sensitivity to the analysis of gender. The women’s rights movements in the West of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a profound impact on many Japanese women intellectuals who were given access to Japanese higher education and publication venues for the first time in Japanese history. Women philosophical thinkers faced the challenge, on one hand, of defining themselves against the patriarchal and often misogynist ideologies of the premodern schools of Japanese thought and, on the other hand, of resisting many western assumptions about the nature of self and society underlying the Euro-American women’s movement. This intellectually rich phenomenon does not fit readily into the categories of academic philosophy because it is so intertwined with direct social and political action. Therefore, we have given the topic its own chapter in the “Additional Themes” section.

In response to the new ideas from the West, a great many philosophers in the Japanese academy simply abandoned the premodern traditions as sources for their work, devoting themselves entirely to expositions and critiques of
major western figures; they constitute perhaps the majority of philosophy professors in Japan even today. Japanese philosophers in the paradigm of doing philosophy exactly as westerners do philosophy are well represented in western-language philosophical venues and do not fall within the purview of this volume. An exception is Japanese bioethics. Although most philosophy of science in Japan neatly fits the western models of that discipline, bioethics, by its very nature, crosses the line between science and cultural or social values. Therefore, Japanese philosophers often bring a fresh perspective to this otherwise western field. For that reason, we have also included a chapter on bioethics in the “Additional Themes” section of the volume.

In contrast to the majority of their colleagues in philosophy, some Japanese philosophers have been eager to graft the newly introduced discipline of western academic philosophy onto its premodern Japanese antecedents. The conflict with traditional values proposed a whole host of new questions: Can one articulate an original yet comprehensive epistemology that would give western empiricism and logic an appropriate place but subordinate it to a dominant “Asian” basis for thought and values? Can one develop a viable ethics that places agency in a socially interdependent, rather than isolated and discrete, individual? Can one construct an interpretation of artistry based in a mode of responsiveness that is also the ground for knowledge and moral conduct? Can one envision a political theory of the state that allows for personal expression without assuming a radical individualism? Along with these fundamental issues, a great deal of attention was devoted to a still more basic question: What is culture and what affect does it have on philosophizing?

Far from representing a retreat to premodern modes of thought, the majority of Japanese philosophers of this sort were committed to answering these questions in terms that would be persuasive on general rational grounds and that would make sense to the rest of the world, not only Japan. This did not stop nationalistic ideologues during the first half of the twentieth century from twisting these ideas to the service of an ethnocentric militarism and staining the image of Japanese philosophy as a whole in the process. The prospect of imprisonment or death for philosophizing in the “wrong direction” infected even the most creative of Japanese thinkers, silencing some, compromising others, and raising clouds of suspicion over the field that have yet to disperse completely.

Throughout the postwar period many Japanese philosophers have continued to specialize in the scholarly study of western philosophy. In these cases, the western continental traditions, modern as well as contemporary, and the study of the history of western philosophy, have tended to attract more attention than Anglo-American analytic modes of philosophizing. Especially since the 1960s, there are also, as one will find represented in this Sourcebook, individuals and
philosophers who have explored new provocative directions, drawing their ideas from a wide range of sources including western science, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology as well as traditional Asian thought and medicine. This phenomenon is another example of the pattern initiated in the Seventeen-Article Constitution: the assimilation and adaptation of foreign ideas against the background of an ongoing tradition.

**Defining philosophy**

As a work on Japanese philosophy, the *Sourcebook* aims both to challenge the limitations of the prevailing definitions of “philosophy” and to demonstrate by its selection of texts some distinctively Japanese alternatives. In other words, it is presented as textual support for the thesis that long before the term *tetsugaku* was coined in the mid-nineteenth century to designate the imported academic discipline of philosophy, Japan already had in place a solid philosophical tradition rooted in an intellectual history that provided it with resources comparable to but very different from those that have sustained western philosophy. The criticisms against applying the term *philosophy* to “non-western” traditions like those treated here did play a part in Meiji-era discussions, as the Overview for that section of the book will show. As part of the overall framework of the *Sourcebook*, however, some initial account should be given of the positive and cogent reasons for designating currents in these traditions as philosophy.

