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# Japanese Philosophy



## Synopsis

An overview of Japanese philosophy from the seventh century to the present. Japanese Philosophy is the first book to assert the existence of a Japanese philosophy prior to Nishida Kitaro in the early twentieth century. Because of Western military and economic dominance since the seventeenth century, the cross-cultural comparison of non-Western philosophy has generally gone in one direction--comparing Chinese, Indian, and other thought systems with Western philosophy. For various reasons, Japanese scholars did not follow the Chinese lead after 1920 in acknowledging that some of their own literary tradition should be classified as "philosophy." In spite of this, the authors argue that it is useful to compare cultures, and that one way of comparing cultures is to compare their philosophies--and therefore that it is worth treating certain parts of Japanese literature as philosophy, especially those parts that are similar to what has long been classified and treated as philosophy in India and China. By doing so, and by providing an overview of Japanese philosophy from the seventh century to the present, the authors contribute to a greater cross-cultural understanding between East and West."a skillful interweaving of a large number of strands in the history of ideas. Countless distortions and roadblocks bedevil Western scholars trying to understand Asian texts and cultures, and only recently have we begun to get glimpses of the actual history of Asian thought. This is a welcome contribution to this important work of cross-cultural understanding, and provides a well-informed Western look at the influence of Chinese and Western philosophy on Japan." -- Richard T. Garner, coeditor of *Society and the Individual: Readings in Political and Social Philosophy*"The book's intellectual freshness comes from presenting Japanese philosophy as structured by the concerns of mainline Western philosophy. Because of this it will be one of those books that you can give to your friends in the philosophy department when they ask, as they always do, whether there is any 'real' philosophy in East Asia. It is an engaging work." -- John H. Berthrong, author of *Concerning Creativity: A Comparison of Chu Hsi, Whitehead, and Neville*

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generally gone in one direction-comparing Chinese, Indian, and other thought systems with Western philosophy. For various reasons, Japanese scholars did not follow the Chinese lead after 1920 in acknowledging that some of their own literary tradition should be classified as "philosophy." In spite of this, the authors argue that it is useful to compare cultures, and that one way of comparing cultures is to compare their philosophies-and therefore that it is worth treating certain parts of Japanese literature as philosophy, especially those parts that are similar to what has long been classified and treated as philosophy in India and China. By doing so, and by providing an overview of Japanese philosophy from the seventh century to the present, the authors contribute to a greater cross-cultural understanding between East and West.

As an expat who lives in Tokyo, I have done a tremendous amount of reading on Japan. That said, I found this slim but dense volume to be, in a word, OUTSTANDING - it is by far the best introduction to Japan's rich philosophical tradition. The first question Blocker and Starling address is simple: is there philosophy in Japan? Even the great Meiji Era intellectual Nakae Chomin once lamented that "...from antiquity to the present day, there has never been any philosophy in Japan." The authors set out to demonstrate why this statement is fallacious. The task facing Blocker and Starling, then, is twofold: first, to extricate elements of Chinese thought from indigenous traditions; and second, to show how borrowings from foreign cultures have in fact influenced the development of Japanese philosophy. And, for my money, they succeed in both projects without being dry or boring. Logistically, this book is divided to chapters on Buddhism, Confucianism, modernity, and beyond modernity. While each chapter could stand on its own, what I like most about this book is its clarity and concise way of articulating each philosophical impulse. I honestly think EVERYONE will find something of value here, from those just beginning their study of Japan as well as those with copious knowledge on the subject - it is THAT GOOD! But, for me, the best chapter is "Beyond Modernity." Here, the authors really shine - they KNOW their subject and, though easy to understand, it is a high level discussion without being didactic. They introduce such postmodern thinkers as Yoshimoto Takaaki (yes, Banana's father!) and Karatani Kojin. Their descriptions were so inspirational that I have since read everything Karatani has written. This is considered a general introduction, but I think it goes much, much deeper than most primers. It is a pathbreaking work in the sense that it is bringing into general discourse the idea that, yes, there is a unique and original philosophy in Japan completely its own, and not just borrowed from other cultures. A delightful read!

This review is written from the perspective of someone who knows next-to-nothing about Japanese

Philosophy, and indeed had not really considered the two words in combination before. In short, it is a masterly introduction to this intriguing and little-known topic. The authors show tremendous erudition and ambition in covering the whole sweep of Japanese philosophy from the seventh century to the present day, and making the comparisons where appropriate with Chinese, Indian and Western philosophy. Buddhism, Tokugawa Confucianism, Modernity: it is all here. Get your copy now ! Ian Ruxton, editor of Sir Ernest Satow's Private Letters to W.G. Aston and F.V. Dickins: The Correspondence of a Pioneer Japanologist from 1870 to 1918 (Paperback), also available on .

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