

BOOK REVIEWS

JAPAN IN TRADITIONAL AND POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVES. Edited by Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Steven Heine. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. pp. xxi, 334. ISBN 0 7914 2469 3 (cloth)

THIS IS A VALUABLE and intriguing volume, if for no other reason than bringing together a range of interesting essays and providing the reader with the puzzle of discovering a common theme concerning the relation of tradition and the postmodern in Japan. While the title is sufficiently broad to warrant the inclusion of anything written about Japan in the twentieth century, the editors' introduction further delimits the aim of this volume as being to "explore the implications of dubiousness by considering the question of the uniqueness and creativity of Japan as seen in terms of the interplay of traditional and postmodern perspectives" (xii). The theme of dubiousness is developed from Ōe Kenzaburo's use of "*aimai-na*" (which also might be rendered as vague or ambiguous) in his essay "Japan, the Dubious, and Myself," which appears as the concluding essay in this volume.

One simple question to ask of this volume is whether the essays actually address the stated theme. Only Ōe and the introduction explicitly address the theme of dubiousness. While most of the essays might be taken as *examples* of the interplay of traditional and postmodern perspectives, I count only three of the twelve essays (leaving the introduction aside) as explicitly addressing this issue in any sustained fashion. Many of the essays do refer to the postmodern, but more often than not it is evoked as an amuletic sort of term which is not in need of definition. One characteristic of the postmodern, recognized across a range of theories, is irony, a sense of irony in both comic and tragic modes arising from an awareness of the limits of knowledge and representation. There is little sense of irony in most of these essays; they tend to be earnest and certain. Querying claims to postmodern status, however, does reveal some ironies.

One of the truly excellent pieces in this volume is Steven Heine's study of the competing interpretations of the *ie* (家) in Japan. This is a superb essay which not only links the traditional/postmodern opposition to a very specific debate but also provides a very insightful way of organizing the debate about postmodernism. I will present here a simplified, and somewhat adapted, version of the typology of the approaches Heine develops both here and in the introduction jointly authored with Charles Fu.

One approach is centrism. This is a type of discourse which might be found in Japan or in the West and emphasizes that there is a stable center in any number of meanings—metaphysically, socially, epistemologically, linguistically, politically, etc. This is the traditional (or perhaps modern) approach which

has been critiqued by such figures as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. The second approach, decentric postmodernism, points to the affinities between Japan and the perspective of scholars such as Barthes and Derrida. Japan and sometimes most of Mahayana Buddhism (especially Ch'an/Zen, of course) are discovered to be decentered and postmodern. You do not need to have been modern to be postmodern. A third approach, deconstructive postmodernism, aims to deconstruct decentric postmodernism by showing, in the case of Japan for instance, that the valorization of Japan as decentric or postmodern simply repeats in veiled form the traditional celebration of Japan as having a center or essence which is unique, unchanging, or superior.

Heine questions the limits of all of these approaches and aims at a new synthesis combining the insights of centrism and decentrism. I will not try to summarize this argument here. It is an argument which I find compelling and think needs to be taken very seriously. In describing these approaches, Heine is very clear in showing how they tend to mirror and get entangled in one another, how the effort to reject one of the approaches ironically ends up replicating or mirroring the very thing it tries to reject. There is a sense of irony here.

The approaches Heine presents do provide some help in attempting to place the essays in this volume. Clearly representing decentric postmodernism, Steve Odin presents an essay surveying and affirming the literature which argues that much of Buddhism and Japanese culture can be interpreted in terms of (or can be seen as saying the same thing as?) Derrida's deconstruction of claims to self-presence, self-identity, and a transcendental signified. Odin also cites as support another essay included in this volume, Richard Pilgrim's important and stimulating study of decentering and the notion of *ma* (間) in Japanese religion and art. It is not quite clear in the literature surveyed here whether Derrida and Barthes are used to interpret the East, thereby privileging Derrida and Barthes, or whether Japan (and the East at times) is seen as having beaten the West to postmodernism, thereby privileging the East. It is ironic that the only dissenting voice to this enterprise that Odin cites is that of Jacques Derrida. Heine poses the question of whether this approach is not a matter of reverse Orientalism which serves to uncritically valorize Japan.

Centrism maintains that there is a center or are centers. Abe Masao's contribution locates two centers and suggests the possibility of a synthesis. While suggesting that we are living in a postmodern age, Abe does not uncritically accept many of the basic assumptions of postmodernism. In very unpostmodern fashion, he argues there is an epistemological center in Japan, "the traditional Japanese view of truth." There is also, of course, a Western view of truth. The Japanese view of truth is linked with pluralism and is thus in tune with the celebration of pluralism in some varieties of the postmodern. Though centrist,

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this position thus also reflects a bit of the perspective of decentric postmodernism. Postmodernism here is creatively interpreted as recognizing differences but as also pointing the way to ultimate synthesis. Japan has a special, not to mention central, role to play here: "Thus, the Japanese view can serve as the basis for establishing the goal of a mutually critical synthesis of Eastern and Western views of truth." (312) While much postmodern thought opposes any notion of totalization, there is no retreat from totalization here.