**The Case for Rethinking Philosophy**

To begin with, philosophy by its nature is an evolving discipline, enriched by the plurality of perspectives that different times and cultures have brought to it, and impoverished by any attempt to harness it to specific political, economic, or religious regimes. In the context of its “western” heritage, too, we have always to speak of “philosophy in the making.” As such, the pursuit of philosophy is inseparable from the constant effort to reintegrate the past in the light of new modes of thought and new methods of critical evaluation.

At the same time, insofar as philosophy is embedded in the very world it aims to understand, it is forever denied a definitive external standpoint from which to present ideas as if they were detached from cultural and linguistic expression. In this sense, the definition of philosophy is permanently bound up with the practice of philosophizing within distinctive cultures. Moreover, philosophizing—if by that we broadly mean the critical investigation of deeply perplexing questions, such as what is the best way to live, what is true and how can we best know it, and what are our obligations to one another—is a widespread and perhaps even universal phenomenon, especially among highly
literate cultures. There is no a priori reason, therefore, to say that philosophy is limited to the way it has been construed in any one cultural context, whether it be the classical cultures of the Mediterranean basin or the modern cultures of the so-called western world. Rather, the challenge is to understand the context and rules of philosophizing in a variety of sometimes radically different environments. We can only judge how good a philosophical answer is after we are sure we have understood the question the answer is addressing. To do so, the most important thinkers to study are those who develop systematic philosophical articulations rather than ad hoc solutions to particular isolated issues. By understanding the projects of critical, systematic thinkers, we are better equipped to uncover the premises and rules of reasoning that inform their answers.

In the premodern Japanese context, these projects rarely coincide with those of the West. This makes it difficult for readers today to recognize the kinds of analysis, argumentation, reasoning, and style of disputation that characterize philosophical investigations in Japan and set it off from those derived from the ancient Greeks. One of the predominant assumptions in current academic philosophy is that philosophical thinking should be restricted to forms of rationality European in origin but presumed universal in scope and applicability. In the attempt to break with this imposition, the Sourcebook undertakes to confront the forms that rationality takes within a very different heritage. Instead of simply assuming that Japanese Confucian, Buddhist, and nativist thinkers did not know how to reason, explain, and analyze, we are summoned to recognize, criticize, and appropriately assimilate their very different contributions.

The challenge is not new. It has been brewing for more than two centuries through the increase of western access to eastern philosophies. What is more, the posture of intellectual hegemony that seeks to marginalize the challenge runs counter to the very spirit that has infused western philosophy since its beginnings.

Philosophy, especially since Kant, prides itself on being essentially self-reflexive. Disciplines like economics and history can be applied to cultures that had not developed theories of their own. Not so with philosophy. Precisely because it is critically self-conscious by nature, it cannot be applied to tacit, virtual, or unarticulated modes of reasoning. In other words, the claim to “discover” philosophical thought only in hindsight would be a contradiction in terms. If we were to apply too strictly the criterion of philosophy as always being self-conscious of itself as philosophy, however, we would have to exclude from the canon of western philosophy the pre-Socratics, whole blocs of Greek and medieval thinkers, probably even Rousseau and many other moderns with him—not to mention medieval Jewish, or Chinese and Indian thinkers. On the contrary, if we are to sustain the defining bond between philosophy and
thinking that reflects on its own assumptions and limitations, then the burden of studying other traditions is to uncover their own modes of critical thinking and self-understanding, undeterred by what our own tradition biases us to demand of them.

*Japanese Senses of Philosophy*

As practitioners of a notably self-reflexive tradition, modern Japanese thinkers have debated at least four distinct senses of the term *tetsugaku*, all of them self-conscious responses to a historical encounter with non-Japanese traditions, western and Asian. As such, each of the definitions reflects a particularly Japanese problematic.

