



A Decade in Retrospect

As I Remember It

Nakai Masakazu 中井正一

ORIGINAL TITLE: 「回顧十年: 思いいずるままに」, 『哲学研究』, February 1951; in 『中井正一全集』 [Complete Works of Nakai Masakazu] (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1981), 1: 349–56.

KEYWORDS: Nakai Masakazu—*Tetsugaku kenkyū*—Kyoto School—
Fukada Yasukazu—Nishida Kitarō—Tanabe Hajime—Miki Kiyoshi—
Tosaka Jun—mediation—*Medium*—*Mittel*

Nakai Masakazu

A Decade in Retrospect: As I Remember It

Translated by Nakai Keigo

When I think back on Kyoto and especially on the academic world there, I recall being in Professor Fukada's room in Shimogamo.¹ We sat facing each other, wrapped up in the stillness of the Tadasu-no-mori forest.² He leaned back and smoked calmly as I fumbled around inside myself for what to say. It felt as if the quiet would swallow us whole.

Even now, whenever I think of academia I am bewildered by that overwhelming silence. Academia was meant to overwhelm and that room instilled in me a kind of phobia. It was there that the professor said to me, "I have been asked to oversee the editing of the *Tetsugaku kenkyū*.³ Could you take over the administrative work from Kōsaka Masaaki? He will show you the ropes." It was 1925 and I had just graduated from university. I accepted the request humbly with no idea of how important to the academic world my responsibilities would be. For the following ten years I served a succession of chief editors as if in a dream, the professor having passed away in the interim. I had been forced to submit multiple letters of resignation to the

1. [Fukada Yasukazu (深田康算, 1878–1928) was a specialist in aesthetics and mentor to Nakai Masakazu (中井正一, 1900–1952) until his death. —Trans.]

2. [Tadasu-no-mori forest (糺の森) is a sacred grove within the Shimogamo Shrine (下鴨神社), located near Kyoto University and subsequently selected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site representing the Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto. —Trans.]

3. [*Tetsugaku kenkyū* 『哲学研究』, the *Journal of Philosophy*, is one of the oldest philosophical journals in Japan. It continues to be published by the department of philosophy of Kyoto University. —Trans.]

office of the chief of the Special Higher Police⁴ at the Nakadachiuri Police Station as part of the “collective punishment”⁵ meted out in the attempt to suppress the anti-fascist movement in 1937, but only the letter for the *Tetsugaku kenkyū* was hard for me. I wept inwardly at the despair that had seeped into my flesh and blood.

During that decade, the academic world in Kyoto was like an explosion of flowers blooming all at once, among them professors Nishida Kitarō, Fukada Yasukazu, Tomonaga Sanjūrō, Hatano Seiichi, Fujii Kenjirō, Koni-shi Shigenao, and Matsumoto Bunzaburō. Young, energetic assistant professors like Amano Teiyū, Tanabe Hajime, Watsuji Tetsurō, Yamauchi Tokuryū, Ueda Juzō, Ojima Sukema, and Kuki Shūzō, shined brightly like stars. Miki Kiyoshi, Tosaka Jun, Nishitani Keiji, Kōsaka Masaaki, and Kimura Moto-mori formed one group; a second was made up of Shimomura Toratarō, Kōyama Iwao, Mashita Shin’ichi, Danno Yasutarō, and others. It was they who gathered at the homes of the professors and enlivened the discussions. Our Saturday visits to Dr. Tanabe were like bedazzling seminars. Looking back, I experienced a joy so profound that I felt as if I were threading my way through those stars and clouds.

Oddly enough, except for Nishida, the other professors at that time were all heavy drinkers. Fukada, Tomonaga, and Hatano seemed particularly close and would regularly arrange for New Year’s drinking parties. Often they got so inebriated that they dropped their *haori* in Tadasu-no-mori or even jumped over the wall to go home.

The gatherings with Dr. Fukada took place on Wednesdays. When the discussions were going well, they would drag into the night over wine or gin, followed by beer and bottle after bottle of saké. Unless he was drinking, Dr. Fukada was not one to criticize others, but once we were well on our way to intoxication, he would often complain about the contents of the *Tetsugaku kenkyū*. At the time, I did not get the point of his cutting language—“Hmmm.... Dr. Nishida’s *Wirbel* [vortex] is....”⁶—but the memory

4. [The Special Higher Police (特別高等警察) were a secret police established in Japan in 1911. Nakai was arrested in November of 1937 for violating the Peace Preservation Law (治安維持法).—Trans.]

5. [*Renza* (連座), the standard Japanese translation for “collective punishment,” means to be charged with and punished for the crimes of others.—Trans.]

6. [In another article entitled “Anxiety in Drawing” (「絵画の不安」) (1930), Nakai explains

has stayed with me until now. I am reminded of a passage he cited in “A Passage in Amiel’s *Journal intime*.” This essay was his last publication in *Tetsugaku kenkyū* and seems to show a sympathy for Amiel’s words: “I fall into an inner skepticism again and again. I care for nothing that is not serious. Nonetheless, I can take neither myself nor my circumstances seriously... In a word, I carry that self-abuse within me always.”⁷

“Such sentiments might make no sense to someone your age, but one day you will understand,” he used to tell me. Now that I am old enough to understand, I find them deeply moving.

