

*“Philosophy” or “Religion”? The Confrontation
with Foreign Categories in Late Nineteenth
Century Japan*

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Categories are not simply containers of thought: they have an effect on the contents. One of the greatest changes in the intellectual history of the non-Western world was the grand re-classification of ideas into categories adopted from the West during the nineteenth century. Among these were “science,” “religion” and “philosophy.” As Western thought was imported into Japan on a large scale during the Meiji period (1868–1912), Japanese thinkers were puzzled by these categories, for which there were no Japanese equivalents. The Meiji era therefore provides us with a fascinating look at problems of translation, interpretation, and categorization of ideas as they migrated across regions.

In this essay I will argue that “philosophy” was an unstable and contested concept during these years. The confrontation with foreign schema spurred discussions about whether Buddhism or Confucianism fell under “philosophy” or “religion.” From these debates came the need to re-classify these traditions in terms of the newly imported criteria, and, for some, to reinterpret and reconstruct Buddhism and Confucianism as modern “philosophies.” I will also argue that by investigating Meiji philosophy from this perspective, it is possible to overcome some problematic assumptions and reevaluate it on its own terms. Thus, the following is also intended as a new introduction to Meiji-era philosophy.

I. THE MEIJI PERIOD: AN ERA OF UNCRITICAL IMPORTATION AND TRANSLATION?

Studies on modern Japanese philosophy often begin with Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no kenkyū*) in 1911 and continue with the subsequent developments of the Kyoto school.¹ The rationale given for this starting point is that philosophy in the period from the translation of "philosophy" into *tetsugaku* by Nishi Amane (1829–97) at the beginning of the Meiji era until the emergence of the Kyoto school was merely an uncritical adoption lacking originality. As a result, while the Kyoto school has received a good deal of attention, philosophy in the Meiji era has been much less studied.

Nevertheless, there is growing attention to Meiji philosophy in Japanese academic circles. Historians of philosophy are expressing more interest in tracing some ideas of the Kyoto school back to the Meiji period. Also, studies on the role of philosophy in modern Buddhism are increasing, while there is a growing realization of the role of Buddhism in Meiji intellectual life as a whole.²

However, the representation and study of Meiji philosophy suffers from a number of assumptions that need to be addressed. First, it is still often presumed that a body of thought can be imported and translated smoothly from one culture to another, albeit with certain technical difficulties. We now know that translation is not unproblematic, but involves active interpretative operations on the part of the "receiver."³ Second, as *tetsugaku* now refers to Western philosophy (or philosophy in a Western style such as that of the Kyoto school), when it comes to the Meiji period there is still a tendency to look only at the supposedly seamless importation

¹ See for example David Dilworth, Valdo Viglielmo, and Agustin Zavala (trans. and ed.), *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998).

² The best and most comprehensive work on Meiji philosophy is still Funayama Shinichi's *Meiji Tetsugaku shi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Minerva, 1959). Noteworthy is that recently there is much attention on Kiyozawa Manshi as a philosopher, see especially Imamura Hitoshi, *Kiyozawa Manshi to Tetsugaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2004). The research into the role of Buddhism in Meiji intellectual history on the whole will get more attention due to Sueki Fumihiko's two volume *Kindai nihon shiso saikō* (Tokyo: Transview, 2004). Research in Western languages is very scarce.

³ See Douglas Howland, *Translating the West: Language and Political Reason in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), and Scott Montgomery, *Science in Translation: Movements of Knowledge through Cultures and Time* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

of *Western philosophy*, and not at indigenous traditions⁴ or possible philosophical interactions.

Third, in cases where it is acknowledged that scholars produced combinations of Western and indigenous thought, the results are usually characterized as “eclectic”: hardly a laudable label in philosophic discourse. It is assumed that, for example, combinations of Hegelianism and evolutionary theory by a Western philosopher could be original, while blends of Hegelianism and Buddhism were somehow illegitimate. We expect a Japanese philosopher to produce something “Japanese.” Hence, the idea of “eclecticism” needs to be rethought.

In this essay, I hope to reinterpret the unique situation of Meiji philosophy by investigating its internal dynamics, which lie for a great part in uncertainty regarding the category of “philosophy” itself. The concept of “philosophy” was contested by different parties for various reasons. In this respect, my work is closely related to Douglas Howland’s *Translating the West*, which explores the translation of concepts like “liberty” for which there were no indigenous equivalents, and shows how these concepts were used to understand and, in turn, make new social realities. In other words, by investigating processes of translation across cultures, more emphasis can be placed on the active role on the part of the “receiving culture” and especially on the processes whereby concepts were formed in actual use and political discussions. Howland argues that such accounts can expose the fallacy of “semantic transparency”: the assumption that the meaning of concepts does not change when transported to other cultures.

By way of illustrating this dynamic in Meiji philosophy, I will in the third section briefly introduce the philosophies of Kiyozawa Manshi and Inoue Enryō, and after that focus in more detail on discussions on materialism and evolutionism that took place in the late 1890s. These were the most important and volatile philosophical debates of the period. They involved Katō Hiroyuki (1836–1916), Inoue Enryō (1858–1919), Takayama Chogyū (1871–1902), Motora Yujirō (1885–1912), Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901) and Tanaka Odō (1876–1932). I will concentrate primarily on the exchanges between Inoue Enryō and Katō Hiroyuki. But let us first look at the issues of categorization and classification.

⁴ I use “indigenous thought” in this paper as referring to thought that was not imported from the West in the nineteenth century. It therefore includes traditions such as Buddhism, which are of course not originally from Japan.