First, following those Meiji-era critics who rejected out of hand the notion that Japan had any philosophy of its own, Japanese *tetsugaku* was taken to designate philosophy conducted by Japanese scholars in a European key. These include principally professional philosophers in academic positions who work on the texts of Plato, Kant, Heidegger, James, Bergson, Rorty, Derrida, and other western philosophers, adding their own critiques and refinements as they do so. They can be as “original” as any other philosopher composing in the same key, and as such there is nothing peculiarly “Japanese” about what they do. In short, Japanese philosophy in this first sense means simply philosophy of a Greco-European vintage distilled by people who happen to be Japanese. With few exceptions, such philosophers do not regularly analyze or even cite texts from their own tradition; and even where they do, there is no claim that these indigenous sources qualify as “philosophical.” For them, the methods and the themes of philosophy must be western in origin.

This Anglo-American-European approach to philosophy as it has been carried out in Japan places too severe a limit on *tetsugaku* and belies the fact that philosophy has always undergone development under the influence of “non-philosophical” traditions. For these reasons, Japanese philosophers who devote their studies strictly to traditional western philosophy have by and large been excluded from the *Sourcebook*.

In the second place, and at the other extreme, Japanese philosophy is taken to refer to classical Japanese thinking as it was formulated prior to the introduction of the European term and its accompanying discipline. As long as this thought deals with ultimate reality or the most general causes and principles of things, it is considered philosophical. Philosophy in this second sense may be shown to derive from or relate to Chinese thought, but it is not informed by European philosophy. Thus, one of the pioneers of *tetsugaku* in Japan, Inoue Tetsujirō, claimed to have discovered philosophy proper in premodern Japanese Confucian schools of thought, arguing that their concern with fundamental questions was comparable to those addressed in western philosophy.
This second approach to philosophy, although important in identifying fundamental questions, has tended to drift away from critical awareness of its own reconstructive nature. Such philosophy accounts for a sizable proportion of the *Sourcebook*, particularly in the premodern period, but is ultimately most interesting when viewed through the lens of later, more methodologically aware philosophical thought.

A third sense of Japanese philosophy acknowledges that philosophical methods and themes are principally western in origin, but insists that they can also be applied to premodern, prewesternized, Japanese thinking. Those who practice Japanese philosophy in this sense understand it primarily as an endeavor to reconstruct, explicate, or analyze certain themes and problems that are recognizably philosophical when viewed objectively. Works that deal with Dōgen’s philosophy of being and time, or with Kūkai’s philosophy of language, are examples of this third meaning. Granted, it takes a practiced hand to identify the philosophical import of premodern writing and engage them in the light of modern philosophical terms and methods. Moreover, even where engagement takes the form of a more or less explicit dialogue between Anglo-European-style philosophy and premodern Japanese texts, modern philosophical presuppositions often remain decisive.

A small number of philosophers in Japan allow for the kind of balanced dialogue where the critique is allowed to run in both directions. These thinkers, who understandably have been given a prominent place in this *Sourcebook*, not only read traditional Japanese texts in light of modern philosophy; they also use premodern concepts and distinctions to illuminate contemporary western philosophy and to propose alternative ways to solve modern or contemporary philosophical problems. Whether these endeavors unearth philosophy retrospectively from traditional Japanese thought, or go further to use that thought as a resource for current philosophical practice, their aim is inclusion: making the Japanese tradition part of an emerging, broader tradition of philosophy. One thinks here of the efforts of Ōmori Shōzō to reexamine the relation between words and objects by reinterpreting the theory of *kotodama*, the spirit of words; or of Yuasa Yasuo’s reappraisal of the body-mind problem in the light of Japanese Buddhist texts. Japanese philosophy in this third sense, then, means traditional and contemporary Japanese thought as brought to bear on present-day philosophizing.

This third understanding of *tetsugaku* recognizes not only the historical fact of the Greek origins of western philosophy but also the enrichments made possible by the incorporation of non-philosophical sources and resources, including Asian intellectual history. It also understands philosophy as an unfinished work of deconstruction and reconstruction, a continuation of the radical questioning that has always been the hallmark of its self-understanding.
In general, the principle of selection at work in this Sourcebook inclines to this third sense of philosophy. That said, the clear disadvantage to this definition of Japanese philosophy is that it does not provide specific criteria to select the full range of texts and resources required to make the Sourcebook a representative anthology.

