

The Formation of Modern Ethics in China and Japan

The Contributions of Inoue Tetsujirō
and Cai Yuan-pei

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In the late nineteenth century, Japanese intellectuals used several Chinese characters to translate Western terms such as “ethics” and “morals” when they first encountered those conceptions. Not until 1881 did Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–1944) borrow the Chinese term *lunli* to translate “ethics” as *rinrigaku* 倫理學. Later the word “morals” was given the Japanese translation *dōtoku* 道德. Thus *rinri* and *dōtoku* were used to signify the subjects of “ethics” and “morality” based on the meaning of describing human relationships and high morality. The two terms thus began to have a clearer distinction. Inoue subsequently published *New Interpretations of Ethics* in 1883, advocating a “Japanese ethics” and theoretically exploring the “foundations of ethics.” Furthermore, he composed an academic discourse in Japan about “the problems of Japanese ethics” modeled on Western ethics.

In Chinese history, *lunli* and *daode* have never been interpreted separately. The terms *rinri*, *dōtoku*, and *rinrigaku* were passed from Japan to China during the late Qing Dynasty while the theory of Western ethics was introduced into China in the twentieth century. Cai Yuan-pei (1867–

1930) grasped the timing of this and consciously absorbed the methodology of Western ethics. In his *History of Chinese Ethics* (『中國倫理學史』, 1901), Cai followed the Japanese course and searched for corresponding Chinese translations of Western ethical terms. In addition, he edited the discourse of Chinese ethics in terms of the methods, principles, and history of ethics.

As educators, Inoue Tetsujirō and Cai Yuan-pei were both officially assigned by their respective governments to study German. During their time overseas, they took note of Western ethics, and after returning to their homelands, enthusiastically devoted themselves to integrating Western ethics into the University of Tokyo and Beijing University respectively. Meanwhile, they zealously translated and disseminated works on Western ethics. Inoue chose to consider Confucian morals as the basis of “national morality” while Cai emphasized the importance of morality in the system of education.

Based on Inoue and Cai’s interpretations, this essay will explore the “borrowing” and “regeneration” (MORIOKA 1991 and LIU 1999) of the meanings of moral relationships and conduct as derived from *rinri* and *dōtoku*, and will discuss the process of constructing ethics in contemporary China and Japan.

THE APPEARANCE OF “ETHICAL ISSUES”

In the “Chapter of Music” in the *Book of Rites*, there is a sentence stating that “All modulations of sound take their rise from the mind of man; music is the intercommunication of them in their relations and differences.” *Lunli* 倫理 here means the principles by which things communicate among themselves their relations and differences. In Jia Yi’s “Changes of Time” in the *New Book*, the sentence, “The Shang King violates the rituals and righteousness and abandons the principles of human relationships,” indicates the meaning of *lunli* as “all kinds of principles of relationship.” As for *daode*, it appears in the sentence, “They harmonize these principles with the *daode* and lay down the order of moral principles” (from the chapter entitled “Speaking of Divinatory Symbols” in *The Book of Changes*). In addition, we can find it in the phrase, “*daode* has

principles” (from the chapter entitled the “Universal One” of *Guanzi*). In Laozi’s *Daodejing*, *daode* is not only mentioned but is also interpreted word by word.

Thus *lunli* is the *li*, or principles, that exist in human relationships, but *daode* puts more emphasis on practicing the essential manners and sentiments of *dao*. Since both are associated with the way one behaves in relation to other people, they are not clearly separated in the Chinese language and as such are nearly synonymous.

Before the Tokugawa period, the two words were introduced into Japan from China through the circulation of classical books. *Lunli* rarely appears in Japanese records, while *daode* is much more common. A small number of other words similar in meaning to *daode* also appear: *lun* (倫, principle), *wulun* (五倫, five principles), and *renlun* (人倫, human principles). *Dao* and *de* sometimes appear separately. In his book *The Meanings of Words in the Analects and Mencius*, Itō Jinsai mentions *dao* and *de* in particular, regarding them as nearly equivalent in their meaning of the operation of human relationships.

