

The Introductions and Reports of the Seminar by Students
Japan-France Joint Seminar II:
Kitaro NISHIDA “An Inquiry into Good”

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1 Introduction

I finished graduate course of Ochanomizu Univ. last year. My Specialty is Japanese philosophy and one of my major interests is “Bushido”.

“Bushi” is the name for Japanese warriors in the middle ages. “Bushido” is about the souls of these warriors. “Bushido” is a traditional Japanese way of thinking. We, Japanese people, regard “Bushido” as one of our most important forms of traditional thought.

My master’s degree thesis is on “Hagakure”. As you may know, “Hagakure” is a very famous book about “Bushido” in Japan and it was originally written by Jocho Yamamoto in the Edo-era.

Yamamoto was a samurai, Japanese warrior in the middle ages, and served Nabeshima-han, which is now at Saga prefecture in Kyushu Island.

At present I teach philosophy to high school students. I teach the thought of famous philosophers, such as Descartes, Kant, and also Buddhism, and others. I also teach Kitaro Nishida’s thought, so I am looking forward to this seminar. The problem of real existence, the focus of this discussion, is very important for not only understanding Nishida but also for studying philosophy.

2 My question

As you know, we can see the influence of western thought on Nishida’s thinking. In fact, Nishida quotes many western philosophers, for example Plato, Descartes, and Hegel. Nishida based his thinking on Japanese traditional thought and Buddhist experience, and then combined it with western philosophy.

In Japan, Nishida is regarded as the first thinker to make his discourse in the philosophical way. But how do European Scholars think about Nishida’s thought? Do they think Nishida as an epigone of past masters ?

3 French professors’ answer

I don’t think so. Nishida’s thought is similar to Fichte’s but not the same. It must be denied that he imitated past philosopher’s thought. He studied many philosophers, from Plato to Hegel, but then took his own thought in another direction. Western philosophy has two stages. One is Greek philosophy, another is the thought influenced by Christianity. Greek philosophers pursued the truth. In the thought influenced by Christianity, the truth is the God. So they regarded the truth, which pursued by Greek philosophers, as the God. They think Greek philosophy and the thought influenced by Christianity is the same. So, western philosophers hadn’t study about the comparison and combination of Greek philosophy with the thought influenced by Christianity. Nishida, however, did. I think Nishida’s thought is excellent in this point.

4 My impression

I’m grateful to participate in this seminar and it has motivated me to study. After the seminar, I considered two things.

First, when I heard how French professors think about Nishida, I was surprised that their opinion was

different from mine. Of course I know how Japanese understand Bushi-do, but I want to know how foreign people think about Bushi-do, the subject of my interest. Second, I have a fresh understanding of my subject. People don't know about Japanese 'thought' as much as I thought. Nishida, who is the most popular Japanese philosopher, is not known well. I feel we must progress in our mutual understanding of each other's philosophy.

These points are obvious but easy to forget when I am at work. When I participated in this seminar, I was motivated to study much more. My wish to know, study, and discuss, is stronger than before. I want to take part in such seminars more and more in the future.

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1 Subject of my study

The subject of my study is Saikaku Ihara, one of the famous writers in the Tokugawa period. Some of his works depict the economic thought of his days. He also wrote some books on "Bushi". "Bushi" or "Samurai" means Japanese warriors. "Bushido" is regarded as one of the important word which represents Japanese spirit. These words correspond to "chivalry" in Western world. Japanese warriors create "Bushido". It is such spirit as not to be afraid of death as a warrior. I read one of works, "Bukegirimonogatari". "Buke" means "bushi" and "giri" means his obligation, and "monogatari" means stories. "Bukegirimonogatari" consists of many short stories concerning about "giri" (obligation) among "bushi".

My present study is to clarify the obligation described in "Bukegirimonogatari". For the purpose, I read "Essais sur le don", "The essay about the gift", written by Marcel Mauss, a well-known French anthropologist. Because I think the feeling that one is owing to someone when he or she is given a gift by someone is similar to the obligation written in this work.

2 The question of today's topic and the answers by French professors

The subject of the seminar is Nishida's philosophy. Kitaro Nishida tried to synthesize Western philosophy and Japanese Zen. I asked to French professors if you find the deep influence of western philosophy in Nishida's writings. Then French professors answered that they find great influence of western thoughts, such as Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Husserl, W.James, etc on Nishida's philosophy but Nishida absorbed Western philosophy on the basis of Eastern one and created original philosophy. They were very impressed by the original idea of Nishida that is so-called "the pure experience". To deepen our common understandings about Nishida's philosophy from now on, I think we will examine not only "the pure experience" in the former Nishida's philosophy but also "the principal of self identity of absolute contradiction", "the place of emptiness" and so on in the latter one from the viewpoint of comparative thought between Western philosophy and Eastern one.

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1 My impression

I was very stimulated by this seminar. But for full discussion, it should need more time.

Here I restate my question posed in the seminar, and French professors' answer to it.

2 My question

NISHIDA says that the Reality consists of three parts; the intelligence, the sentiment and the volition. In his view, the intelligence is active aspect of humanity, and the others are passive aspects of humanity. And it seems that he tells a lot of the sentiment and the volition, but a bit of the intelligence. How do you think about it?

3 French professor's answer

The intelligence has not only active aspect but also passive one. The sentiment and the volition also have them. To understand this subject needs further study.

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