A fourth and final sense of Japanese philosophy concentrates on those qualities that explicitly set it off from non-Japanese philosophy. Japanese tetsugaku here designates thinking that is not only relatively autonomous and innovative but demonstrates that “markedly eastern or Japanese character” that Takahashi Satomi and Shimomura Toratarō recognized in the achievement of that most celebrated of twentieth-century philosophers, Nishida Kitarō. Insofar as this approach highlights contributions to philosophy that are uniquely Japanese, it has been criticized as an instance of inverted orientalism: an appraisal weighted in favor of things Japanese, stereotyping differences from things non-Japanese, and minimizing the importance of historical variants. In terms of the politics of defining philosophy, such a criticism of the fourth sense of Japanese philosophy ironically ends up supporting the attempt to strip tetsugaku of its Japaneseness, reducing what is left to no more than a vestige of western intellectual colonialism. Viewed in that light, the fourth sense of Japanese philosophy can be seen to be like a post-colonial attempt to identify and valorize a precolonized layer of Japanese ideas and values. In any event, the purpose in trying to locate specifically Japanese elements in a philosopher’s thought is to draw attention to that surpassing of sources, eastern as well as western, where Japanese philosophy has something to say to philosophies of a different provenance.

Obviously, this fourth definition of tetsugaku easily slides into neglect of the conditions for innovation and distinctive differentiation. Nevertheless, keeping this vulnerability in mind, we can generalize certain fundamental orientations as commonly or typically “Japanese.” Whatever singularity Japanese philosophy represents, it does not necessarily entail a fall into the vainglory of national pride. On the contrary, a critical awareness of the historical, cultural, and linguistic conditions that shape its thinking are a necessary condition for identifying original or creative contributions to philosophical thinking.

In the end, a catalogue of criteria for what is to count as philosophy cannot be drawn up in advance of an examination of the texts themselves. To come to a new definition that avoids the vicious circle, only the interplay between working definitions of philosophy and an acceptance of the historical records as a heuristic for challenging those definitions will do. In that sense, the preparation of this volume has been more in the nature of a thought experiment than a categorical proposal. It is offered as a resource for the ongoing practice of philosophizing, and not merely a collection of historical sources belonging to a particular field of inquiry we call philosophy.
Working Assumptions

Since this is a Sourcebook, it cannot reflect the variety of debate over how to interpret one or the other author or tradition, except as such debates are included in the texts extracted. By the same token, it does not aim at representing the whole of the thought of particular figures. Rather, the attempt has been made to select texts of general philosophical interest, even when this means choosing what would otherwise be considered minor texts. Still more obviously, no one can be more aware than the editors of how much has been left out, even in a volume extending to more than half a million words. For example, in defining the criteria of inclusion, we have limited our selections from living philosophers to those born before 1950. In part such arbitrary decisions are inevitable; in part some decisions do no more than mirror the interests and preferences of the editors.

At the same time, underlying the experiment at redefining philosophy are certain working assumptions that have only been hinted at obliquely in the foregoing. Here we may lay them out simply and without the fuller argumentation they deserve.

First, insofar as philosophy is inherently ongoing and dialogical, it relies on texts and their transmission both within and across cultures and traditions. Translation and the continued assimilation by succeeding generations are part and parcel of the practice of philosophy.

