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JAPANESE PHENOMENOLOGY

*Phenomenology as the Trans-cultural
Philosophical Approach*

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PHENOMENOLOGY IN JAPAN: A PRESENTATION

It is the privilege of the *Analecta* to present in this volume – for the first time to the West – essays by the most prominent Japanese scholars, and to record the existence and significance of Japan on the world map of phenomenological reflection.

Admittedly, many a philosopher in the West may have had some vague presentiment that the development of the phenomenological method and research in Europe and North America has not gone unnoticed in Japan. More likely than not, Husserl and his major disciples would figure in philosophical textbooks and in the intellectual surveys of the contemporary West available to the Japanese public. Moreover, from the little exposure we may have had to Japanese life and culture, we could perceive here and there some furtive echoes of our own discourse. But altogether we have been left in the dark as to the existence of a genuine and original phenomenological research and reflection in Japan.

In the present volume, including ten previously unpublished essays, Japanese scholars are given the opportunity to speak for themselves, hopefully, to shock the Western phenomenologists (and orientalists) into a first discovery of their Japanese colleagues.

This volume, consisting of two parts, opens with a study by Y. Nitta, of an unknown manuscript of Edmund Husserl, and with W. Mizuno's critical inquiry into the phenomenological method itself. Then follow the 'theory of space' by H. Kojima, an original treatment of phenomenological intuition by E. Shimomissē, and Sh. Takiura's penetrating essay on the 'reality of time'. The question of the 'life-world' is examined by H. Tatematsu, while J. Watanabe studies the nature of truth in Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

Part II, 'Phenomenology in the Japanese Inheritance', centers around Kitarō Nishida and the Kyoto School which is presented by T. Ogawa. It contains a first translation into English of a fragment from Nishida's writings made by a well known Nishida specialist D. Dilworth in collaboration with V. H. Viglielmo. This fragment from the period in which

Nishida stood in a dialogue with Husserl's thought is complemented by an essay by D. Dilworth showing Nishida's original reflection.

The "discovery" offered in the following pages is a complex proposition indeed. What appears here is not the image of "another phenomenology". And yet in this panorama of research and reflection belonging naturally to the common field of the phenomenological endeavor one may simultaneously discern a Japanese thread. This raises questions on the significance of the discovery itself.

First of all, it is not only the discovery that phenomenology is present and well-alive in Japan, but rather the discovery that there exists a trend of research and reflection which can be deemed, and recognized as both taking part in the common philosophical endeavor outlined by Husserl and as "Japanese" in the same way we speak about "French", "German", "Polish", "Italian" and "North American" phenomenologies. In Japan, with its own distinctive philosophical tradition, the pursuit of phenomenological research might seem incongruous. We might surmise that a 'phenomenology in Japan' means that some of our Japanese colleagues have specialized in the inner workings of the rigorously defined methodology, and developed the latter with the required accuracy. Yet, they would remain the experts in Japan of a philosophical method which originated within another tradition.

What the reader will find in this volume is quite different. Many Japanese philosophers have indeed obtained doctorates in Europe, and published works on Husserl, Heidegger, Max Scheler, and others, in Western Languages. But they have not confined themselves to the role of mere interpreters. Phenomenology became, on the contrary, a field of scholarship they could explore, evaluate and appropriate in their own terms: ultimately, as it seems, it became a genuine mode of Japanese philosophizing. The result is a *Japanese* phenomenology, that is to say: a reflection which is unmistakably heir to Husserl, but reflects as much the Japanese intellectual legacy and the philosophical quest of contemporary Japan, from the Meiji era to World War II and the present.

Secondly, we discover that the Japanese phenomenology, so understood, is not a late-comer in the field. In fact it goes back to Husserl's appearance and teaching activity on the philosophical scene and we can see that it has developed a tradition of its own.