“Ethics” originates from the Greek word *ethos*, while “moral” is derived from the Latin word, *mores*. Both refer to “habits” or “principles.” Aristotle took *ethike* to mean the study of *ethos*, for which Cicero coined the term *philosophia moralis*. The two words *ethos* and *mores* are the origins of the philosophy of ethics and morals in the Latin heritage, from which their English equivalents are derived.

In 1867, J. C. Hepburn first included the word “ethics” in his *Japanese-English and English-Japanese Dictionary*, with ethics being rendered as *dōtokugaku* (道德學) or *shūshingaku* (修身學). In his 1873 book on *Utilitarianism* (『生性發蘊』), Nishi Amane translated ethics as *rinri* (rituals), whereas Hori Tatsunosuke translated it as the “teaching of rituals, models, and methods” in his *Pocket Dictionary of English-Japanese Translation* (『英和對譯袖珍辭書』). Until 1872, Nakamura Masanao treated “ethics” as the behavior of morality when he translated J. Mill’s book *On Liberty*.

Up until 1881, Inoue Tetsujirō had recourse to Confucian terms and considered “ethics” as “writing rituals and music, intercommunicating ethics; but more than that, close to records of thinking, rectifying ethics, and being sincere in gratitude.” Later, “ethics” was rendered *rinrigaku* in his *Dictionary of Philosophy* (『哲學字彙』). Still later, he translated moral

philosophy as *dōgigaku* (道義學, the study of morality and righteousness). He especially focused on the conception of subject classification, and was concerned how to express Western terms in Eastern languages. Borrowing Tetsujirō's translations, Shibata Shōkichi published an English-Japanese dictionary the following year in which he listed *rinri* as “ethics” and *dōtoku* as “morals.”

Linguists categorize *rinri* (倫理) and *dōtoku* (道德) as new Chinese characters (新漢語) or modern Chinese characters (近代漢語). Unlike “democracy” (民主), “science” (科學), and “economics” (經濟), the original meaning of the two words of the compound disappeared when being used to refer to a Western term, which then lent legitimacy to the new Chinese compound. In other words, it was not a matter of simply resurrecting old terms or giving birth to new ones, but of allowing the previous and current meanings to coexist in the same terms. Thus, when Western concepts are translated into modern Japanese, the concepts take on the superiority of a guest language. This in turn implies that the theory at work in the guest language is playing a leading role. The new meaning of *rinrigaku* explains the superiority of a newly organized discourse based on the rejection of old moral doctrines.

During the Meiji period, *rinrigaku* was translated as “ethics,” with the result that what the younger generation of philosophers encountered at the time not a cluster of *rinrimondai* (ethical issues), but rather *rinrigaku mondai* (issues regarding the study of ethics). In other words, the question was how to integrate the problems that arose within *rinrigaku* into academic discourse or from the challenge of scholars who supported “Japanese moral theory.”

INOUE TETSUJIRŌ'S *RINRI SHINSETSU*

Inoue Tetsujirō, who was taught by Nishi Amane (1829–1897), collected his teacher's and other scholars' translations of Western philosophical terms in his philosophical glossary, 『哲學字彙』. In addition, his study of modern poetic form, 『新體詩抄』, was based on the imitating the poetic rhymes of English poetry. Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), who was one of Tetsujirō's students, was interested in the question of the good

(善) and in the fusion of Western and Eastern cultures. In Tetsujirō's case, fusion affected only cultural forms. For Nishida, in contrast, it was the theoretical fusion that he aimed at in his talk of "pure experience" in *An Inquiry Into the Good*.