Second, the project of selecting and translating texts as examples of Japanese philosophy has necessitated certain linguistic adjustments, both semantic and syntactic. The overriding goal has been clarity of communication, which in turn requires a certain leeway with regards to the idiomatic conventions of specialists in the field. The balance is a delicate one. On the one hand, strict lexical fidelity easily produces texts that can be understood by the general reader only when accompanied by an extensive running commentary. Such an approach falls wide of the concerns of the Sourcebook. On the other, a translation should not distort the original merely to make it more familiar to the reader, since the subject matter and the method of inquiry can be as significant for their divergence from recognized philosophical practices as they are for their parallels. The process of assimilation assumes that philosophy proceeds by forming contrasts and articulating alternatives, and that this process in turn derives as much from reading and questioning the texts as entering into the fuller context that only linguistic and historical expertise can bring. It is hoped that the translations will aid readers in thinking through the texts rather than simply thinking about them. Moreover, to the extent that the definition of philosophy is one of the aims of the Sourcebook, the volume itself is an unfinished project. The challenge is to let the texts themselves provide criteria for identifying and developing a wider understanding of what it means to philosophize.
Third, the reader familiar with western philosophy needs to have some idea of what to expect in the way of novelty in these pages. The traditional modern western philosophical canon has more or less systematically assumed a universal logic that is conducive to theoretical science pursued for its own sake: it searches for a reality that changes according to fixed laws or a nature independent of human artifice, all in service to knowledge as objective and justifiable. Still, we need to entertain the possibility of cultural logics where propositions are not separable from linguistic expressions, where reality is what is actualized and not merely what is settled from the beginning, where knowledge is practical and transformative, and where the natural and human worlds are closely intertwined. In other words, whereas philosophy has traditionally been considered timeless, reflective, discursive, analytical, rational, skeptical, aimed at clarity through opposition, focused on principles, and deriving definite conclusions through sound inference or deduction, engagement with Japanese philosophy needs to allow for a style of thinking that rather puts the emphasis on being organic, generative, allusive, relational, syncretic, aimed at contextual origins and underlying obscurities, and negation as a way to transforming perspective.

**Translating the Philosophical Idiom**

For readers without a background in Japanese history and language, the translation of Japanese philosophy into English obviously must render texts from one idiom into another. The original language is obviously important to the formation of ideas, but if those ideas are to reach a wider audience and to receive the critical attention of as many philosophical readers as possible, reliable translations are crucial. What if Aquinas' readings of Aristotle had been dismissed on the ground he read him in Latin? What would have been the impact of Kierkegaard if only those philosophers who could read Danish were allowed to use his ideas critically? Still, reading Kūkai or Dōgen in a western language is not the same as reading Kierkegaard. After all, he was part of the European philosophical tradition and was conversant with many of the same philosophical works that his readers in English, German, French, Spanish, or Italian would know. What is more, he shared with them a common background in the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman worldview, very different from the worldview of Kūkai or Dōgen which had its roots in China, Korea, and India. In the case of modern Japanese philosophers, many of whom were trained abroad, we find greater familiarity with the western philosophical idiom. This is one reason so much attention in the West has focused on modern rather than premodern Japanese philosophy. Nevertheless, the intellectual background of most modern Japanese philosophers has more in common with Kūkai,
Dōgen, Shinran, Razan, Sorai, and Norinaga than it does with Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, or Hegel.

This brings us to a second and more difficult task for translation: to bridge the gap in assumptions between the western philosophical reader and the original Japanese thought. There are two things we can do. First, whenever we try to understand philosophers from any tradition, we need to pay close attention to the questions they are trying to answer. It is easy to make the error of asking our questions of a philosopher from another tradition or time. For example, in his doctrine of the oneness of mind and body, Dōgen was not addressing Cartesian dualism anymore than Aristotle was in his theory of the inseparability of formal and material cause. To understand Dōgen’s philosophy, we must at least start with the issues that his philosophy was addressing, such as how Zen practices relate to enlightenment and whether one becomes a buddha through mind or body or both.

This much would seem obvious, if not for the disturbing evidence that the more professional training one has in western philosophy, the more difficult it is to sympathize with cultural and intellectual assumptions from non-western traditions. The irony is that this lack of sympathy is a betrayal of the founding ideals of philosophy itself. Plato and Aristotle, Athenians to the core, would not consider ignoring the thought of the Milesians in Asia Minor, any more than Thomas Aquinas would ignore the Arab and Jewish theology of his time. Leibniz studied Chinese neo-Confucianism to help clarify his own ideas of preestablished harmony, and Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Emerson would not think of ignoring ideas from India brought to the West through the translations by missionaries and scholars. In the past century or two, however, to secure its place in the university, philosophy has become an academic Wissenschaft fitted out with its own “scientific” foundations and methodologies. As a result, students of western philosophy grow agitated when the Japanese philosopher they are reading does not answer, and in some cases does not even appear to understand, what to them are the most obvious questions.