II. THE IMPORTATION OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY AND THE PROBLEM OF CATEGORIZATION

The full-scale introduction of Western philosophy into East Asia started in Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the earlier phases, philosophical currents entered all at once or sometimes in reverse chronological order. Needless to say, this complicated the understanding of Western philosophy. A major problem was that the entire technical vocabulary of philosophy needed to be translated, which was for the most part done with neologisms. The term "philosophy" was translated with the neologism *tetsugaku*, by Nishi Amane (1829–87), who was largely responsible for the first wave of introduction and translation of Western philosophy in Japan. All current Japanese terms for these concepts were first translated during the Meiji period. Yet problems of and discussions about translations of philosophical concepts continued well into the twentieth century. To put this in a larger perspective, inseparable from the content of this imported body of Western thought were the categories in which it functioned. "Science" was obviously something different from "religion" or "philosophy." But it is crucial to realize that before the Meiji era, these concepts had no Japanese equivalents and such differences were not so obvious.

Among the greatest changes in modern European intellectual history were the emergence of modern science, and the gradual differentiation of these large categories, especially in the nineteenth century. For example, "science" was a relatively new concept, first formulated in the 1850s. Philosophy, which was of course much older, gave up some of its domains of inquiry to science, and grew as an academic discipline, in the process (re-)constructing much of its own history. Although Japan had contact with Western ideas through the Dutch during the Edo period (1603–1868), the problem of categories did not arise during these years. This would change during the Meiji era's rapid westernization on a massive scale, which was followed by the grand re-categorization of ideas.

Isomae Junichi has recently traced the importation of the concept of "religion."⁵ The need for a translation for the word "religion" first arose during the negotiations of treaties with the United States in the late 1850s, as these contained clauses on religion. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, regions in East and South-East Asia adopted and applied Protestant models of "religion" to their own traditions. As a result, empha-

⁵ Isomae Junichi, *Kindai nihon no shūkyō gensetsu to sono keifu: shūkyō, kokka, Shinto* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 2003).

sis was placed more on beliefs than on practices, as religions started to identify their foundational texts and founders. Isomae argues that in Japan from the 1880s through the 1890s, "religion" gradually migrated to the irrational and the private sphere. "Religion" was placed in opposition to "science" and scientific rationality on the one hand, and to patriotic loyalty on the other, especially after a series of public rows where Christianity was accused of being incompatible with the national essence and imperial system. Interestingly, Shinto was formed into a national ideology, and initially did not fall under the category of "religion." A similar process occurred when categories of thought were retroactively applied to Japanese historiography. From these years, we see the first histories of Japanese "religion," or "politics" and "philosophy." In short, as new categories became accepted, they necessitated the restructuring of the old, and not only reflected, but also created new realities.

This application of Western concepts to Japanese traditions was problematic, not only for "religion," but also for "philosophy," and especially for the distinction between the two. For Japanese, these were generated with foreign criteria: Christianity for the former and the Western philosophical tradition for the latter. Questions arose as to whether or not there was something like "Japanese philosophy." Could one say that Buddhism, Confucianism, or Kokugaku amounted to "philosophy"? The answers depended on how universal Western philosophical methods, inquiries, questions, and formulations were presumed to be.

As Carine Defoort points out, there remains an ongoing "implicit discussion" as to whether or not Asian traditions can be labeled as "philosophy."⁶ She distinguishes several positions taken in these scholarly conversations. First, one could argue that Asian traditions of thought do conform to the general consensus about what constitutes Western philosophy. Here the meaning of "philosophy" remains unaltered, and Asian thinkers need to be included in the canon. A second position recommends that the category of "philosophy" be expanded to include specific themes, questions, and methods peculiar to Asian traditions of thought.

Counter arguments can be made that Asian philosophy does not originate from the same tradition of Greek thought, or that its practices do not conform to the methodological and thematic criteria that characterize Western philosophy. These can vary from legitimate criticisms to orientalist views. A fourth stance denies the universality of philosophy, and decries

⁶ Carine Defoort, "Is there such a thing as Chinese Philosophy? Arguments of an Implicit Debate," *Philosophy East and West*, 51 (2001): 393-413.

Asian traditions as inherently different from the those of the West. Such arguments can also take the form of an "occidental" or "secondary orientalist" essentializing of Western thought. Thus when speaking about "Asian philosophy," the burden of proof is placed on the Asian traditions. Questions are posed such as "was Confucianism is philosophy," not "was Hegel was a Confucianist" or "did he complete the Way?" Thus Westernization has created a cultural imbalance of categories and representations.

To return to the Meiji period, Nishi Amane, the translator of the term "philosophy," was of the opinion that philosophy did *not* exist in Japan. Another important Meiji-era political philosopher, Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901), offered what became a much-cited verdict: "Since olden times to this day there has been no philosophy in Japan."⁷ This view, that there is no such thing as Japanese thought before 1868 which can be labeled "philosophy," has become prevalent in Japan. In other words, retroactive designations of indigenous thought as "philosophy" have never gained wide acceptance. The term *tetsugaku* is used almost exclusively for Western-style philosophy. This means that in modern Japanese, there is a distinction between philosophy (*tetsugaku*) and pre-Meiji indigenous intellectual production, the latter usually expressed in the term *shisō* (thought). This is not merely a matter of nomenclature: it suggests that pre-Meiji "thought," by current Japanese standards, has no place on the stage of "world philosophy."

This is in marked contrast to other construals of non-Western philosophies, such as African, Native American, and especially Chinese. The existence of "Chinese philosophy" is both explicit and relatively widely accepted. What is remarkable about the contrast between the Japanese and Chinese cases is that the latter encompasses Confucian and Buddhist traditions that were eventually denied the label of "philosophy" in Japan.⁸

Yet these rejections of "Japanese philosophy" were by no means uniform. There was a significant number of Japanese thinkers who did believe that Japanese Buddhism and Confucianism were, or at least included, "philosophy." Among such figures as Tanaka Ōdō, Torio Koyata (1847–1905), Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–1914), Miyake Setsurei (Yūjirō) (1860–1945), Inoue Enryō (1858–1919), and Kiyozawa Manshi (1863–1903) it was not un-

⁷ Maraldo, John, "Contemporary Japanese Philosophy," *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy*, ed. Brian Carr and Indira Mahalingam (London: Routledge, 2000), 810–35, 811.