Nishi Amane is known as the "Japanese father of Western philosophy," Tetsujirō as the "founder of Western philosophy in Japan," and Nishida Kitarō as the "founder of the Kyoto School." We may therefore grant Tetsujirō a central place in the development of modern Japanese philosophy as having inherited the achievements of Nishi and stimulated those of Nishida. The uniqueness of Tetsujirō's philosophy lies in his combining important elements of Western philosophy with Eastern Confucianism and Buddhism. His approach is grounded in a comparative *rinrigaku*. Like other new disciplines that emerged in the Meiji Period, such as physics, political science, psychology, and financial management, *rinrigaku* was reclassified and reorganized in academic circles to become part of the history of modern Japan.

While teaching at the University of Tokyo, Tetsujirō offered courses on "the history of Eastern philosophy" and "logic" with a special focus on ethics and the issues facing the East. He was convinced that the philosophical essence in Eastern thinking had not yet been sufficiently distilled and disseminated. Western philosophy, he believed, would aid in bringing the requisite theoretical foundation to promote the philosophical values of the East. He appealed to "ethics" and "morality" to distinguish Eastern and Western values, but in his enthusiasm to find points of similarity, he failed to take the individuality of particular thinkers adequately into consideration:

Western ethics mainly emphasizes the exploration of knowledge, not moral cultivation. In other words, moral thinking is practiced through the pursuit of knowledge; both should be combined. There is no way to lay particular stress on one side. If the advantages of Western and Eastern philosophy can be integrated, an unprecedented morality is bound to result later on. (INOUE 1900, 578)

Tetsujirō also edited a dictionary of ethics 『日本倫理彙編』 and a compendium on *bushidō* 『武士道叢書』, once again in the attempt to find Eastern counterparts to Western ethical ideas: "Western ethics, Eastern

morals.” He was sent to study philosophy in Germany by MEXT from 1884 to 1890. He learned German, French, and Italian in his first four months, and later was admitted into the University of Heidelberg. During his year in Heidelberg, he took Kuno Fischer’s (1824–1907) philosophy courses, and audited lectures on zoology and physics. Subsequently, he transferred to the University of Leipzig to audit the lectures of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), and made friends with Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), from whom he learned metaphysics and the philosophy of Hegel. After that, he taught at an Eastern language school in Berlin. He did not return to Tokyo until 1890, at which time he became a professor at the University of Tokyo.

Tetsujirō was the first Japanese professor in the department of philosophy at the University of Tokyo to publish a textbook on ethics, *A New Interpretation of Ethics* (『倫理新説』, 1883). In this short, sixty-three-page book, he argues that ethics has to do both with principles of practice and with norms of public education. It is worth pausing to look at the origins of this approach.

To philosophize, one needs to delve into the origins of ethics. This was in fact where Tetsujirō begins:

There is no need for us to discuss how to obtain happiness or what kind of behavior leads to trouble; rather we need to explore why humans pursue happiness as the ultimate objective. (INOUE 1883, 415)

Thus the structure of ethics that Tetsujirō offered had to do with the ultimate *good* of human beings. His task was to establish a discourse on the subject in Japan based on the way the questions were framed in European ethics.

Although his *New Interpretation of Ethics* was criticized by the commentators of the 『明治文化全集』 (*Complete Works of Meiji Culture*), the criticisms have been dismissed as “nothing more than traditional ideas and ethics with evolutionism, so lacking in logical integrity that they can only be dismissed as inferior opinions” (MATSUZAKI 1992, 416). Although the criticisms are not altogether unreasonable, given the high-spirited, flamboyant rhetoric to which Tetsujirō was prone, we cannot dismiss the work lightly as it represents the first academic discussion of ethics in Japan. Tetsujirō tried to introduce the “question of ethics” in

order to structure the treatment of particular ethical issues. In other words, what modern ethics is concerned with is what the *good* is, and how to choose it. The former belongs to foundational moral philosophy and the latter is the object of applied ethics; the one gives ethics its substance, the other its function.