There is not a single essay I do not remember from my ten years with *Tetsugaku kenkyū*, whether I happened to approve of their selection or not. Among them, I was deeply touched by a study on spatial theory that Tosaka wrote while serving as a soldier in the army. It stands out as a tribute to great human energy. Or again, I recall how Miki’s “The Structure of Questions” (「問の構造」), which he sent to the journal during his stay in Germany, astonished us for its creativity. Several months later, however, when Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* fell into our hands, we were somewhat chagrined to find that Miki’s article was little more than a prelude to Heidegger. Such was the extent which we competed with one another every three months over those years. The momentum of an ever-progressing academic world was mirrored in the stress it caused young scholars in Kyoto trying not to fall behind Tokyo.

During the ten years I assisted in editorial work, there is one essay that I have the impression did not achieve its intended result. I am referring to Dr. Tanabe Hajime’s “Requesting the Guidance of Professor Nishida.”⁸ I would like to recall some passages here.

Religious experience is trans-historical, while philosophical reflection is both historical and relative. Of course, the historical is established on the trans-historical, and the relative presupposes the absolute. However, the

Wirbel as “a vortex vacuuming everything” (すべてを吸いこむところの渦流) (NMZ 2: 172). In this context, the vortex is used of Nishida’s philosophy in a negative sense, although I add that the “vortex” can also be read as a key term of Tanabe’s (cf. GōDA 2012). —Trans.]

7. [FUKADA 1948: 11. The original writing of this quotation is found in Amiel’s *Journal intime* on September 20, 1866 (AMIEL 1890: 122). —Trans.]

8. 「西田先生の教を仰ぐ」『哲学研究』 15/5, no. 170 (1930).

absolute that appears as a moment can only appear as a differential point, and its whole is nothing more than what we can seek through this point as mediation. The trans-historical, which is presupposed as the basis of the historical, can only be a differential point included in the direction of the historical, and hence, it is no more than the Idea that we can eternally seek after through the latter. Nevertheless, turning philosophy into religion leads to eliminating this distinction, taking the trans-historical absolute to be the principle (*principium*) of the system—not as a mere direction of a differential point, but as an integral whole—and giving order to and organizing [as into a system] the historical and relative. In this respect lies my fundamental skepticism towards Professor Nishida's philosophy.

Nevertheless, Professor Nishida's system thinks of consciousness-in-general or its intellectual mode as the intelligible self as the absolute that generally sees the Idea and does not seem to recognize its status as being historically conditioned....

[Rather,] is it not philosophy that defends an incomplete standpoint, only dwelling in the infinite movement reflected on within a limited relation to an absolute, and precisely because it has the unbridgeable gap and holds the power of life, lying in reality through acting? That “seeing” exhaustively absorbs “acting” violates the essential significance of philosophy.⁹

As we observed this confrontational challenge of Dr. Tanabe to his mentor, we found it absolutely tragic and breathtaking.

Dr. Nishida, however, did not respond directly. He kept his silence to the end, brushing it off in July of the following year in the pages of *Tetsugaku kenkyū*: “The determination of a free human being is a determination of the place (*basho*) of absolute nothingness. The self determines itself as nothingness. As such, it envelops time inside itself and each person has their own time.” Like Pascal's God, “the self-aware determination of absolute nothingness may be seen as an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.”¹⁰

Dr. Tanabe was never satisfied with this response. He resolutely continued his questions in “Clarifying the Meaning of the Logic of Species” (「種の

9. Pp. 12–13, 38, 40. [THZ 4: 311, 327–8; TANABE 2020: 289, 307–8 (translation modified). —Trans.]

10. No. 184, pp. 8–9. [NKZ 6: 187–8. —Trans.]

論理の意味を明かにす」¹¹), which appeared seven and a half years after that initial exchange. (On 7 November, immediately after completing the editing of that issue, I was silenced by the authorities and forced to leave *Tetsugaku kenkyū*).

It has already been ten years since Professor Nishida proposed his *basho* (place) of nothingness, and during that time, his thinking has deepened and developed in its details. Professor Nishida has been constructing a towering system. Nevertheless, even now I continue, as I have from the beginning, to harbor doubts about the foundations of this esteemed system. My misgiving is that if absolute nothingness is posited directly as the basis of the system, as the so-called *basho* of nothingness, it would be being (有) rather than nothingness (無).¹²

In this desperate and spirited essay, Dr. Tanabe proposed the idea of a “mediation of action” (行為の媒介) in place of a “system.”

A system does not allow for praxis to emerge from it. Insofar as the system envelops praxis, it is no longer praxis but only a theoretical notion of praxis. Instead, we should think of the logical order of rational existence at the moment when being and reason are united by praxis through negation, as forming the content of the system....

A system is renewed in each present, and each system is discontinuous with the next.

There is no room for action in an ontology based on the interpretation of expression (表現解釈の存在論), for action is established in the negation of expressive being. This is why the nothingness of existential philosophy remains an interpreted nothingness and why action can only be seen as the potential for decision....