⁸ See Gene Blocker and Christopher Starling, *Japanese Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

common to speak about Japanese philosophy or “Japanese Buddhist philosophy” (*nihon bukkyō tetsugaku*). The main difficulty in classification was the difference between the two new categories of “religion” and “philosophy.” Buddhists felt that Buddhism did not fit easily in the distinction philosophy/religion. Significantly, at the 1887 opening ceremony of the Philosophy Hall (*Tetsugakkan*), Inoue Enryō’s institute for philosophy, there was a debate about the categorization of Buddhism and Confucianism: were they or were they not “philosophy”?⁹ From the 1880s onward, these problems of categorization sparked various attempts to understand Buddhism in the light of the novel distinction philosophy/religion.

The relation between philosophy and religion took various forms in the West, and contemporary Japanese relied on various Western sources and interpretations to understand the differences. Nishi Amane was mainly concerned with British utilitarianism and positivism. For later Buddhist philosophers, the importation of German idealism and most notably Hegelianism proved an inspiration for a more intimate connection between the two than the previously dominant positivism allowed for.

Japanese Buddhists strove to understand where Buddhism falls in the distinction philosophy/religion. Inoue Enryō interpreted Buddhism usually as a “religion based on philosophy,” but his interpretations and nearly all of his writings on Buddhism tend heavily towards the philosophical. Some prominent Buddhist modernizers disagreed with the trend of turning Buddhism into a philosophy. A quick excursion to China show the same interpretative problems, as we see figures like Ou-yang Ching-wu declaring that Buddhism was “neither a religion nor a philosophy,” but in fact concentrating almost exclusively on philosophical problems.¹⁰ These problems were also worked out in on an institutional level. While *tetsugaku* became an academic discipline, “religion” became a sectarian category, and Buddhist thought is usually not investigated in philosophy departments. The Meiji era also saw hybrids, most notably Inoue Enryō’s independent Philosophy Hall (*Tetsugakkan*), where Western philosophy, “Buddhist philosophy,” “Confucian philosophy” and Kokugaku were taught and discussed. In China, there was among others the Chinese Metaphysical Institute (*China Nei-hsueh Yuan*) in Nanking, founded by the Buddhist Ou-yang Ching-wu, where Buddhism was taught in terms of philosophy.

⁹ See Ikeda Eishun, “Kindai Bukkyō ni okeru tetsugaku, shukyo mondai,” *Indotestgaku-bukkyōgaku*, 16 (2001): 224–43.

¹⁰ See Welch Holmes, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), and O. S. Briere, *Fifty Years of Chinese Philosophy: 1898–1950*, trans. Laurence G. Thompson (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1956).

This problem of the categorization of Buddhism was not settled for some time in Japan. For example, in 1903 Ono Fujita in his *Japanese Buddhist Philosophy (Nihon bukkyō tetsugaku)* addressed in length the relation between religion and philosophy, and “Buddhist philosophy.”¹¹ Also, Kawada Kumatarō, professor in comparative philosophy, argued in strong terms 1957 in *Buddhism and Philosophy (Bukkyō to tetsugaku)* that Buddhism should be included in the study of philosophy.¹²

If Buddhism was interpreted as or including a philosophy, philosophical categories and concepts were also retroactively applied to Buddhism. From the Meiji, we can see for the first time the identification of Buddhist “ethics,” “metaphysics,” “logic” and so on. Before the discussion at the Philosophy Hall (*Tetsugakkan*) mentioned above, the first writer who treated Buddhism as a “philosophy” was Hara Tanzan (1819–1892), a Soto priest and a major figure in Meiji Buddhism. In 1879 he was appointed by Katō Hiroyuki (1836–1916) to teach at Tokyo University, where he lectured on Buddhism under the designation “Indian philosophy” (*Indotetsugaku*). Hara Tanzan is also said to have compared the *daijōkishinron* and German idealism in his lectures.¹³ One of Hara’s pupils, Inoue Enryō, who would become one of the most important Buddhist philosophers of the period, expressed it most clearly in *The Revitalization of Buddhism (Bukkyō-katsuron)*, where he wrote that he wanted to “separate the philosophical parts and the religious parts that exist in Buddhism, and group according to category all the elements of the two that are found in the sutras and explanatory texts, then generalize this and abstract a coherent line of reason. . . .”¹⁴ Buddhism was to be taken apart and rebuilt according to new categories and with new concepts. The second part of Inoue Enryō’s *The Revitalization of Buddhism* was an attempt to reconstruct the history of Buddhism as the development of a philosophy, evolving dialectically from materialism (thesis) through idealism (antithesis) to Enryō’s own philosophy of the “Ideal,” which was the synthesis of the previous positions.

Here we can see a quite different representation of Buddhism. Previous scholars had represented Buddhism in terms of different Buddhist sects or in comparison to Confucianism, but not in terms of these new Western categories. Confucianism faced similar problems. Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–

¹¹ Ono Fujita, *Nihon bukkyōtetsugaku* (Tokyo: Bunmeidō, 1903).

¹² Kawada Kumatarō, *Bukkyō to tetsugaku* (Kyoto: heirakuji, 1957).

¹³ Shimizu Kō, “Shokichosaku ni mirareru Inoue Enryō no higashi, nishi tetsugaku no taihi,” in *Inoue Enryō no gakurishisō*, ed. Shimizu Kō (Fukuin, 1989), 117–33.