Sandra A. Wawrytko's analysis of women and sexual ethics in the films of Kurosawa, Kinugasa, Mizoguchi, and Shinoda is also centrist in a double sense. There is a centered tradition in Japan formed by social and psychological structures of oppression. Western psychoanalysis (not "postmodernized" via Lacan) also provides an epistemological center from which Japanese society might be psychoanalyzed. Even if one wholeheartedly agrees with the proposition that Japanese women should be freer, one's estimation of the argument here will hinge upon what one thinks of an effort to psychoanalyze the Japanese via English language sources. In many ways, this essay is more reminiscent of occupation period efforts to psychoanalyze the Japanese than postmodernism. There is also here a very unpostmodern, in some sense anyway, urge to explain what the postmodern Japanese woman does and *should* see in these films. Japanese women have spoken for themselves on such issues but most of it is, quite naturally, written in Japanese.

Two essays apply Barthes' notion of intertextuality to Japanese literature. Both thus take, at least explicitly, a postmodern approach which seeks to move beyond the concern of earlier literary theory with notions such as authorial intention, the mimetic function of art, and meaning. Haruo Shirane offers a study of Fujiwara no Shunzei and intertextuality which does, in interesting fashion, attempt to distinguish Shunzei's and Barthes' understandings of intertextuality. S. Yumiko Hulvey provides a fascinating overview of Enchi Fumiko's novels and maps out their development in terms of the use of multiple narrative voices, intertextual references, appeals to the figure of the miko or female shaman, and the subversive use of fantasy. This is a valuable, compelling, and informed survey and analysis of a very interesting novelist. I would place both of these studies ambiguously between the modern and postmodern. The radicalness of the notion of intertextuality is domesticated here in a way allowing Shirane to still refer, in unspecified terms, to a "collective unconscious," and Hulvey to make repeated reference to Enchi's "authorial intention." Some of the concerns of centrism linger here, and pre-postmodern literary criticism probably offers all the tools needed to carry out the analyses presented here.

The only essay here to deal with economic issues, a crucial component of several theories of the postmodern, is Charles Wei-hsun Fu's critical examina-

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tion of efforts to explain the relation of East Asian economic development and Confucianism. Fu also seeks to establish a new approach that "transcends scientific theories of causality and that simultaneously serves as the starting point for an ideological revitalization of Confucianism" (95). This involves an insightful comparison of the differences between Chinese and Japanese forms of Confucianism which leads to a statement of how the Chinese and Japanese should learn from each other and revitalize Confucianism. While there are references here to the "pluralistic postmodern world" and an effort to break with prior approaches to modernization theory, no sources are cited that I can recognize as postmodern and Fu's project seems to be a valuable contribution to the modernization debate.

There are also three essays here focusing on the Kyoto school of philosophy. Dale Wright presents a close reading of Nishitani's work to try to show how he drew on Buddhism and European sources to develop positions on selfhood, nihilism, and historical consciousness. He uses this analysis to suggest that Nishitani should not be viewed as postmodern for two reasons: 1) the concept of the postmodern is so vague that it is difficult to apply in a meaningful way and 2) use of the postmodern is also a way of implicitly claiming the superiority of our categories. Even if one finds much of value in postmodern thought, there are moments when it is difficult not to be at least a touch sympathetic to this argument. If the traditional is opposed to the postmodern, then this a traditional approach.

Starting with a North American debate about the role of tradition in philosophy, John C. Maraldo suggests both sides of the debate assume "that there is, or should be, one tradition" (226). Maraldo argues that there are a variety of communities practicing philosophy and that they are recognized by the methods, problems, and terminologies they engage. Such communities are continually redefining tradition and what counts as philosophy by translating texts in the literal sense or by placing new texts within the context of current philosophical problems. This approach is illustrated through an interesting examination of debates in Japan about whether Nishida Kitarō was Japan's first philosopher and, more broadly, whether there was philosophy in Japan prior to the encounter with western philosophy. While there is a concern here with textuality and tradition, Maraldo is not concerned with relating his use of these terms to any theories of textuality or the postmodern.

While making no reference to postmodernism, Bernard Faure's essay actually engages a wide range of the issues which might be lumped together under the rubric of postmodernism. Faure presents a critical examination of: 1) the ideological elements of the Kyoto school, beginning with Nishida, which have at least the possibility of being taken as support for nationalistic ideologies of Japan's uniqueness, 2) the tendency of some western scholars to accept the

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works of the Kyoto school as expressions of "pure philosophy," and 3) the dangers of scapegoating, i.e., falling into a position of counter-ideology or reverse Orientalism, when criticizing the ideological elements of the Kyoto school. These concerns echo Heine's interest in moving beyond centrism, de-centric postmodernism, and deconstructive postmodernism.

Faure is struggling here, in a very serious and self-conscious way, with one of the major dilemmas posed by recent, and not so recent, developments in any number of intellectual traditions. While there is a relentless urge to be critical of, to demystify, and to deconstruct ideologies, hidden assumptions, and philosophies, theorists and critics often unintentionally replicate in some transformed manner the very positions they seek to critique. Faure recognizes the potential here for tragic irony. Very often the dilemma is absurdly simple, but maybe that is the nature of dilemmas. If one deconstructs or shows how all knowledge is determined or contingent, then from what position does one critique? While there is no resolution here, the problem is clearly posed and developed a step further than usual through a thorough engagement of recent debate about the Kyoto school and Buddhism in Japan.

The final essay is Ōe Kenzaburō's "Japan, the Dubious, and Myself," a talk given in New York in 1993 which is more or less the same as his Nobel Prize speech. This text needs no introduction. I am reminded here, however, of an essay by Ōe which appeared in newspapers in Japan in the months following his reception of the Nobel Prize. He spoke of giving up writing novels, at least partially because so many readers have said they found his novels difficult to understand and never managed to finish reading them. Ōe also spoke of a desire to concentrate on writing clear and precise definitions.

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