We therefore need at least a basic articulation of common assumptions and motifs that run throughout the Japanese tradition as general tendencies in its philosophical thinking. These are offered not as an orientalist project of essentializing the thinking of the “other,” but quite the contrary, to deconstruct the hidden assumptions of the western philosophical reader, especially when those are not the assumptions of the Japanese thinker being read. There is no way properly to judge generalizations about Japanese philosophy without traversing the territory for oneself. We present the following motifs only as landmarks for negotiating a path through what remains, when all is said and done, a tradition very different from that of western philosophy.
The Preference for Internal Rather than External Relations

Most Japanese philosophers have historically favored the understanding of relations as being internal instead of external. That is, if I say “a and b are related,” the paradigm of external relations assumes that a and b can exist independently, but insofar as there is a relation between them, a third factor R is required to connect the two. By contrast, the paradigm of internal relations assumes that if I say “a and b are related,” I mean that a and b are intrinsically interlinked or overlapping, and that the R is the shared part of a and b. If our modern western philosophical tradition tends to make external relations the default, most Japanese philosophers throughout history are inclined towards thinking in terms of internal relations. Although both modes of thought are to be found in both traditions, awareness of this difference in fundamental orientation can help postpone hasty judgments and help direct attention to suitable cognates.

Take, for example, the relation between knower and known. If that relation is external, the philosopher will assume that the subject (the knower) and the object (the known) exist independently and that they become connected through the creation of a third item, the relation called “knowledge.” Various theories will arise to explain what makes the knowledge “true.” When we think in terms of internal relations, however, knowledge represents not what connects the independently existing knower and known, but rather the overlap, the interdependence between knower and known. The more expansive the knowledge, the greater the overlap and the more inseparable knower and known become. The ideal would be the point in which there is complete interpenetration between knower and reality such that there is no obstruction between mindfulness and reality. Such a model of knowledge stresses engagement and praxis in preference to observation and analysis. Whereas a model of knowledge emphasizing external relations involves making a connection between knower and known, a model emphasizing internal relations involves erasing, or at least permeating, the artificial boundaries between knower and known.

A first corollary of this fundamental orientation is that the ideal knower is not distinguished by a dispassionate, detached, disinterested mentation but by an engagement of the whole person. If knowledge is an internal relation, then it is always somatic as well as intellective. It involves concrete praxis as well as abstract speculation. This is reflected in the fact that one of the principal Japanese words for “mind,” kokoro, carries the meaning of affective sensitivity as well as rational thought, a meaning prior to the bifurcation of bodily and mental acts. Further, if one assumes human being in its entirety to be part of the world, then knowledge of the world, in the final analysis, means that part of the world knows itself.

A second corollary concerns the transmission of knowledge. If one assumes
that knowledge \( R \) can serve as an external link between the knower \( a \) and the known \( b \), this means that it is basically something objective and independent, something that can be passed on systematically from one independent mind to another. But where internal relations are primary, teacher and student form an interdependent unity of praxis that enables the transmission and assimilation of insight. This relation in turn reflects an understanding of truth as modeling oneself—thought, word, and deed—after reality by immersing oneself selflessly in it under the guidance of a mentor. In the West, this mode of learning is more akin to the master-apprentice relation than it is to the accumulation of knowledge as information.

A third corollary to the fundamental orientation of internal relations is the emphasis on understanding how knowledge comes about rather than simply what it is. Thus, for example, Japanese poetics is less concerned with articulating the characteristics of a good poem than with retracing the path that ended in a good poem. The priority given to the “way” over the focus on mere technique has an important role to play not only in the performing arts but in philosophical argument as well.

**A Holograph of Whole and Parts**

The inclination to pursue internal relations affects more than epistemology. It reaches across a range of philosophical questions because of its association with another guiding assumption of Japanese philosophy: the unity of whole and parts. On a model of external relations, we would say that the whole consists of its parts and the relations connecting them to each other. We see this assumption at work in the atomistic view that to understand something, we break it down into its smallest parts, analyze the nature of those parts, and then explain how those discrete parts are linked in external relationships with each other. Alternatively, a “holographic” approach sees a “whole inscribed” in each of its parts as, for example, the DNA of every cell contains the genetic blueprint for the whole body of which the cell is a part. Not only are the parts in the whole, but the whole is in each of its parts. This is only possible if the parts are related internally rather than externally. Holographic thinking, though not entirely absent in the western philosophical tradition, is very much the default mode of thinking in the Japanese.