¹⁴ Inoue Enryō, *Bukkyō katsuron honron*. In *Inoue Enryō senshu* (Tokyo: Tōyōdaigaku, 1990), 4: 222.

1944) wrote a set of three voluminous and at the time well-acclaimed historical works on Japanese Confucianism.¹⁵ His interpretation of the history of Confucian philosophy was a functional equivalent of the re-categorization of Buddhism in Inoue Enryō's work. Thus, rather than seeing Inoue Tetsujirō's texts as historical overviews, we should see them as the expression of a Meiji philosopher. The retroactive categorizing of Confucianism as *tetsugaku* was an operation that was informed by the specific scholarly concerns of the era. It was an active interpretative choice to group various "Confucian" thinkers (in a lineage of "great thinkers," similar to Western histories of philosophy) under the category of "philosophy," and not for example under "religion" or "political thought." One of the larger achievements of philosophy in nineteenth-century Europe was its research on the history of philosophy itself. In the work of Inoue Tetsujirō and Inoue Enryō, we can find interesting parallels in their attempts to construct histories of "Japanese philosophy," in both Buddhist and Confucian versions.

The next step in this process was to formulate a new Buddhist philosophy. Both Inoue Enryō and Kiyozawa Manshi attempted to generate a central formula for Buddhism and searched for points on which Buddhist theory, Western philosophy and modern science agreed. What they did not say was as important as what they did; accompanying their emphasis on philosophy was a conspicuous silence on phenomena usually associated with religion: rituals, monastic life and rules, meditation, idolatry, and magic. These had all been essential dimensions of Buddhism in the earlier periods. Since Buddhist cosmology had been discredited by the advances of modern science, both thinkers left out features such as the legendary Mount Sumeru on which the earth rested, while retaining other aspects of the Buddhist worldview, such as the law of cause and effect. Both left room for a "mystery" or a soteriological function, just as many of their Western counterparts did at the time.

These problems of categorization and representation, and the various attempts to "combine" philosophy with Buddhism and Confucianism are part of the story of indigenous thought in the Meiji period, and are also of importance for our understanding of "philosophy" in modern Japan. In contrast to contemporary usage of *tetsugaku*, the distinction between indigenous thought and Western philosophy, and therefore the contents of *tetsugaku*, were problematized and contested during the Meiji era. Attempts to

¹⁵ Inoue Tetsujirō, *Nihon Yōmeigakuha no tetsugaku* (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1901), *Nihon kogakuga no tetsugaku* (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1902), *Nihon Shushigaku-ha no tetsugaku* (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1905).

formulate a Buddhist or Confucian “philosophy” (*tetsugaku*) were also meant as a critique of *tetsugaku* as meaning exclusively Western philosophy, as expressed by many westerners, and by Japanese such as Nishi Amane and Nakae Chōmin.

Thus in order to understand what motivated Meiji philosophers we are compelled to take developments of Buddhism and Confucianism into account. The philosophical reinterpretations of Buddhism and Confucianism were also part of a larger nationalist vogue of the 1880s. To prove that Japan had a philosophy—preferably one that surpassed Western philosophy—was also a matter of cultural prestige. Although they relied heavily on Western philosophy, both Inoue Tetsujirō and Inoue Enryō hoped to formulate a Japanese philosophy that was superior. If we bring these interpretative problems and thinkers, especially Enryō and Kiyozawa Manshi to the foreground, the picture of Meiji philosophy becomes more complex and more interesting. In the next section I will first summarize the philosophies of Inoue Enryō and Kiyozawa Manshi, and then turn to their discussions on materialism with Katō Hiroyuki.

III. INOUE ENRYŌ AND KIYOZAWA MANSHI

Inoue Enryō reinterpreted all of Buddhism as “a religion based on philosophy,” but in the end, his writings tilted heavily towards philosophy. Enryō identified the major schools of Buddhism in terms of materialism, idealism, and the overcoming of these two metaphysical poles in the Buddhist concept of *Shinnyo*. The core of this analysis is that the two main phenomena of the universe, matter and mind, are but aspects of a substance that cannot be reduced to either. However, Enryō’s philosophy was very much inspired by idealism, and I would argue that his was a methodical idealism.

Enryō referred to this substance philosophically as the “Ideal” (*risō*) or in Buddhist terms as *Shinnyo*. In his theory of *Shinnyo*, the fusion of logic and ontology was most explicit. *Shinnyo* was always described in logical terms, usually as a unity of distinction and non-distinction. But at the same time it was the origin of the universe, somewhat akin to the *natura naturans* in Spinoza’s thought. As the ontological origin of the universe, it gave rise to the phenomenal world. In generating the phenomenal world, *Shinnyo* acted according to the laws of conservation of energy and cause and effect. In this sense, he tried to demonstrate that Buddhism was in accordance with the modern sciences. However, Buddhism actually superseded the sciences,

because it showed the way in which man could reach *Shinnyo* and fulfill his spiritual needs.

Kiyozawa Manshi (1863–1903) was in many ways similar to Inoue Enryō, but his thought eventually developed in a different direction.¹⁶ As was Enryō, he was convinced that Buddhism should be reinterpreted through a *philosophical* investigation of its core ideas. Manshi interpreted *tetsugaku* as universal, not as a discipline from the West. Buddhism was hitherto formulated by Asian peoples in a language that was inevitably culturally bounded, and should now be expressed in a universal philosophical language. For Manshi, not only “Asian philosophy,” but also philosophy as expressed in the West was culturally conditioned, and philosophy as such could be distinguished from its particular, provincial expressions in the West.

