

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Japanese philosophy? Our very title poses a problem in that even influential figures among those we might assume to have a vested interest, those we might otherwise confidently call “Japanese philosophers,” have long called into question the very existence of a body of work that would deserve the name.

Recall for example the lamentations of noted Meiji era thinker Nakae Tokusuke (pen name Nakae Chōmin), who declared in 1901 that “from antiquity to the present day, there has never been any philosophy in Japan” (8). Scholars of National Learning, he wrote, had done nothing but study ancient texts and imperial mausoleums, Confucianists had merely proposed new interpretations of the sages, and if some Buddhists had shown creativity, it had always been within the limitations of their religion. As for the Western-style thinkers among his contemporaries, all they were doing, he contended, was to parrot this or that European theory.

Some scholars would have it that a century after Nakae’s lament, there is still no Japanese philosophy. Listen, for example, to this remark of Sakamoto Hyakudai:

When asked at an international conference or some other occasion abroad to explain the essence of “Japanese Philosophy,” one cannot but experience a twinge of regret to have to respond that “There is no such thing; everything is imported, imitated.” (3)

Prominent thinkers Yoshimoto Takaaki, Umehara Takeshi, and Nakazawa Shinichi did little to allay doubts about the very existence of

Japanese philosophy when they named their joint 1995 work *Nihonjin wa shisō shita ka* (which we might translate as “Have the Japanese Done Philosophy?”). And another contemporary philosopher, Nakamura Yūjirō, goes as far as to ask rhetorically, “Is a Japanese philosophy possible?” before evincing some optimism that Japan can achieve the transition from what he terms its “culture of translation” to an authentic self-expression. Even if Nakamura comes to acknowledge the existence of Japanese philosophy today, like many Japanese intellectuals he would still hold that there was none before Nishida Kitarō’s 1911 *An Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no kenkyū*).

One had to wait for Nishida for a work that could disprove [Nakae] Chōmin’s judgment that there was no philosophy in Japan. . . . Nishida’s work is *the first* to deserve the name of philosophy. (Nakamura Yūjirō, *Philosophie*, 20, our translation)

That there might yet be no established body of thought that we can characterize as Japanese philosophy is surprising in the light of the wealth of other non-Western philosophies that have emerged. The first of these to appear, as long ago as the end of the eighteenth century, were Chinese philosophy and Indian philosophy. (Of course, these thought systems are really much older, dating back to approximately the same time as the emergence of Greek philosophy in the sixth century BCE. But it was only toward the end of the eighteenth century that these ancient thought systems appeared as something called “philosophy,” that is, labeled and packaged as Chinese or Indian “philosophy.”) In the twentieth century the proliferation of non-Western thought systems laying claim to the term *philosophy* has intensified: Beginning around 1960, there appeared for the first time discussions of “African philosophy,” “Native American philosophy,” and, more interesting from the standpoint of the discussion of Japanese philosophy, something called “Korean philosophy,” which has comfortably assumed that name despite its own indebtedness to the “imported” and the “imitated.”

What is particularly surprising about the lack of anything packaged as “Japanese philosophy” is Japan’s wealth of literature of the sort elsewhere classified without demur as “philosophy.” This contrasts with such cases as African philosophy and Native American philosophy, which terms have found their place in academia despite a great deal of often heated debate as to whether there was anything in sub-Saharan Africa or pre-Columbian North America that could be reasonably classified as philosophy, especially as these peoples had no written literature until contact with European cultures in the modern period. In this respect the Japanese case would seem far less controversial. The same sorts of texts that are

included within, and classified as, Indian, Chinese, and Korean philosophy are amply represented in Japanese literature. Nor has this literature been in any way hidden or “lost.” It has simply been packaged and classified in other ways—as “literature,” “culture,” and so on, but not as “philosophy.”

Yet why should this be so? Why is it that Japan fails to fit the mold of other cultures eager to claim for their rich intellectual questings the title of “philosophy”? As a first step toward determining the principal reasons for this, let us recall how the notion of “philosophy,” as known in the West, first took shape in the Japanese intellectual world during the Meiji period (1868–1911). At that time the Japanese government was encouraging the wholesale importation of Western intellectual culture, including something called “philosophy,” which was conceived as being exclusively Western (Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Kant, Hegel, and so on).

To designate this newly-introduced Western study, Nishi Amane introduced in 1874 a new word, *tetsugaku* (a shortened form of *kitetsugaku*), which he formed using two Chinese characters, or *kanji*, meaning the “science of seeking wisdom.” The first philosophy instructors were foreigners, who began to arrive three years later, and it was not until 1893 that they began to be replaced by Western-trained Japanese professors of philosophy. Naturally, this fostered the idea that that thing called philosophy was a strictly Western product standing alongside other Western disciplines such as chemistry, physics, and biology. Philosophy (*tetsugaku*), in other words, was perceived as a part of the foreign knowledge that Japan felt it needed in order to compete with the West and avoid being colonized by the aggressive Western powers.

Here, however, we are merely recalling an initial stage in which the Japanese saw philosophy and their indigenous thought as separate fields. This does little to explain why intellectuals since the Meiji Restoration have not wanted to join the Indians, Chinese, Koreans, and others in claiming for certain parts of their ancient literature the honorific title of “philosophy.” After all, the same two Chinese characters for the word *tetsugaku* (which the Chinese pronounce *zhu-shway*—pinyin, *zhe xue*) were also adopted by the Chinese around 1900 to mean philosophy, but whereas the Japanese used this term to refer only to Western thinkers, the Chinese ultimately came to accept that it should be used to refer not only to the likes of Aristotle and Kant, but also to the ancient Asian philosophers, including their own Kongzi (Confucius), Mengzi (Mencius), Zhuangzi, Laozi, Mozi, and so on.

The comparison of the Japanese and Chinese cases is both interesting and instructive. In China, too, many scholars initially thought that *zhe xue* (*tetsugaku*) was one of the Western *sciences*, and was therefore something previously nonexistent in either China or Japan except in very rudimentary

form. However, as it gradually became clearer, partially through the efforts of John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, who visited China just after World War I, that Western philosophy was not a science but a metaphysical and speculative world view based largely on a sense of cultural values, Chinese scholars began to see greater similarities between Western philosophy and ancient Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, and so on.