This is most evident in Buddhist thinkers, but is even more basically rooted in native animistic religious practice. In the modern West, when we find a part standing for the whole, we tend to consider it merely a figure of speech, a case of metaphor or synecdoche. Within Japanese thought, however, the holographic relation is often assumed to be as literal and factual as the DNA that links every cell with the whole body.
Argument by Relegation

The preference for internal relations and an interdependence of wholes and parts is also reflected in the logic of argumentation by relegation. Here opposing positions are treated not by refuting them, but by accepting them as true, but only true as a part of the full picture. That is, rather than denying the opposing position, I compartmentalize or marginalize it as being no more than one part of the more complete point of view for which I am arguing. This is different from argument by refutation, a form of disputation very common in the West and, interestingly, also in India. In that form of argument, the purpose is to obliterate the opposing position by showing it to be faulty in either premises or logic. The argument by refutation implicitly accepts the laws of the excluded middle and the law of non-contradiction. That is, assuming there is no category mistake in the formulation of the position, either $p$ or $\neg p$ must be true and they cannot both be true in the same way at the same time. Therefore, in the refutation form of argumentation, if I can show the opposing position to be false, my position is affirmed with no need to say anything more.

Argument by relegation, which is much more common in Japanese philosophy, has its own advantages. Logically, it broadens the scope of discussion. Even if I am persuaded that another’s view is incorrect in some respect, it is nevertheless a real point of view and my theory of reality must be able to account for its existence. It carries with it the obligation to show how, given the way reality is, such a partial or wrongheaded view is possible in the first place. Rhetorically, an argument by relegation has the appearance of being irenic or conciliatory rather than agonistic or adversarial, but if we both share the model of argument by relegation, we will indeed be competing over which position can relegate which. Argument by relegation does engage in a kind of synthesis, but the purpose of this synthesis is not to show the complementarity of positions, but instead the superiority of one position over the other. This style of argument is pervasive in Japanese intellectual history and helps, in part, explain the enduring fascination with Hegelian dialectical thought in modern Japan, but with an important difference that brings us to a final generalization.

Philosophy in Medias Res

Hegel’s dialectic used sublation to transform opposing positions from being externally related as exclusive opposites into a more integrated, internally related synthesis. As easily understandable as this was to modern Japanese philosophers, they diverged at a fundamental point. Rather than embrace Hegel’s vision of a future telos towards which history was evolving, they turned the question on its head to ask where the dialectic had come from. If Hegel recapitulated an entire western tradition of bringing opposites into a final unity, Japanese philosophers were drawn to the logical place, the ontological or
experiential ground of unity out of which reality split into discrete, mutually exclusive polarities. To see the diversity as ultimately real is equivalent to confusing what is discrete in the abstract from what is unified in its most concrete reality. Thus, to return to an earlier example, the mind-body problem is not a matter of establishing connections between a mind and a body existing independently, but rather of asking how the concrete body-mind unity came to be thought of as a relation between independent, opposing substances.

In its inquiry into the abstract diversification of a single, unified reality, Japanese philosophers are not trying to lay out a historical aetiology that harks back to a distant past before things had fallen apart. They are concerned with recovering and expressing the experience of the here-and-now within which the original unity of reality is to be recognized. The preference for doing philosophy in medias res begins in the gaps left by abstract concepts about reality. It is a kind of experiential ground out of which the abstractions of philosophy emerge and to which they must answer. Here the use of negative (and not simply apophatic) language is crucial. The ground of meaning must itself be intrinsically meaningless; the ground of the world of being and becoming must be intrinsically empty, a nothingness. Just as often, the language can be radically affirmative in a sense that western languages find clumsy, as in Buddhist expressions of “suchness” or “of-itselfness” of reality, to which we might prefer something like William James’ allusion to the “blooming, buzzing confusion” out of which all thought and reflection emerges.