His two main works, *A Skeleton of Philosophy of Religion (Shūkyō tetsugaku gaikotsu, 1893)* and *Draft of a Skeleton of Philosophy of Otherpower (Tarikimon tetsugaku gaikotsu shikō, 1895)* contain the core of Manshi’s philosophy. Together they offered an original theory which was, in effect, an attempt to formulate a philosophical basis for Pure Land Buddhism. The basic distinction in which this religious philosophy operated was that between the limited and the unlimited. The world of the limited was the world of phenomena as we knew it. It was the world of distinctions. The unlimited was independent and was unity. In his construal of the limited world, Manshi attempted to reformulate the Buddhist theory of *engi* as a modern ontology. Here the world of the limited functioned according to the law of cause and effect. Manshi interpreted this law to mean that everything was connected with everything: to explain one event, one must take into consideration its cause, but also the circumstances in which that cause functions. Ultimately the reality of one event was related to everything else in the universe, as in one organic body.

The relation between the unlimited and the limited was a paradoxical one.¹⁷ Both were defined in opposition to the other. The limited was not unlimited and vice versa. At first, one might think of the unlimited as outside the world of the limited. However, the limited may be limited by the unlimited, but the unlimited can by definition not be limited by anything.

¹⁶ For the following overview I have primarily relied on Manshi’s *Skeleton of Philosophy of Religion*, and the secondary sources Imamura Hitoshi, *Kiyozawa Manshi no shisō* (Tokyo: Jinbunshoin, 2003), and the explanatory notes in the *Kiyozawa Manshi Zenshu*, and the oversight in Imamura Hitoshi, *Gendaigo yaku. Kiyozawa Manshi goroku* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2001).

¹⁷ Imamura Hitoshi, *Kiyozawa Manshi no shiso*, 105–6.

This means that there could not be anything outside the unlimited, because if there were something outside the unlimited it would not be unlimited any longer. Hence the limited cannot be outside the unlimited, and must be inside it. The conclusion, according to Manshi, was that the limited and unlimited were actually one. They were of the same substance (*dōtai*). One can note here the similarity to the Hegelian-style of philosophy (*coincidentia oppositorum*) and to vocabulary that was also used by Inoue Enryō. Based on this theory of the limited and the unlimited, “religion” was defined by Manshi as the coming together of the unlimited and the limited, where limited, in this case, meant man searching for the unlimited. Thus, Kiyozawa Manshi’s philosophy can be characterized as an exploration of the logical structure of religion.

To characterize the theories of Inoue Enryō and Kiyozawa Manshi solely as “combinations” of Western philosophy and Buddhism, and hence as “eclectic,” would be inadequate. Constructing philosophy is almost always done by using material or patterns from other philosophies or intellectual developments, and in that sense most philosophers can be said to be eclectic. Nor was Enryō’s use of Western philosophy simply an appeal to Western authority. Both Enryō and Manshi criticized the notion of *tetsugaku* as signifying an exclusively Western academic discipline. Both did use new Western philosophical vocabulary to recast Buddhism, but it is important to note that they also attempted to introduce Buddhist concepts into the language of *tetsugaku*. Their larger aim was to identify a central Buddhist philosophical formula that would *surpass* Western philosophy.

Thus far, I have discussed a number of the features of Meiji philosophy in the abstract. Now I will turn to the discussion on materialism in order to illustrate how the interpretative and classificatory problems of Meiji era philosophers informed concrete philosophical discourse.

IV. DISCUSSING MATERIALISM IN MEIJI JAPAN

Debates and discussions concerning materialism took place in the 1890s. It is important to note at the outset that these were not limited to materialism alone. Although materialism was the central philosophical point of discussion, the exchanges also involve the relations between philosophy, science, religion, ethics, and national identity; and suggest that there was more at stake than simply philosophy. The proponents knew each other well; both Inoue Enryō and his successor Kiyozawa Manshi had studied philosophy

under Katō Hiroyuki at Tōkyō University. Katō was, in fact, together with Katsu Kaishū, a major sponsor of Enryō's Philosophy Hall.

Materialism was an extremely influential theory in the nineteenth century, but less so among philosophers than others. Karl Vogt (1817–95), Jacob Moleschott, (1822–93) and Ludwig Büchner (1824–99) formed the classical triumvirate of an early materialist movement in the 1850s, while Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) has been, somewhat incorrectly, seen as the most famous proponent of a later materialism.

The materialists argued that their critique of Hegelianism, their atheism, their criticism of authority, and their monism were the results of science, not of philosophical speculation (hence the designation “*scientific materialism*”). Although evolution was in principle not materialist, it was often associated with it. The second phase of materialism was characterized by the appropriation of evolutionary theory. Haeckel, a professor of zoology at Jena, was very influential in Japan. Where evolutionism remained silent on the origins of life, Haeckel reduced the entire world, including mental, social, and political phenomena, to qualities of matter. Haeckel, however, held that matter was somehow animated, and his position can be described as a romantic monism.¹⁸

Katō Hiroyuki played a large role in the importation of German political theory into Japan, and was also one of the leading exponents of evolutionism. He based his theories for the most part on those of Spencer, Huxley, Büchner, and Haeckel. His theoretical ends are usually interpreted in ideological terms as attacks on the theory of natural rights employed by the Movement for Freedom and People's Rights.¹⁹ But he also aspired to be a systematic philosopher and wrote on metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

Katō's metaphysics were those of a radical materialist monism. He presented his monism as a negation of a range of dualisms often taken for granted. He argued that the distinctions nature/culture, nature/man, natural peoples/cultural peoples, and natural/artifact should ultimately be reduced to the “nature” side. Methodologically, Katō advocated positivism and scientism. His theory of evolution was comprehensive in that it attempted to explain evolution from the cosmological and geological levels

¹⁸ See Robert Richards's forthcoming *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁹ See Winston Bradley Davis, *The Moral and Political Naturalism of Baron Kato Hiroyuki* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1996), and Julia Adeney Thomas, *Reconfiguring Modernity: Concepts of Nature in Japanese Political Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

through various biological and social levels to the formation of the nation. Evolution on all these levels took place via the mechanisms of heredity, adaptation, and natural selection, and led to the development of ever more complex and interdependent structures.