The final shift in definition was achieved following the great debates on this issue of 1922–1923, in which the dominant figures were Liang Shuming (*The Civilizations of Orient and Occident and Their Philosophies*, published in 1922 and using for the first time the term *zhe xue*) and Chang Chunmai (Carson Chang, *Science and the Philosophy of Life*, 1925). Chinese intellectuals now reached the consensus that much ancient Chinese writing (Confucian, Taoist, and some Buddhist texts) should indeed be considered *zhe xue* and that *zhe xue* must be divided into Western, Indian, and Chinese, each representing different value orientations or *Weltanschauungen* of these different cultures. Since philosophy was now deemed not a science but rather the expression of cultural values, Liang and his group successfully argued that the Chinese should embrace Western science but continue to espouse Chinese philosophy.

So, while Europeans began to refer to some Chinese writing as philosophy in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the Chinese themselves did not begin to refer to their own ancient writing by the term by which they translated “philosophy” until 1923.

Liang Shuming was probably the first to advance the idea, so popular today, that the philosophical systems of respective cultures represent different value systems, and are therefore a good way to understand the “spirit,” character, or temperament of each given people. As Dewey and Russell had pointed out, philosophy is not science. Insofar as the sciences deal with hard facts and rigorous mathematical proof, they will be the same anywhere. Philosophy, on the other hand, insofar as it is concerned with values and metaphysical speculation, will vary from culture to culture. Liang took this to mean that one could use philosophy as a tool to learn about other cultures. What are the Indian people fundamentally like? What is their character, or temperament? One way to find out is to study their philosophy. Thus, the idea arose, from around 1923, that philosophy is culture-bound and a good culture indicator. A leading writer in this movement was the Japanese author Nakamura Hajime, who argued in his very influential *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (written in the 1940s but not published until 1964) that each people has a distinctive conception or way of “seeing” the world that defines each as a distinct cultural entity.

The similarity of views of Liang and Nakamura was not, however, accompanied by a common use of the terms *tetsugaku* and *zhe xue*. Despite

their common origin, these terms continued in their divergent destinies. If *tetsugaku* never came to have the broader definition *zhe xue* acquired through the influence of Dewey and Russell and the Chinese debates, a major factor in this was a difference in the respective degree of allegiance felt in Japan and China toward their own intellectual traditions. In Japan the zestful embracing of Western disciplines from around 1870, accompanied by a shift in state education policy away from Chinese learning (neo-Confucianism) toward Western learning, was conducive to the association of “philosophy” and the Occident.

The loss of favor suffered by neo-Confucianism at this time was facilitated by the fact that it was not truly indigenous. When, beginning in the Sui dynasty (seventh century), Chinese culture had appeared to the Japanese as superior in certain ways, they had imported it with enthusiasm, but with Western learning similarly appearing to have the edge a thousand years later, it now seemed advantageous to the Japanese to wholeheartedly adopt it in turn (and in so doing reject Chinese traditional thought). Later, in the Taishō period, a new nationalist trend began to take only the Western learning necessary for science, technology, and economics, reaffirming for morality, social relations, and lifestyle traditional culture of Nipponese (not Chinese) origin.

In China, by contrast, the resistance to Western learning and the loyalty to Chinese traditions were much stronger, leading to a long and lively debate between near equals from 1880 to the 1920s, which, as indicated above, finally ended in a compromise: to embrace Western science and technology and to retain (and reinterpret) traditional Chinese moral and social thought (i.e., “Chinese philosophy”), especially Confucianism. For the Chinese, whose cultural identity is enduringly linked with ancient Chinese thought systems, the shift from Chinese to Western has been far less easy than in Japan, and, even today, far less uniform.

It should be said that in neither China nor Japan was the policy on these issues the result of an immediate and unanimous decision. On the contrary, in both countries it was a fiercely contentious issue. On the one hand, some Chinese wanted to abandon *all* Chinese traditional learning (both scientific and moral, social, and political); while, at the same time, a powerful lobby of “liberals” in Japan almost succeeded in their advocacy of Western ideals of democracy, in addition to Western science, technology, and economics. On the other hand, there were in both China and Japan influential conservatives who advocated the complete rejection of all Western influence. As we now know, both countries ultimately embraced a compromise, accepting Western science, technology, and economics, while keeping their indigenous moral, social, and political culture. For the Chinese, this meant retaining their ancient philosophy; for the Japanese it

entailed a reaffirmation of fidelity to their ancient pre-Chinese (and *non-philosophical*) traditions, manifested in a growing emphasis on Shintō.

What we have just said may satisfactorily explain the divergent emphases of *zhe xue* and *tetsugaku*, but does it really explain the continued eschewing of the term *philosophy* by Japanese to refer to Japanese traditional thought? After all, for all the enthusiasm displayed toward Western ideas this was not unanimous, and one could hardly say that the non-Western traditions in Japan have vanished or been forgotten. Moreover, even if the rejection of traditions had been total, Japanese philosophers from the Meiji era onward would still have had ample opportunity to review their country's thought and establish an account of it as a retrospective history of Japanese philosophy.

At this point, we might try pursuing a different line of inquiry. If we examine non-Western philosophies that have emerged, we find that a major motive in their elaboration has been the redressing of wounded cultural pride. In reaction to centuries of colonial and near-colonial rule by overbearing and ethnocentric European masters, intellectuals of suppressed nations justifiably strove to restore their peoples' cultural dignity. For many years, Chinese and Indian intellectuals had been told that their own culture was worthless or at least vastly inferior to that of Europeans. Finally, they reacted by sifting through their ancient literature, selecting the best examples, and packaging for the first time a new grouping that they could point to with pride as Chinese philosophy, or Indian philosophy. Other colonized peoples in the South Seas, Africa, and elsewhere followed suit: they had ancient oral wisdom literature; why should not this, too, be considered philosophy?