Logic becomes the formative principle of being through the mediation of action in which affirmation and negation are united.¹³

This essay served as an important stimulus for those young and energetic students who opposed fascism and threw themselves into political praxis.

After proofreading Dr. Tanabe’s piece, I lost my freedom for three years. Although I did manage to get hold of the occasional copy of the journal, I

11. No. 259, October, 1937.

12. P. 58. [THZ 6: 467. —Trans.]

13. Pp. 49, 51, 64, 42. [THZ 6: 461–2, 471, 456. —Trans.]

was not able to keep abreast of what happened afterwards. I was expelled from the academic world, banished to life on the outside, and eventually left Kyoto. Despite everything, I would sometimes experience an unbearable nostalgia for those days.

I later read Dr. Tanabe's essay on the "pompon dahlia" system.¹⁴ Although I am not familiar with the context surrounding the publication, I still think that Dr. Nishida failed to respond to the question Dr. Tanabe had put to him in 1937, as did members of his circle. This left a gap in the pages of the *Tetsugaku kenkyū* regarding the serious question of whether "mediation" (媒介) is to be seen as a *Medium* or as the *Mittel* of *Vermitteln*.¹⁵ Insofar as the subject of Dr. Tanabe's 1937 essays is still valid today, the deaths of Miki Kiyoshi and Tosaka Jun, who took action and leapt into nothingness, can be said to constitute the sort of action (行為) needed to fill the blank space, or what Dr. Tanabe called "a sort of mediation that takes us over the abyss of negation."

Indeed, it seems to teach us that action is not something to be spoken of lightly.

If my ten years in the academic world in Kyoto qualify me as a member of the Kyoto School, I consider it an honor to point out gaps like these. The Kyoto School is not the monolithic entity people think. I choose to remem-

14. [The image of the pompon dahlia is found in Tanabe's *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (懺悔道としての哲学), Chapter 8 (THZ 9: 266–7; TANABE 2016: 441). —Trans.]

15. [Nakai interprets the Nishida–Tanabe conflict as disagreement regarding the concept of "mediation" (媒介), namely, the conflict between "*Medium*" and "*Mittel*." According to Nakai, "*Medium*" corresponds to Nishida's notion of mediation. "Dr. Nishida preferred to speak of a dialectic after his middle period. This seems to lead to idea that the 'concept of mediation' in dialectical negation belongs to the concept of phenomenological *Medium* (mediating material 媒体) rather than *Mittel*" (NMZ 4: 22). Conversely, *Mittel* is used to refer to Tanabe's talk of mediation as a mediation of negation (否定媒介). For example, Nakai explains *Mittel* as "making oneself into a negating mediation, that is, in a spirit of withdrawal" (NMZ 2: 136). This conflict between *Medium* and *Mittel* also has to do with place (場所) and operation (働き). For instance, Nakai proposes his vision of the library as an "operation" (働き or 機能) rather than as a "place" or "space" (NMZ 4: 274–277). The library is thus seen as a locus of work (課) rather than merely serving as a locus of storage (庫) (NMZ 4: 286) or a room (室) (NMZ 4: 306). In this way, Nakai took up a major conflict in the Kyoto School as his own. He continued to think about the questions of dialectic and mediation through his political practice, convinced "that the answer to this question of mediation would never be found in books" (NMZ 4: 185). —Trans.]

ber it never as something static but always as a massive shooting star that has left a brilliant glow in its wake.

REFERENCES

Abbreviations

- NKZ 『西田幾多郎全集』 [Complete works of Nishida Kitarō] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978–1980), 19 vols.
- NMZ 『中井正一全集』 [Complete works of Nakai Masakazu] (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1981), 4 vols.
- THZ 『田辺元全集』 [Complete works of Tanabe Hajime] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1963–1964), 15 vols.
- AMIEL, Henri-Frédéric
 1890 *Amiel's Journal: The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel*, trans. by Humphry Ward (London: Macmillan).
- FUKADA Yasukazu 深田康算
 1948 『美しき魂』 [A beautiful soul] (Tokyo: Kōbundō Shobō).
- GŌDA Masato 合田正人
 2012 「近迫と渦流: 田辺元・ハイデッガー対決が今私たちに突きつけているもの」 [Approximation and vortex: What the confrontation between Tanabe Hajime and Heidegger puts before us], 『思想』1053: 75–116.
- TANABE Hajime 田辺元
 2016 *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, trans. by Takeuchi Yoshinori with Valdo Vigi-elmo and James W. Heisig (Nagoya: Chisokudō Publications).
- 2018 “Clarifying the Meaning of the Logic of Species (1, 4),” trans. by Robert Chapeskie and revised by John W. M. Krummel, in Masakatsu Fujita, ed., *The Philosophy of the Kyoto School* (Singapore: Springer), 25–41.
- 2020 “Requesting the Guidance of Professor Nishida,” trans. by Richard Stone and Takeshi Morisato, in Takeshi Morisato and Roman Pașca, eds., *Asian Philosophical Texts: Exploring Hidden Sources* (Milan: Mimesis International), 281–308.