**EDITORIAL CONVENTIONS**

Our aim in editing the over two hundred translations that make up this book has been to spare the reader as much inconsistency as possible and to make for an overall more readable text while at the same time allowing for a wide variety of style and interpretation. The balance is a delicate one and required the full collaboration of all three editors on the volume in its structure and content. From the outset, we decided it best to dispense with some technical apparatus that specialists might expect. Where words have been added to a translation to do no more than adjust syntax or specify a pronominal reference, the square brackets ordinarily used to set them off have been omitted. All other annotations have been kept to a minimum and relegated to footnotes, transitional comments, or the Glossary. All this has been done with an eye to making the texts read more smoothly for a wider audience without forfeiting fidelity to the original. For the same reasons, minor adjustments to the wording of existing translations have been made rather freely, without drawing any attention to the fact. In cases where a published translation has been substantially revised, an indication is given in the corresponding bibliographic reference at the end of the volume.
In addition, the following conventions have been adopted throughout:

**Transitional comments.** In a few cases, particularly in classical Buddhist thinkers, comments have been inserted by the editors into a selected passage to aid in the transition of an abbreviated text. These comments are extracted and set in italic type.

**Footnotes.** In order to keep footnotes to a minimum, information supplied by the editors concerning technical terms, texts, and historical persons is provided only on the first appearance and offset in square brackets. Footnotes belonging to the original text are left without brackets.

**Personal names.** As a rule, native Japanese, Chinese, and Korean names are given with the family name first, followed by the personal name. Since Japanese often refers to classical personalities by their personal name, artistic name, or ordination name (for example, Motoori Norinaga is commonly referred to as Norinaga), a cross-reference has been added to the concluding Index. Chinese names are generally given with their Chinese pronunciation, which has meant adjusting some of the existing translations that employ Japanese pronunciations. In such cases, both names are referenced in the concluding Index.

**Glossary of technical terms.** Terms that appear with some frequency in the volume and are likely to be unfamiliar to many readers have been gathered together into the Glossary, where they are given their equivalents in Japanese, Chinese, and Sanskrit as required, along with a brief and generalized definition. These terms are flagged with raised brackets (‘’*) on their first appearance in a chapter, unless they are defined in context. As far as possible, English equivalents have been employed in the texts. Terms in Japanese and Sanskrit that have come into common use are generally given...
without diacritical marks, with a few exceptions (for example, nirvāṇa and kōan). Pages on which terms in the Glossary appear are included at the end of each entry.

**Chronology.** A Chronological Table of Authors has been included at the end of the volume to help locate thinkers in their respective eras. Recognizing minor disagreements among scholars concerning the starting and ending dates of certain historical eras (the Tokugawa era, for example), dating here has been standardized in accordance with the *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan.*

**Chinese and Japanese script.** All Chinese characters (or sinographs) and Japanese script (hiragana and katakana) have been omitted from the text. The Sino-Japanese written form of proper names, places, and transliterated terms are provided in the Glossary or General Index. Chinese names and terms have been uniformly transcribed in pinyin.

**Bibliographical information.** Complete bibliographic information is provided in the Cumulative Bibliography at the end of the volume. Where the collected works of an author in question are available, they have been used to cite the original texts. Selections that appear in more easily accessible standard collections have also been identified as such. Classical Chinese works cited in the text are included among the abbreviations at the beginning of the Bibliography, along with a listing of one or more standard English versions.

**Cumulative bibliography.** The Cumulative Bibliography is made up of four parts: (1) abbreviations used in the text; (2) abbreviations used in the bibliography; (3) complete information on texts and translations cited in major selections; (4) other sources cited briefly in the text.

**Indexes and searches.** If you wish to explore a technical term, start with the Glossary where you will find both a definition and a complete list of occurrences in the *Sourcebook.* If you are interested in philosophical concepts, begin with the Thematic Index, where you will find a general scheme with particular themes cross-referenced to the body of the book. To search for proper names, titles of classical works, or special terms, you will find a complete list of page references in the General Index.

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