In this connection, what can we say of the Japanese case? Certainly we can point to individual works such as Okakura Tenshin's 1904 English work *The Awakening of Japan* and Watsuji Tetsurō's 1935 *Fūdo (Climate and Culture)*, which initiated a fresh emphasis on Japanese values in what can be seen as a reaction against the earlier passion for European learning. But, again, what we do not find is the comprehensive formulation *après coup* of a Japanese philosophical tradition. Could it be because they were never colonized or humiliated by Western imperialists that the Japanese never felt the need for such a comprehensive philosophic self-assertion? Could it be that they simply took it for granted that their culture was as good as or better than any other, except in the areas of science and technology that alone could yield the military strength necessary to resist European incursion? Each culture tends naturally to be ethnocentric, and at least as far as arts and letters are concerned, not to mention myths of superior national origins, the Japanese could be as spontaneously ethnocentric as anyone. Could it be, indeed, that they

found the means of intellectual independence not by elaboration of philosophy but by assertion of myth? In later chapters we will return to this issue, but for now we can at least posit this as a plausible answer to our key question.

Yet another reason might be offered why Japanese scholars have not attempted to package parts of their traditional writing as philosophy (*tetsugaku*). We have seen that following the work of Liang Shuming and Nakamura Hajime in the 1920s and 1930s, it was widely accepted that philosophy was the expression of the value orientation of each culture. However, this can be interpreted in one of two ways, according to the precise sense we accord the term *philosophy*. Sometimes the word refers to a general outlook or attitude toward life (as in “my mother’s philosophy of life”), while at other times it denotes a scholarly discipline acquired by training and practiced by technical specialists (as in “studying philosophy at university,” “reading a philosophy book”).

According to the first interpretation, since each distinctive culture necessarily has its own value system, each distinctive culture necessarily has, in a broad sense, its own philosophy, regardless of whether this has been written down in some analytical, logical, systematic form or not. The second, equally plausible, interpretation is that while each distinctive culture has its own value orientation or way of seeing the world, this need not be expressed philosophically (that is, in the restricted sense), but can be equally well expressed mythologically, religiously, artistically, poetically, and so on, philosophy in the restricted sense being only one of the possibilities.

Any cultural group wishing to overturn Western Eurocentric cultural imperialism must decide which of these two ways to go. Formerly colonized African peoples, for example, can argue either that their oral wisdom literature (proverbs, myths, etc.) should be regarded as philosophy, or, following the Negritude movement, that in contrast to Europeans, who are cerebral, analytical, abstract, and in that narrow sense “philosophical,” African people are more feeling, holistic, contextually oriented, and have therefore developed a more rhythmic, musical understanding of the world. Similarly, women’s groups today can argue either that there is a feminist philosophy, which a male-dominated power structure has suppressed up to now, or that women see the world in a more emotional, holistic, contextual way that is fundamentally different from the masculine analytic, cerebral, abstract way that leads to what we know traditionally as philosophy. In every case what has previously not been called philosophy compares itself to what has traditionally been called philosophy. One then argues either that the term *philosophy* should be extended to include what had previously been unrecognized as such, or else that the term *philosophy* should be reserved for certain types of highly analytic,

logically articulated thought systems and not extended to include alternative approaches to the world that are more holistic, contextual, integrative, and more in touch with emotion.

It is in this second way that most Japanese intellectuals have interpreted the theory of cultural *Weltanschauungen*. When Japanese intellectuals, such as Nakamura Hajime, approached the question of what was distinctive about their culture, how it differed from others, they concluded that it was not, on the whole, logical, analytical, abstract, intellectual, and philosophical, but was rather sensual, integrative, and aesthetic. Of course, they acknowledged that Japanese had over the centuries borrowed and made use of a great deal of Chinese philosophical thought, but that was not considered the strong point of Japanese culture; that was not what the Japanese did best. If the Indians and to a certain extent the Chinese approached the world rationally, intellectually, abstractly, analytically, the Japanese genius was to see the world in concrete, sensuous, holistic, and aesthetic terms. This vision and approach was thought to be in no way inferior to, and indeed was thought to be in a certain "romantic" way superior to, the more cerebral, analytical approach of the West and to a lesser extent those of India and China. The title of Nakamura's book is instructive in this regard. He does not title his work "*Philosophies of Eastern Peoples*" but "*Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*." (Of course, all of this presupposes the stability of the long tradition restricting the technical use of the word *philosophy* to logical rigor and analysis, but in chapter 5 we will consider the postmodern challenge to this "logocentric" conception of philosophy and explore the implications for Japanese philosophy.)

Clearly, if, in accordance with Nakamura's outlook, the specifically Japanese elements in Japan's intellectual heritage are to be subsumed in the notion "ways of thinking," while the term *philosophy* is to be restricted to the narrower "logocentric" sense explained above, with all such thought in Japan supposedly "imported and imitated," be it from China, Korea, or Europe, then we may yield, momentarily, to the view that no, there has never been any such thing as "Japanese philosophy." Perhaps the term does not refer to anything distinctively Japanese, but simply to imported Chinese philosophy and, later, imported Western philosophy. Earlier we stated that *tetsugaku* was used exclusively to speak of imported Western thought. Having noted the influence of Liang Shuming in tracing the world's philosophical schools back to three original ones, the Greek, Indian, and Chinese, we might now surmise that Japanese intellectuals saw their non-Western thought as simply falling into the Chinese camp. Moreover, following Nakamura Hajime's line of thought, the Chinese thought imported to Japan remained, by its abstract character,

fundamentally foreign to the Japanese way of thinking. The implication of all this is that there has been no Japanese philosophical originality.

This is, however, a contestable argument in that assenting to a common origin does not preclude the emergence or the recognition of originality. Acknowledging the debt to China would not logically prevent Japanese intellectuals from arguing for a Japanese philosophy as a distinct philosophy deriving from Chinese thought, in the same way that French, German, British, and even American intellectuals argue that they have distinct national philosophies, even though each of these can be ultimately traced back to the Greeks.