According to Katō, egoism was the fundamental and only significant drive for all organisms, from single cells, animals, and humans to societies and nations. Cooperation between cells in an organism and individuals in societies only occurred because individuals “realized” that cooperation enhanced their own survival. Katō’s theory differed from other leading evolutionists, such as Darwin, in that altruism in its various manifestations was ultimately a further evolved form of egoism. Katō argued that the “social instincts” of altruism and morality only came into existence *after* society was formed. For him there was no static conception of man; as everything developed, so did man, society, and morality. Good and evil arose in societies and were nothing more than what respectively benefited or harmed society. And as societies differed and developed, so did notions of good and evil. Human rights were neither changeless eternal qualities (as in natural rights theory) nor invented artifacts. Rather, human rights came into existence through natural evolution.

An examination of Katō Hiroyuki’s critique of Christianity and Buddhism helps to explain the ferocity of Inoue Enryō’s attack on his theories. Katō marshalled a full range of arguments against Christianity, the most important being that Christianity was incompatible with science (evolution), and that because of its universalism, it made people unpatriotic.²⁰ Since Katō classified both Buddhism and Christianity as “universal religions,” the former was subject to some of the same criticisms leveled against the latter. The Buddhist notion of universal compassion was incompatible with the need for killing enemies of the nation, the necessity of which was hardly doubted in the years during and after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–95. Katō also argued that Buddhism was unscientific.

In 1895 Katō published a short article in *Tetsugaku Zasshi* in which he criticized the basis of Buddhist ethics.²¹ This critique led to a series of exchanges with the Buddhist proponents Kiyozawa Manshi, Unshō Rishshi, and Sakaino Tetsu. In sketching out the main presuppositions of Buddhism,

²⁰ For Katō’s critique of Christianity, see Yoshida Kōji, *Katō Hiroyuki no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Dōmeisha, 1990), 119–48.

²¹ “Bukkyō no iwayuru zenaku no inkaōhō ha shinri ni arazu,” published in *Katō Hiroyuki no bunshō* (Kyoto: Dōmeisha, 1990), 3: 187–91. See pp. 191–210 for Katō’s responses to Kiyozawa Manshi, Sakaino Tetsu, and Shaku Unshō. For an overview of the discussion, see also Yoshida, Kōji, *Katō Hiroyuki no kenkyū*, 149–80.

Katō noted that in Buddhist ethics good and evil were unchanging natural categories, and actions were governed by karma: good deeds led to good results and bad deeds to bad. Katō, however, argued that good and evil were concepts first formed in society; in other words, the process of social evolution was primary to ethics. And because societies differed from one another, so too did notions of good and evil. Also, it was clear that good and evil were only relevant for humans, so why should they exist before the advent of man? Katō also took the Buddhist notion of the impermanence of all things (*mujō*), and turned it against Buddhism: if all things were impermanent, that is, subject to change, so were possible laws of good and evil. The law of impermanence, too, was also subject to change.

Katō's critiques of Christianity and Buddhism were not exceptional for the time. But what is important is that Katō situated Buddhism exactly in the position that Enryō worked so hard to save it from: Buddhism and Christianity were similar in their harmful effects on the nation, and Buddhism was equally unscientific as Christianity. Enryō's entire project was to prove that *unlike* Christianity, Buddhism was a *philosophy*, or at least possessed a strong philosophical basis. Buddhism, therefore, was perfectly compatible with the latest scientific developments, and also was the essential ingredient for Japanese nationalism. We will now turn to Inoue Enryō's criticism of Katō's materialism and his later defense of Buddhism as a philosophy.

Inoue Enryō launched a strong attack against the materialist vogue in 1898, with the publication of *Against Materialism (Hayuibutsuron)*.²² Although Enryō did not mention Katō by name, his text was clearly an all-out attack against Katō's evolutionist materialism, monism, scientism, empiricism, and evolutionary ethics. Enryō objected to materialism on a variety of theoretical grounds and because of its detrimental effects on Japanese society. He argued that "popular materialism" was a general materialistic attitude which had grown significantly with the rise of capitalism in the Meiji period. In an uncharacteristically dramatic style, Enryō wrote that "I believe that this vogue of materialism will spread a more detrimental virus in society than cholera and dysentery."²³

He also accused the advocates of materialist philosophy of slavishly following the latest vogues of the West, and he contrasted Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintō to materialism. Together, these three traditions should together be nurtured and modernized in order to form a new Japa-

²² Inoue Enryō, *Hayuibutsuron*. In *Inoue Enryō Senshū* (Tōyōdaigaku, 1991), vol. 7.

²³ Inoue Enryō, *Hayuibutsuron*, 549.

nese *philosophy*. Although Enryō did not characterize materialism as such as “Western,” he did characterize the strong points of Eastern philosophy, in opposition to Western philosophy, as being more oriented towards the mind.

Enryō argued that the reduction of all phenomena to matter did not have any explanatory value, because in the end it remained unclear what matter actually was. Against reductionist forms of evolutionism he argued that, although the universe developed from the nebular, intelligence, life, morality, and so on must somehow have been present since the beginning. If not so, they could not have developed. Enryō often used an organic conception of development, somewhat akin to ideas in *Naturphilosophie*, when comparing evolution with the development from a seed to a full plant: just as the branches and flowers must somehow be present in the seed, so must life, consciousness, intelligence, and morality be present in a primordial form in the beginning in order to be able to develop. An important difference between Enryō and Katō concerned the relation between science and philosophy. Whereas Katō Hiroyuki endorsed scientism, Enryō argued that some aspects and domains fell outside the sphere of science.