Tetsujirō insisted that we should consider the nature of *good* and *evil* (惡) before delving into substantial issues such as how to choose the *good*. Before creating a general framework for resolving ethical issues, we need to consider the meaning of good and evil through rational thinking and reflections on human experience. In the process, our aim should be to fortify our capacity for moral judgment and secure methodologies to verify basic moral principles.

Inoue Tetsujirō's junior schoolmate, Inoue Enryō (1858–1919), published his own *Theory of Ethics* (『倫理通論』) in 1886. In his later textbook, *An Outline of Ethics* (『倫理摘要』, 1891), he illuminates the aim of ethics:

Rinrigaku is equivalent to the English “ethics,” “moral philosophy,” or “moral science.” Subsequently, people translated it as *dōgigaku*, *dōtokugaku*, and *shūshingaku*. All of these translations are inappropriate. I advocate naming it *rinrigaku*. This discipline has to do with the criteria for judging good and evil, the principles for evaluating *dōtoku*, and the standards to govern behavior. The reason I translate it this way is the result of logical argumentation, not of free imagination or simple happenstance. (INOUE Enryō 1891, 2)

Enryō pointed out that *rinrigaku* was translated from “ethics.” *Dōtokugaku* and *shūshingaku* are both unable to cover the full meaning of *rinrigaku*. He criticized Confucius' and Menzi's ideas of human nature as being products of the imagination resulting from insufficient evidence to prove “how benevolence, righteousness, ritual, and courtesy are human principles.” Therefore, he worked out a structure for ethical questions, aiming to judge “the criteria of *good* and *evil* and the principles of *dōtoku*.”

Enryō began by compiling a glossary of terms, a study of the naming of schools of ethics, a chronological chart of ethical thinkers, and a brief history of ethics, and then set out to edit his results. Along the way he picked up contemporary and modern European theories, reorganizing

them into a catalogue of “148 ethical questions” to help students navigate their way around his ethical system. His chapters covered:

1. Introduction (how to define ethics)
2. Teleology (what the result is if people do not take happiness as the ultimate goal)
3. Norms (the difference between theory and reality)
4. Conscience
5. Will (what the ultimate goal is)
6. Behaviorism (whether there are things that take egoism to be a good)
7. Regulations
8. Conclusion

Enryō was persuaded that the issues of ethics and morality arising in real society could be brought into his study of ethics. With the aim of redefining ethics, he created a modern, integrated, academic discourse for ethics. Since his work was framed as a textbook of ethics, at the same time, it takes on the mission of education (teacher training).

“Good and bad, righteous and evil” were some of the main concerns of Western ethics in the mid-nineteenth century. For Japan, these ideas no longer had much appeal. Most scholars focused instead on utilitarianism, which aimed at increasing the happiness and goodness of human beings and diminishing the evil. This same focus can be found in Nishi Amane’s *Three Treasures of Human Life* (『人生三寶説』) and in the ethical theories of the two Inoues. The emphasis in Western ethics fell on standards of individual behavior. Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900), who was exploring these questions at the same time as Tetsujirō and Enryō, was an English utilitarian moral philosopher. He believed, as Tetsujirō summarizes, that

Ethics is a study of the principles that govern right action or conduct. It is different from politics, because it is concerned with what is right for each individual, while politics is concerned with what is right for society. (INOUE 1874, 15)

Enryō agreed with this idea, observing that, “The police stress the criteria of how a country behaves, but ethics focuses on individuals. The

two are very different” (1886, 1–2). In a similar vein, Ōnishi Hajime (1864–1900) noted that, “Ethics is a study of the principles that govern correct action or conduct. It helps to criticize the behavior of each individual” (1903, 5).