Central to that tradition is the figure of Kitarō Nishida (1870–1945), the most creative philosopher in twentieth century Japan. Familiar with the works of Bergson and William James, sharing Husserl's interest in logic and the foundations of mathematics, Nishida could feel at home with the

phenomenological method and understand it in its significance for contemporary philosophy in the West. However, Nishida's world and his cultural roots were not Husserl's. From his experience of Zen meditation, Nishida criticized Husserl's identification of consciousness with "intentionality". Whereas the latter began with the distinction between the subject and the object, Nishida posited consciousness as prior to that distinction. The result was a philosophy of consciousness as an ontological investigation, and – as in Zen – truth was, in opposition to Husserl, attained through losing one's subjective self. Thus already at that time phenomenological insights, albeit vicariously, entered Japanese philosophy through Nishida's controversy with Husserl.

Although other members of the Kyoto School did not share directly the concern with Husserlian philosophy, it is worth noting that, as early as 1911, a dissident phenomenological reflection was already present in Japan. From the bibliography of the selected translations of the major phenomenological writings into Japanese, which H. Tatematsu, one of the most distinguished translators of Husserl, prepared for our volume, we may see how thoroughly and intensely the interest in the phenomenological movement and its development was entertained in Japan from its early beginnings. One could validly argue that Nishida was not a phenomenologist in the strict sense; yet in his dialogue with phenomenology he may have uncovered issues which, sooner or later, will become crucial for phenomenology itself. For instance, the emphasis which he put upon action, as reflected here by D. Dilworth, is only now becoming a focus of our investigation (see *Analecta* Vol. VII).

Thirdly, while we assess the existence of a Japanese phenomenology, with a tradition of its own, we perceive also a host of questions which could not appear prior to the discovery of a non-Western phenomenology. Admittedly, the reader of the following essays could content himself with the reassuring view that Japanese philosophy proves the universal value of the Husserlian method. The conclusion would be that Husserl's concerns, his approach to the question of man's life-world etc., are significant for man as such, in spite of cultural differentiations. But once we have thus hailed the universal validity of the phenomenological method, we should let ourselves be confronted with the more disturbing interrogations inherent to this volume as to any East-West intellectual encounter.

For instance, one could be tempted to conclude that Nishida's attraction to Husserl's thought, and the subsequent phenomenological movement in Japan, reflects a hidden affinity between Husserl's project and the intellectual tradition of the East, especially Zen Buddhism. But why do we

not find a similar encounter in China at the same time? It should then be clear that the existence of a Japanese phenomenology cannot be safely explained away by the magic invocation of an Eastern or Buddhist tradition akin to Husserl's intuition. The crisis of Japanese thought in the 1910's, and Nishida's personal temper and circumstances, are likely to have played as important a role as his Buddhist background in his attraction to phenomenology.

Moreover, did phenomenology provide Japanese philosophers only with another *language*, modern and intercultural, which allowed them to pursue their own tradition while overcoming intellectual insularity? Or was phenomenology a revolution in Japanese philosophy? If it was indeed a revolution, was Husserl important for the same reasons as he was in Europe? After all, maybe Nishida and others also found in Husserl insights which are not specifically phenomenological. Husserl may have become the privileged channel through which modern Japanese philosophers happened to have access to various, unrelated strata of the Western mind. However that may be, here is a phenomenology which we cannot understand simply by reading Husserl, Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty.

In a similar vein, one should not hastily conclude from this volume that phenomenology is the common ground for a philosophical understanding between the West and Japan, not to speak of "the East". On the contrary, it should be clear that a Japanese phenomenology does not offer a short-cut to the intercultural meetings of the minds. It simply opens up a common *Holzweg* into the forest of human experience and philosophical traditions. It will take time before we even find out where that *Holzweg* begins at all.

In conclusion, a "Japanese phenomenology" with its own relation to Husserl's inheritance, does not only constitute one more chapter in the phenomenological inventory. Its very existence may lead us to question the presuppositions of our own phenomenological discourse. At least it provokes us to consider whether the phenomenological approach might not be merely as Husserl himself claimed but, on the contrary, a *universal* avenue opened to the philosopher seeking to discover truth about man, his place in the cosmos and the significance of his existence.

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