In the second part of *Against Materialism*, Enryō constructed a philosophy which he claimed could compensate for what was lacking in evolutionism and corrected wrong views of materialism. Thus his philosophy was not opposed to evolution as such, but rather incorporated evolutionism in a modern version of Buddhist metaphysics, which he called a “new idealism” (*shin yuishikiron*) and an “energetic monism” (*yuiryoku ichigenron*). The two most significant inadequacies of evolutionary theory, according to Enryō, were first that it did not explain the origins and the end of evolution, and second that it could not explain the emergence of life and consciousness. Enryō presented his theory from two perspectives: one was to see evolution from the “objective” or the “outside;” the other was from the “subjective” or “inside.” These point of view, he maintained, correspond with two sides in the universe, and in man itself.

From the objective viewpoint, Enryō accepted evolutionary theory, but argued that evolution would eventually reach a point from where it would regress to its original state. The beginning and end of the universe were therefore the same. This allowed Enryō to contrast the Western (Christian) linear conception of time with the endless circle of time as taught by Buddhism.²⁴ He named this cycle the “Great Change” (*taika*). According to

²⁴ *Bukkyō katsuron honron*, 58–59, 176.

Enryō, the original state did not consist of matter, but of pure energy, which contained in latent form all forms of the world as we know it, including life and consciousness.

From the subjective perspective, the universe, as well as man, consisted of a core of pure thought-energy, which was gradually moving in concentric circles toward sensational energy, life-energy, and inorganic energy or what is usually called "matter." Evolution started from an original undifferentiated state in a centrifugal movement that moved towards the unlimited in order to maximize pure freedom, pure life, and pure consciousness. In this process, as in a river, the center moved faster than the sides, and the loss of momentum on the sides caused this pure energy to solidify and become matter. This matter resisted movement towards the absolute. This resistance stood for the determined aspects of nature, while the movement towards the absolute stood for pure freedom. In other words, there was a gradual differentiation between freedom and necessity.

This explains for Enryō why in man there was an inner core of pure reason and free will which tended towards the absolute, while there was a gradual solidifying in practical thinking, sensation (or the borderline between matter and mind), organic life and matter which tended to attach to the limited world. Philosophy and religion both sprang from this tendency in man towards the absolute. "Man is thus a religious animal and a philosophical animal."²⁵ Thus, in contrast to Katō's materialist dismissal of religion as a superstition and a construct, Enryō argued that religion was natural.

Enryō contrasted the three "philosophical" traditions of Buddhism, Shintō, and Confucianism with Christianity. In contrast to the Christian theory of creation, they saw the universe as an unfolding of the primordial and undifferentiated, and were therefore in accord with a nebula-theory of evolutionism. In Confucianism, Enryō found parallels between nebula and the Great Ultimate (*taikyoku*), and in the development of the universe from pure principle (*ri*) into pure *ki* and impure *ki*. In Shintō this was expressed by reference to the primordial chaos (*konton*) in the Japanese classic *Nihon-shoki*. Enryō equated the nebula with *Shinnyo*, which for him was Buddhism's central logical and metaphysical concept. In short, the universe was evolving from *Shinnyo* into the manifold *dharma* (*hō*), and would eventually return from the *dharma* back to *Shinnyo*.

From a purely philosophical perspective, these exchanges have, per-

²⁵ Inoue Enryō, *Hayuibutsuron*, 590.

haps, limited value. From a historical point of view, however, lest some the confusion in these debates be dismissed as pidgin-philosophy, their stakes and contours should be investigated. When so doing, it becomes clear that the instability of categories was one of the main problems involved.

In an age of science and evolution, Inoue Enryō and Kiyozawa Manshi both attempted to develop an approach to Buddhism that was compatible with evolutionary theory. As they proceeded, both collided with Katō Hiroyuki, who sought to dismiss Buddhism as an unscientific religion. Their discussions provide us with two quite different reactions to the development of science in the nineteenth century. Katō endorsed scientism in the course of formulating a materialist philosophy. Enryō and Manshi tied to preserve a domain for philosophy and religion that was, nevertheless, compatible with science. Thus, it was not the advent of science as such, but the materialist interpretation of scientific research by Katō which Manshi and Enryō saw as a threat to Buddhism's credibility since it denied them a space wherein Buddhism could operate as an idealist philosophy.

Although "philosophy" and "religion" were not stable categories in the West, in Japan and East Asia there was a particular form of instability because of the presence of indigenous systems of thought. In the debates over materialism we can see the interpretative problems lined out in the second section of this essay at work: the relation between indigenous traditions, in this case Buddhism, and the categories of philosophy/religion. The difference between Katō's classification of Buddhism and Enryō's was that Katō interpreted Buddhism as a religion, much on the same par as Christianity, a move that Enryō tried to avoid by depicting Buddhism as a philosophy that was compatible with science. In his reply to Enryō's *Against Materialism*, Katō argued against the characterization by Enryō of Shintō as a "philosophy." He also suggested that it was not necessary to preserve Confucianism and Buddhism simply because they were Asian or Japanese.²⁶

Although these definitional differences were not the center of these texts, they help us understand why debates over "materialism" and "evolutionism" in this period involved so many aspects other than the nature of the universe and evolution. Due to the specific context of Meiji-era philosophy, these exchanges did not take place on an exclusively "philosophical" level. The opposition of materialism/idealism intersected with classificatory distinctions, the consequences for national identity, and a generally strong orientation on society and ethics. The question for Enryō was not only

²⁶ Katō Hiroyuki, "Ha hayuibutsuron," in *Katō Hiroyuki no Bunshō*, 3: 337–48.

whether materialism was a good theory or not, but issues such as if Buddhism was unscientific and therefore to be dismissed, would the Japanese lose part of their national identity? What if Buddhism were reinterpreted as a philosophy? If so, how should it be understood the light of various philosophical distinctions such as idealism/materialism? In sum, the discussion concerning materialism and evolution was not only caused by philosophical interpretations of the rise of science, but also informed by specific interpretative problems concerning indigenous systems of thought.