It is probably true that there are only three independent origins of philosophy, China, Greece, and India, all at roughly the same time (600 BCE). But whenever a subsequent group of people is able to transform any one of these original philosophies, adapting it to their own indigenous culture so that it becomes a stable, ongoing indigenous tradition in its own right, then we speak appropriately of Roman philosophy, British philosophy, and even of American philosophy. American philosophy appears at that extra remove when it is sufficiently different from British and German philosophy, addressing itself to peculiarly American concerns in a distinctly American style or voice, and when that way of doing philosophy and those sets of concerns become an ongoing stable tradition in their own right, something that did not occur in the United States until the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Before that there was British and German philosophy being done within the geographical area of North America but nothing that could properly be called American philosophy. The well-known twentieth-century Chinese philosopher, Fung Yulan, similarly distinguished Buddhism in China (Indian Buddhism that appears in China during the first and second centuries) and Chinese Buddhism (a distinctively Chinese style of Buddhism that does not appear until the fourth and fifth centuries).

Why should we not make a similar distinction between “continental Asian philosophy in Japan” and “Japanese philosophy of continental Asian derivation”? Might Japan be exceptional in some way so that its borrowed philosophy never matured into a local product? As we shall see, a case might be made that it is, based on allegations of a fundamental weakness in the very manner in which Japanese intellectuals assimilate foreign thought. This is the view we encountered at the outset, that there is no original Japanese philosophy because all philosophy in Japan is imported, translated, imitated, and so on.

Nonetheless, we reject this view, the fallacy of which can be ascribed to two things. The first of these is the exaggeration of an admittedly strong tendency to translate with little critical contribution. Ōe Kenzaburō, who

sees this tendency as having subsisted from the Meiji era to the present day, writes:

There was an inclination for people to think that an intellectual effort had been accomplished merely by transplanting or translating the new American and European cultural thoughts into Japanese; and both the translators and those who read the translations were inclined to think in the same manner. (204)

According to Ōe, this inclination resulted in the “diachronic, one-dimensional acceptance and discharge of new cultural theories . . . ; with only a few exceptions, the Japanese were not able to establish a cultural theory of their own” (209). In philosophy too, the exceptions may be few, but they count.

Secondly, we must point to a simplistic notion of translation itself. Examining the supposed lack of philosophy in Japan, Nakamura Yūjirō, in terms that recall those of Ōe, attributes it to an emphasis on the history of philosophy, philology, and the translation of foreign philosophers. Japan, he stresses, is a “culture of translation.” Now, it may be that in restricted areas of philosophy, such as logic, a pure translation is possible. But much of what was translated to Japanese from Chinese and Korean, and from European tongues, dealt with epistemology, axiology, and other fields in which texts were redolent with implications of the cultures from which they had emerged. In the translation of this sort of writing, what is received is rarely the same as what is given. Even the furnishing of a fresh lexicon of Japanese words, for example, could not prevent Western philosophies from acquiring a fresh resonance within the cultural *Weltanschauung* of Japan.

In many cases, given the tendency mentioned above to translate without adequately considering local cultural applications, such ideas did indeed remain “remote” (Ōe’s word) from Japanese realities. But where any attempt was made to creatively reformulate the foreign ideas, the new text could not but be distinctively Japanese. In other words, the notion that in truly entering Japanese cultural life, foreign philosophies could indefinitely retain the precise character proper to their foreign origins is difficult to accept and goes against all we know about acculturation. In general, we know that people are seldom aware of their own cultural biases as they translate from a foreign culture into their own. The tendency, for anyone, is to imagine we are “objectively” translating, merely transcribing, whereas it is clear to others (and perhaps to ourselves later) that we have unconsciously imposed on our transcription the indelible imprint of our own cultural *Weltanschauung*.

As we shall see, this notion of a purely “objective” translation also goes against the evidence: Chinese philosophy in Japan became something

other than Chinese; Buddhism in Japan became something other than Chinese and Indian; European philosophy in Japan became something other than European. Just as the country's monks and scholars had done in centuries past when poring over freshly-acquired volumes from the Asian mainland, the earliest practitioners of Western-style philosophy in Japan were bound subtly to modify their subject despite themselves. As we shall see (in a similar way again to the case with Asian sources), this modification later became part of a conscious project as Japanese thinkers chose to use Western modes of expression to express local ideas and values.

Another way to put this is that what we have respectively called philosophy in the broad sense and philosophy in the narrow sense are rarely independent. It is true that philosophy in the technical sense sets out to critique the ambient world view, that is, what we may call philosophy in the broad sense, pressing for justification, pointing out contradictions, demanding clarity in vague areas, and so on. But in so doing it also reflects the cultural preconceptions of its exponents and in that sense tends to sustain an already existing set of beliefs, values, and attitudes. Thus, philosophy in the narrow sense both critiques and reflects philosophy in the broad sense. It is because the *Weltanschauung* thus pervades philosophy in the narrow sense that where the latter is brought in from an alien tradition, it loses its pristine character of the "imported." Chinese or Western philosophy imported into Japan is used by Japanese to reflect on, rationalize, clarify, justify their own indigenous Japanese *Weltanschauung* (that is, philosophy in the broad cultural sense). In that sense, imitation, too, is invention.

We can now perceive the validity of the term *Japanese philosophy* in the narrow, technical sense. Although it is debatable precisely how deeply Chinese and Western philosophy took root in Japanese soil, we think it will be clear in the chapters to come that there is a large body of Japanese writing that is both sufficiently philosophical and sufficiently Japanese to qualify as "Japanese philosophy." And despite the ongoing controversy whether, in the end, Japanese intellectuals accepted or rejected the rational and analytic "logocentric" style of much Indian, Western, and Chinese philosophy, there is no question that Japanese thinkers have been deeply engaged philosophically in these issues and, along with many Western, Indian, and Chinese philosophers, have contributed enormously to the ongoing critique of philosophy as the citadel of Reason. We can therefore state unequivocally that before the modern period (Meiji, 1868) we see a Japanese philosophy deriving from the Chinese (and Korean, which in turn ultimately derives from Chinese) and in the modern period a Japanese philosophy influenced by and contributing to the Western tradition.

What we propose to do in this book is, to our knowledge, unprecedented: to package, *as* philosophy, significant parts of Japan's intellectual tradition that we judge to merit the term, including much that has hitherto been subsumed under "literature" or "religion." In doing this we shall be referring to material that is familiar to anyone who has studied Japanese cultural history. We shall not be bringing to light any lost texts. We shall simply be putting this existing, well-known material together as philosophy. If we allow the existence of "Arabic philosophy," or "Korean philosophy," what is to prevent our proposing a Japanese philosophy?

Why, one might wonder, should we do this? What difference does it make whether these texts are called philosophy or not? Our response would be that to understand any culture, we need to be able to compare it to others, and in comparing cultures we must always attempt, as far as possible, to compare equals with equals. We need to be able to compare Japanese poetry with the poetry of other cultures, Japanese religion with the religion of other cultures, Japanese art with the art of other cultures, and in this sense it would be helpful to compare Japanese philosophy with the philosophy of other cultures.

Of course, this still leaves us to decide our criteria for what is to count as "philosophy." How will we know what to include and what to exclude? We have already seen that the word *philosophy* is commonly used in two senses: a very broad sense and a narrow, specialized one. In the broad sense, we may say that every person and every culture necessarily has a particular philosophy, where this means a general sense of things and how they ought to be, an inarticulate and undeveloped sense of values, a general and intuitive *Weltanschauung*, which might appear in a culture's myths, legends, popular sayings, songs, poetry, art, and so on. To study the philosophy of an ethnic group in this broad sense would be the work of a social anthropologist trying to derive from these elements some sense of the general outlook and basic attitudes of the group as a whole. Such research might conclude, for example: "They tend to see the world as threatening," or, "They see themselves as divinely appointed to lead their neighbors." This is not, however, what we would expect to learn, except incidentally, in a study of French or German philosophy. Here we would be looking for a particular kind of written text, by an identifiable author (Descartes, Kant, Hegel, for example), logically and systematically developing a more or less original view with which other individual philosophers could then disagree in whole or in part, and thus contributing to a tradition, or history of philosophical theories sharing a common methodology of rational scrutiny and the imperative of logical justification.

If we are thinking of philosophy in this latter narrow, specialized sense, as something comparable to British, or French, or American philosophy,

then this must be our criterion in selecting material for inclusion in Japanese philosophy. As Kwasi Wiredu has said in talking about African philosophy, we must compare equals with equals. Hence, it would be misleading to compare German philosophy in the narrow sense with Japanese philosophy in the broad sense. If we want to talk about the social psychology of the Japanese (how they think, how they tend to act, what their basic values, attitudes, etc. are), then we will want to compare this with the Germans' social psychology (the fact that they tend to be well-organized, disciplined, or whatever), rather than with the writings of Immanuel Kant, for example. In this book we are interested in comparing Japanese philosophy in the narrow, technical sense with Indian, Western, and Chinese philosophy in the narrow, technical sense. As we will see, *all* philosophy in the narrow, technical sense is related to philosophy in the broad, sociological sense in that the former is a reflection on and refinement of the latter. But this is no more true of Japanese philosophy than it is of Chinese or Indian or Western philosophy.

In this second sense of "philosophy," European philosophy arose at a particular point in Greek history. Greeks before Thales did not have philosophy in this second sense. And if the Greeks before Thales had no philosophy or philosophers, it is possible that this was true of other societies and cultures as well. By the same token, however, just as philosophy did arise in European culture at a particular time and place, so it is possible that philosophy arose at various moments in other, non-European cultures. In this second sense of "philosophy," it may turn out that some cultures have philosophy and some do not, and we cannot dogmatically assert before examining the facts either that all cultures must have philosophy or that none do except European cultures. We must patiently and empirically look at each culture to see whether it does or does not have philosophy, and, of course, if it does, then we will naturally want to study it, either alongside European philosophy or perhaps by incorporating all the different regional philosophies into a more comprehensive world philosophy.

Of course, this way of defining philosophy might be challenged as being ethnocentric and Eurocentric. The question of whether there is any non-European philosophy was originally one raised by European philosophers about some other, non-European group, and this certainly raises the possibility of cultural bias. Whose conception or definition of philosophy are we using when we ask of the thought systems of other cultures whether they count as philosophy? Well, naturally, with our own, Western, European philosophy. And, of course, a lot is at stake in this question. Philosophy is an enormously value-laden term. To say that a culture did not develop a philosophy sounds demeaning and to say that they had a philosophy sounds like a compliment. As each region of our

planet tries to define itself in the postcolonial period in as positive a manner as possible, it becomes highly sensitive to pejorative or belittling assessments of its own culture, especially those assessments made by outsiders (and even more so those made by former colonial masters).

But the reason we use our own value-laden conception of philosophy is that this is all we have, at least at the beginning! From the beginning of the discussion of the possibility of non-Western philosophy, *philosophy* is a Western term. One might note minor variations of meaning among its cognates: the French *philosophie*, for example, has its own specific associations of the encyclopedists arising from the Enlightenment, but whether practicing “philosophy,” *philosophie*, or *filosofia*, the Western scholar treads essentially the same path, inspired by the same “love of wisdom” (in Greek: *philosophia*) and using a term whose meaning has been determined by Western thought.

For better or worse, any description of another culture’s thought systems must be comparative, entailing the comparison of their thought with our own, whoever “we” and “they” may be. Since Europeans or European-trained scholars are the speakers, they must use their language (with the standard meanings of their words, terms, and concepts) to talk about (and judge) non-European thought systems. If Indian or Chinese intellectuals began the discussion, exactly the same principle would apply; they would use their respective language, each with its distinctive web of meanings, taking account of European concepts by comparing these with concepts of their own, ever referring to homegrown notions as models and standards.

Perhaps Hindu scholars asked Alexander’s generals whether there were any *rishis* among the Greeks. We can imagine Marco Polo trying to satisfy the curiosity of Yuan dynasty Confucian administrators concerning the presence or absence in Europe of *zi*. “We have a long tradition,” they might say, “of important thinkers we call *zi*—Kongzi, Mengzi, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Mozi, Xunzi, Han Feizi, and many others, who have made our culture great. What about you? Do you have any *zi* among your people?” We can imagine Marco Polo’s dilemma; it is hard to say “yes” and hard to say “no.” It is hard to say yes since there really is no tradition in Europe identical or even very similar to the Chinese *zi*. There were European saints, and academics, for example, but these are not the same as *zi*. On the other hand, if he admits there are no European *zi*, he seems to belittle his own culture, admitting, in effect, that his people had produced none of those intellectual giants prerequisite to a great culture.