V. CONCLUSIONS

When Nishi Amane coined the term *tetsugaku* in the early Meiji period, he limited it to Western philosophy. However, discussions soon arose as to whether or not indigenous traditions were, or included, philosophy, and whether Buddhism and Confucianism were religions or philosophies. This in turn sparked recastings of these traditions as "philosophy," most notably by Inoue Enryō, Kiyozawa Manshi, and Inoue Tetsujirō. With their conceptions of "Buddhist philosophy" and "Confucian philosophy," Enryō, Manshi, and Inoue Tetsujirō challenged the notion that "philosophy" was limited to the West, and argued that should also include non-Western thought. They did not posit an incomparable uniqueness for Japanese thought, but saw the history of ideas in more universal terms. Inoue Enryō and Inoue Tetsujirō both hoped for a synthesis of Western philosophy. In these debates, it was not the distinction or the categories that were rendered problematic, but the interpretation of Buddhism and Confucianism, and therefore the contents of the categories of "philosophy" and "religion" After the Meiji, *tetsugaku* came to refer to Western-style philosophy, while Buddhist and Confucian ideas would be referred to as *shisō*: "thought."

The problem for the study of Meiji philosophy is that this nomenclature caused later researchers to look at the period with this stabilized notion of *tetsugaku* in mind, to find little there of interest, and to conclude that this period was one "mere import and translation," or, in the case of Enryō, "syncretism." Scholars did not recognize that some of the main philosophical problems in this period were exactly the unstable nature of the categories of "philosophy" and "religion," and the dynamic interaction of Western philosophy with Buddhism and Confucianism. Thus Enryō has often been labeled as an "eclectic;" Manshi, until recently, has been studied in terms of the history of Buddhism as a religion; and Inoue Tetsujirō has,

at best, been regarded as a “historian” of Confucianism, but primarily as a bureaucrat and ideologue. But what these three thinkers had in common was that they broadened the category of *tetsugaku* to include Asian thought, and in the process reinterpreted those traditions philosophically.

When this other side of Meiji philosophy is brought to the forefront, our image of intellectual life in the period becomes more complex. Meiji philosophy cannot be reduced to the passive reception of foreign theories. Western philosophies were actively interpreted, appropriated, and discussed. They entered Japan in shockwaves, collided with indigenous values and thought systems, and provoked controversies, such as the debates over materialism. The latter included a range of positions on the place of philosophy vis-à-vis science, some similar to European discussions. But they also indicate that philosophical oppositions intersected with interpretative problems concerning the classification of Buddhism and Confucianism.

Concerning modern interpretations of Japanese philosophy, Sakai Naoki has argued that the development of histories of “Japanese thought” is part of the modern process of the construction of a national identity.²⁷ “Japanese thought” is constructed as object of study, rather than being the result of it. Here “the West” functions as an abstract point of reference, from which “Japanese thought” always differs. Although I agree with Sakai, I think it is necessary to emphasize the change in categories over time. We can see a historical shift from the Meiji era when designating earlier intellectual practices as “philosophy” was not uncommon, to a later period, beginning in the 1920s, when the same traditions were labeled as “thought” (*shisō*). The meaning of *tetsugaku* stabilized as a signifier for Western-style philosophy alone. Why this happened is still an open question. One could argue that the term *shisō* served different functions. In Japanese exclusivist thinking, the vagueness of *shisō* could more easily be used to designate incomparable difference from Western thought than could *tetsugaku*, with its strong Western connotations and academic criteria. It is striking that *shisō* came into vogue at a time when Japanese theories of exceptionalism began to flourish. In contrast to the Meiji Buddhists Enryō and Manshi, Suzuki Daisetsu (1870–1966) devoted much of his work to demonstrating that Buddhism was not “philosophy.” Rather, it was particularly “Eastern,” and essentially non-rational. He referred to Buddhist thought as *shisō*, and never *tetsugaku*. In contrast to Inoue Tetsujirō’s use of *tetsugaku* for Tokugawa Confucianism, the subsequent, celebrated intel-

²⁷ Sakai, Naoki. *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997).

lectual historian Maruyama Masao treated Tokugawa Confucianism as *shisō*. But *shisō* is not an exclusivist concept, as it also used for non-Japanese ideas. I would suggest that in contemporary Japan *shisō* is a practical device that allows for discussions about Buddhist and Confucian ideas while avoiding debates about “philosophy” or “religion,” or a successful strategy to avoid foreign categorization. One might construe this is a successful strategy to avoid foreign categorization.

Inoue Enryō “Temple of Philosophy” (*Tetsugakudō*) in Tokyo makes concrete his cohort’s challenge to the distinction between philosophy and religion. It has many of the external characteristics of a Buddhist temple, but is devoted to philosophy. It also has an educational function, as the visitor can take a dialectical walk through the garden of materialism, the slope of experience, the pond of monism, the point of the three teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintō, symbolized in unity as a roof with three pillars), the station of consciousness, and so on. The old library is called the “Castle of the Absolute.” The main hall is devoted to the four sages: Socrates, Kant, Buddha, and Confucius. This temple was to be the first in a nation-wide temple complex that formed the Religion of Philosophy, but that project was never finished. The Temple is still there, but is now officially a park, and is a forgotten remainder of some of Japan’s most dynamic years of philosophy.

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