Initially, then, there is no alternative but for the culture initiating the investigation to use its own concepts to approach the culture under scrutiny. Because of European military, economic, scientific, and technological hegemony during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was

Europeans who judged Chinese and Indian cultures by comparing them to their own European standards. From now on, as Europeans learn enough to recognize significant similarities between their thought systems and those of China and India, and begin to consider them together, it is likely that European concepts will be influenced by Asian ones and vice versa, and that all these will undergo a gradual modification and mutual accommodation toward the others. Comparing Asian thought with Western philosophy might, for example, shift the European sense of the center of philosophy farther from the more rigorous, scientific, analytic regions of philosophy (Aristotle, Descartes, etc.) and toward the more mystical and wisdom-oriented European philosophers (Epicurus, Epictetus, Spinoza, Kierkegaard, etc.). In chapter 5 we will explore the possibility that this is already occurring, in the alliance of postmodernism's attack on "logocentrism" with a heightened regard for Japan's holistic and aesthetic traditional culture. But initially, if Europeans begin the investigation, then they must begin with their own language and their own cultural baggage, with all the admitted dangers of bias and misunderstanding that this approach inevitably involves. To understand another culture is necessarily to misunderstand it, at least at the beginning and to a certain extent.

This is true more generally. All cultural descriptions are comparative; unavoidably culture A must use A's words and concepts to describe culture B. Even when we ask about Japanese *religion*, "religion" is, after all, an English word that we are trying to impose on an alien culture. Perhaps people of that culture have no word that translates exactly as our word *religion*. A similar case is that of "African art" or "American Indian art." The very question, "What kind of art did the American Indians have?" presupposes something that may well be false. It assumes that the American Indians not only made things that we see as fitting our concept (in English) of "art," but also had themselves a similar concept, that is, a word reasonably accurately translated as "art," a word that they understood to mean something very much like what we understand the word *art* to mean.

One reason it may well be a mistake to think that other cultures have concepts such as art and religion is that these concepts in English and other European languages presuppose a division of society and culture into distinct functional regions, such as exists in our culture. Art is thus seen as more or less separated from religion, which is in turn more or less separated from agricultural, military, political, and scientific concerns. In many cultures, no such separation ever took place, and in cultures where what we call artistic activities are inseparable from religious, agricultural, military, and political activities, concepts like our concept of art and religion

simply do not arise. In such cultures it makes no sense (even if you speak their language and they yours) to ask, "What is your religion, what is your art?" They may make wooden statues for ancestor spirits to temporarily "occupy," and to which they make offerings of food and drink, and of which they ask (that is, "pray") for help for a successful harvest, battle, or marriage; but they have no sense of which part of this complex is their "art," which part is "religion," which part is "agriculture," and so on. These questions will make no sense to them, though they will, of course, make sense to us. *We* are the ones interested in their "art" and "religion." Even in the cases of art and religion, then, where it might seem obvious that all cultures and societies have something separably identifiable under both concepts, the possibility of bias and misunderstanding arising from cross-cultural comparison presents a serious problem.

Suppose we now return to the word *philosophy*, as defined in our second sense (that is, as a critical, reflective, rational, and systematic approach to questions of very general interest), and apply that definition to different thought systems around the world. As mentioned earlier, by applying this definition of philosophy as a criterion, at least three independent original thought systems would seem to qualify—Greek, Indian, and Chinese, all arising around 500 BCE.

Cultures that are not philosophical in this sense are those that tend to accept their own mythological world view simply on the authority of tradition. "We believe this because it is our ancient belief; our people have always believed this." Philosophy, by contrast, arises precisely at that point when, for various reasons, that traditional outlook is called into question. "We have always been taught to see the world in this way, but how can we be sure that this is really correct?" At this point individual philosophers come forward with the boldness and the audacity, and we might even say the arrogance, to start utterly afresh, questioning everything, assuming nothing, and confident that they can figure it all out by themselves! No longer do we say, "This is how our people see the world," but rather, "Anaximander advanced this theory; Thales held another view; Aristotle disagreed with both and developed a radically different position." Or, to give a second example: "Gaozi denied there was any human nature; Mengzi held that there was a human nature that was fundamentally good; Xunzi agreed with Mengzi (against Gaozi) that there was a human nature, but disagreed with Mengzi that it was fundamentally good." Far from a traditional uniformity of opinion, the onset of philosophy, whether in China, India, or Greece, is generally marked by a proliferation of many different, competing views, whose proponents engage in endless debates, arguing for their favorite doctrines and against all the others.

But why should we believe any of these philosophers with their new and radically different ideas? Certainly not from any traditional authority, but only from the weight of rational evidence that they adduce. In this sense early Greek, Indian, and Chinese thinkers tried to prove their individual theories by carefully defining their terms, by drawing distinctions, and by constructing arguments for their positions and counterarguments against the positions of their opponents. Notice how Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan characterizes the beginnings of Indian philosophy.

The age of Buddha (596–483 BCE) represents the great springtide of philosophic spirit in India. The progress of philosophy is generally due to a powerful attack on a historical tradition when men feel themselves compelled to go back on their steps and raise once more the fundamental questions which their fathers had disposed of by the older schemes. The revolt of Buddhism and Jainism . . . forms an era in the history of Indian thought, since it finally exploded the method of dogmatism and helped to bring about a critical point of view. For the great Buddhist thinkers, logic was the main arsenal where were forged the weapons of universal destructive criticism. . . . The conservative schools were compelled to codify their views and set forth logical defenses of them. The critical side of philosophy became as important as the speculative. (17)

Of course, this characterization represents only the beginning stages of philosophy, when it first arises in Greece, China, and India. Later, its criticism of tradition itself becomes traditional, so that later Greek and Roman philosophy, as well as later Chinese and Indian philosophy, become orthodox and conservative. When alien cultures borrow these original philosophies, they generally receive them in their well-established, conservative late phase. To the Romans, Greek philosophy was a highly revered, virtually complete system of thought. As we will see, Chinese philosophy was introduced into Japan with much the same aura of an established tradition. It is also true that there occur from time to time within well-defined philosophical traditions, whether Indian, Chinese, or Western, philosophical movements (romantic, existentialist, etc.) that philosophically challenge philosophy itself, calling into question the privileged role of reason as the final arbitrator of Truth and Goodness. But where this is carried out philosophically, using logic to combat logic, analysis to overcome analysis, reason to recognize the limits of reason, it, too, has an important place within philosophy, however short-lived these revolts against the “logocentric” mainstream of philosophy may have been.

This, then, is our working definition of “philosophy,” as critical, logical, and systematic, and it is this more narrow and technical sense of philosophy that we will use in our reconstruction of Japanese philosophy. It is in this sense that scholars now typically refer to the six orthodox and three unorthodox schools of Indian philosophy and to Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, and Legalism as different schools of Chinese philosophy.

A first question now for Japanese philosophy is at what point Chinese philosophy became Japanese, and one of the most important themes to examine is precisely how Japanese philosophers interpreted, criticized, modified, developed, and used imported Chinese philosophical ideas and methods in accordance with Japanese predilections and needs, and how their writings contributed to an ongoing tradition of thought that is distinctively Japanese. Exactly the same criteria should be used to distinguish twentieth-century Japanese philosophy of a Western or international style (that is, a Japanization of Western philosophy) from the earlier study of European philosophy in Japanese universities (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries).

Naturally, the development of a distinctive philosophical subregion (such as Japan within the larger Chinese tradition) is influenced by the selections the subculture makes from the grand tradition, whether these occur by chance or design, with distinctive local cultural predispositions a factor both in the selection and in the modification of what is selected. Indeed, one big difference between Japanese and Chinese philosophy arises from the fact that Japanese philosophy is highly selective of the much larger range of philosophical schools that arose in China. Partly this is due to the historical accident whereby by the time Chinese philosophy was imported to Japan in the eighth century many earlier Chinese schools had already become obsolete or absorbed into other philosophical schools. Thus, when Chinese philosophy was first introduced to Japan during the Sui and Tang dynasties, China had already gone through a thousand years of extremely diversified philosophical development—the original teachings of Kongzi (Confucius), then centuries later his most important followers (though very different from one another), Mengzi (Mencius) and Xunzi, in addition to many other quite different and competing schools of philosophy, such as the philosophical (as opposed to the religious) Taoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi, Mohism (Mozi), The School of Names (Hui Shih, Gong-Sun Lung), legalism (Han Feizi), and so on. By the Tang dynasty, Confucianism had been accepted as the official Chinese school of philosophy and many elements of earlier schools had been absorbed into later Confucianism, including *Yin Yang*, Five Agents, as well as elements from the *I Jing* (the *Book of Changes*). In addition, by the time of the Song dynasty, Mengzi (Mencius), and not Xunzi, had been

selected as the orthodox follower of Kongzi (Confucius), with the result that *Mengzi* became one of the four classical Confucian texts, while Xunzi's writings were more or less ignored. Therefore, when the Japanese first began to learn Chinese philosophy, they were introduced only to this late Confucianism, ignoring all the other previous schools of philosophy, as well as neglected Confucianists such as Xunzi.

However, part of the selection process reflected Japanese political priorities and cultural preferences. In China philosophy had developed independently of government. At first (sixth through third centuries BCE), various schools of philosophy vied with one another trying to persuade the state authorities that their particular philosophy could best guide the nation. When government leaders politely refused the political advice of these sages, philosophers turned to teaching promising individuals in small schools as a means of self-cultivation, an important conception of the role of philosophy for more than two thousand years. Even later, when Confucianism became the dominant official state philosophy, the other schools were not outlawed, and the teaching, writing, and development of Confucianism was never directed by the government but remained in the hands of a class of scholars, known as the *ru*. An important indication of the traditional independence of Chinese philosophers is the ancient tradition of Chinese philosophers protesting government policy, or even refusing, or resigning government service under corrupt regimes. Confucian philosophers cultivated moral standards to which they held governments accountable.

In Japan, by contrast, philosophy was admitted by the government for the aid it could provide the government in the service of the state. Hence, there never developed until quite late an independent class of literary specialists among whom scholars could be selected for government service, as was the case in China with its famous meritocratic examination system. In Japan, government positions tended to be hereditary.

For all these reasons Japanese tended to select only those aspects of Chinese philosophy best suited to the perceived needs of Japanese government leaders and advisors. So, for example, because it was not considered important for the running of the country, Japanese never developed (until the late Tokugawa era—eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) the idea, so prominent in China, of the role of philosophy as a tool for self-cultivation. Also, the Japanese were never very interested (again until late Tokugawa) in China's second most important and popular philosophy, philosophical Taoism (*Tao Jia*), which the Japanese government leaders thought encouraged anarchy, rebellion, and lack of loyalty to the government and devotion to the state. As a result, Japan never developed the kind of alternative, "personal" philosophy of Taoism that flourished in

China as a kind of counterculture to the dominant official public Confucianism, an alternative to which Confucian scholars could turn at the end of the day or toward the end of life or as a solace when they lost or resigned their government jobs or the government they worked for was overthrown.

For similar reasons, Japanese tended to exclude Kongzi's theory of the "mandate of heaven," the view that to be successful, governments must be acceptable to a moral order of Heaven, without which they could be legitimately overthrown (not a popular idea among government leaders anywhere). Mengzi (Mencius), who was the most philosophical of the earlier "orthodox" Confucianists, was almost completely ignored for nearly a thousand years because Mengzi held the firm and outspoken belief that, in addition to serving Heaven, governments must also serve the people, for it was from this service that governments derived their legitimacy. If such service was lacking, rebellions would be morally justified. Where Mengzi and the Confucian tradition generally tended to offer advice to governments on how they ought to rule in order to fulfill their moral obligations to their people and to Heaven, this tended to be excluded from Japanese Confucianism, at least until very late in the Tokugawa period (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Also, Japanese Confucianists tended to emphasize loyalty to the state government over filial piety (family loyalty), whereas for the Chinese it was just the reverse.

Japanese Buddhism in its early centuries was similarly politically enmeshed, being introduced into Japan by government leaders as a way to protect and bring good fortune to the state, and not as a popular movement of personal faith among ordinary Japanese people. Contrast this with China where the monasteries maintained their independence throughout, refusing even to pay allegiance to the emperor as their sovereign, and relying not on government sponsorship but on a broad popular base of support and private contributions by individual families.

The particular selection of texts the Japanese made from the Chinese and Korean traditions and the interpretations these texts received were also much affected by Japanese cultural predispositions. In the later neo-Confucianism of the Tokugawa period, for example, Japanese philosophers tended to reject the more abstract, transcendental, and rationalist elements of the philosophy of Zhu Xi (Shushi) in favor of material, phenomenal, sensual, immediate, intuitive principles. Japanese philosophers often explicitly criticized Chinese philosophers for being too intellectual, abstract, logical, and otherworldly, odd as this may sound to Indian or Western philosophers, who tend to think of Chinese philosophy as being less abstract and analytical, and more intuitive and holistic.

Clearly, as far as the non-Western components of Japanese philosophy are concerned, the comparison of Chinese and Japanese Confucian and Buddhist texts and their emphases and implications will be highly instructive. Before we select texts to consider, however, we must specify our criteria: which of the texts imported from the Asian mainland are themselves truly philosophy? This is a major issue, in that much of what we would probably want to include as Japanese philosophy (and the same is true of Chinese philosophy) is often classified as religion, that is, as religious writing, especially Buddhism. This is a problem that can arise in the study of all the major traditions. Most Western philosophy during the medieval period in Europe is Christian philosophy. Much, though by no means all, Indian philosophy is Hindu and Buddhist. And here we must acknowledge that there is no firm consensus among scholars. Some Chinese experts exclude Buddhist writings from the catalogue of Chinese philosophy, while others, such as Fung Yulan and Hu Shih, include certain Buddhist texts as Chinese philosophy. Similarly, Indian scholars cannot agree on whether some parts of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism qualify as philosophy or whether all such writing should be considered religion.

We will argue on the side of those who support a distinction between religious and philosophical writings within Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Christianity. But, within Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, how do we separate the religion from the philosophy? This is a very large and difficult question, but we would argue that religion is primarily a combination of personal faith (felt inner experience) and communal ritual activity (so that there can be and are religions, as in Africa and among American Indians, without any written texts), while the associated philosophy is the attempt to intellectually explain and systematize problems that arise in interpreting and defending religious texts.

Religious texts speak, for example, of the difference between body and soul, but do not bother to explain exactly what that distinction is or how the two are related; or we find scattered throughout religious texts statements that, taken together, appear contradictory (the problem of evil, for example, is the problem of how to reconcile the religious beliefs that God is all-powerful, and all-good, and that evil, nonetheless, exists). Similarly, there is the problem of intellectually reconciling in Buddhism how the soul can be born into a different body after death when, according to Buddhism, the soul does not exist. How can God be said to be eternal, supreme, perfect, and still be worried about human beings (though this may be a problem that philosophers themselves have created)? Indian Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist schools all accepted the doctrine of karmic causality, but this opened up the philosophical debate concerning precisely what is meant by causality, and in particular, whether causality

produces something new, or whether the effect already exists in some sense in the cause. Finally, there is the intellectual problem of the meaning of religious language. If God is so completely different from us, how can we apply words such as "love," "caring," "knowing," "making," etc. to God? And if we do not use words of ordinary language (normally used to describe ordinary human beings and their relationships to one another), then how can we talk about God at all?

These are not *religious* problems, not problems for religious belief. But they can become problems for intellectuals, creating a stumbling block to religious belief. They are intellectual problems that must be resolved before these intellectuals can continue their religious progress. And of course it is precisely these intellectual (philosophical) problems associated with religious texts and religious beliefs that the critics of any religion will focus on in attacking that religion. So defenders of a particular religion will have to be prepared to answer such attacks, not those from the inside, so to speak, but attacks from the outside seeking to undermine the religion and supplant it with another.

For many religious thinkers, these intellectual problems and philosophical solutions are a decidedly nonreligious distraction to be tolerated, at best, if at all, only temporarily, as one might need to clear a roadblock before getting on with the really important task of continuing the journey. The early Christian church father, Tertullian, and the original Śākyamuni Buddha were very concerned that philosophical questions not replace or become a substitute for religious concerns. After approximately a century and a half of Islamic philosophy, Islamic religious leaders decided that it was not a good idea to try to mix religion with philosophy, but that it was better to keep the religion pure and free of philosophical theorizing. But Islam is exceptional among the world religions in that regard. Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism made an early decision that however different philosophy and religion were, and however much more important, from their point of view, religion was than philosophy, nonetheless philosophy was necessary to remove intellectual obstacles to religious progress, to justify faith to skeptics and to defend the religion against attack. In that sense, Nāgārjuna, Seng Zhau, Hui Neng, Kūkai are Buddhist philosophers, Shankara is a Hindu philosopher, and Aquinas a Christian philosopher.

We have felt it important here to clarify the distinction between philosophy and religion, but in fact, the selection of Chinese texts considered to be philosophical has already been made with considerable consensus. That is, among the majority of philosophers considering "Chinese philosophy," there is wide agreement on the body of Confucian, Taoist, Mohist, Legalist, and Buddhist texts, which ought to be included. It follows that if

we know which Chinese texts conventionally count as being philosophical, we can be reasonably sure that where these same texts have Japanese derivatives or offspring the latter are prime candidates for inclusion in Japanese philosophy. Similarly, where the debate between followers of the Chinese philosophers Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming is continued by Korean writers in a peculiarly Korean way, this is widely accepted as an example of Korean philosophy.

Having established our criteria, what then shall we include in our survey of Japanese philosophy? There are three main groups, corresponding to three main historical periods. Early Confucian and Buddhist philosophy (from the eighth century on); neo-Confucianism of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868); and philosophy inspired in style and content by the Western thought introduced in the Meiji period (beginning in 1868), which has in the decades since come to engender its own fresh and distinctly “Japanese” scion. In the following chapters we will follow this historical progression. In chapter 2 we shall discuss pre-Tokugawa Japanese Buddhist philosophy; in chapter 3, Tokugawa Japanese Confucianist philosophy; in chapter 4, Western-style Japanese philosophy following the Meiji Restoration; and in chapter 5, Japanese postwar philosophy, as well as Japanese responses and contributions to the displacement of modernity by postmodernity.