Tetsujirō disagreed. As the Imperial Rescript on Education had proclaimed in 1890, “loyalty and filial piety” were the aim of ethics. Christians and Buddhists alike disapproved reducing ethics to guidelines for the country and national identity, and making “loyalty and filial piety” the highest virtues. The conservatives, in contrast, believed that each individual has the duty of “good citizenship” towards his or her country. In this regard, Tetsujirō pointed out in his *Outline of the Ethics of the People* (『國民道德概論』) what he saw as the greatest flaw of Western ethics: that it did not include “good citizenship” as duty. He criticized Western scholars who defined virtues as a praiseworthy quality exhibited in right conduct, while failing to take into consideration the importance of good citizenship and its practice (INOUE 1912, 11–18). In his view, “good citizenship” was the defining characteristic of a country. In Japan, this culminated in Shinto and the national polity (国体), in the pursuit of the martial arts, in loyalty and filial piety, and so on.

Fujii Kenjirō (1872–1931), a student of Tetsujirō’s, was appointed professor of ethics in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Tokyo in 1901. He also believed that “good citizenship” should be part of *rinrigaku*:

Even though ethics is a product of Western philosophy, its structure and practicality have been weak and unrealistic. “Good citizens/morals” were founded a long time ago. They supplement the ideas of our nationality, and thus constitute practical wisdom and a standard for the Japanese. (FUJII 1920, 8)

Based on these practical beliefs, Tetsujirō published his *Moral Education* (『倫理與教育』) in 1908, and the following year Fujii Kenjirō edited *The Problem of the Examination for Educational Discipline* (『修身科教員試験問題』), both eager to fulfill their final educational mission as scholars of ethics at the University of Tokyo, and to prove the comprehensiveness and obligatory nature of “good citizenship.”

CAI YUAN-PEI'S HISTORY OF CHINESE ETHICS

In the beginning of the twentieth century in China, views of “ethics and morals” from the West were at first rationalized in terms of human relations, the principles that govern them, and “virtuous behavior.” How were they to respond to comparisons of Western “ethics” and “morals” with these traditional Eastern notions?

The earliest Chinese scholars exiled in Japan had already begun to study Japanese ethics. In 1897 Kang You-wei (1858–1927) published a catalogue entitled 『日本書目誌』 introducing Japanese books, content, and methods. Liang Qi-chao (1873–1929) then began writing newsletters in 1901 about Western philosophers, among them Spencer, Rousseau, Francis Bacon, Descartes, Kant, and Darwin. He believed that Japanese ethics covered the whole of the human sojourn of life (LIANG 1900, 35). Although the Chinese believed that they were “a country of etiquette,” Kang believed that the significance of China’s ethics was narrow and unable to comfort the masses of people: “We must attentively mimic the ideas of the West to rescue society from its chaotic disorder and reorganize the history of Chinese ethical philosophy.” He quoted from the *Recent Mandates from the Japanese Ministry of Education* (『日本文部省近日之訓令』) to emphasize the ethical education in middle schools in the following six concepts:

Oneself: health, purpose of life, knowledge, emotion, thoughts, and so on.

One’s family: parents, siblings, children, relatives, ancestors, servants, and so on.

One’s society: properties, fame, honor, gratitude, generosity, and so on.

One’s country: constitution, patriotism, laws, civil rights, international relations, and so on.

One’s humanity: justice, good faith, veracity, gratitude, generosity, courage.

Altruism: biotic and abiotic things, selfless concerns, and so on.

In 1905, Liu Shi-pei (1884–1919) published a *Textbook on Ethics* (『倫理教科書』), noting out that Chinese ethics is mainly concentrated in studies of the Song period, especially Zhu Xi (1130–1200), and that they placed

stress on practicality and self-discipline rather than altruism. In the first, introductory section, he argued that Chinese ethics is based on eight focal points, from which he derived an initial definition of ethics. He then turned to the question of the right mindfulness, the capacity for self-discipline, and finally, the management of family and country to secure peace in the world. The second section, focusing on family and society, included the Ming dynasty *Liuyu* (『六喻』), the *Shengyu guangxun* (『聖喻廣訓』) from the Qing dynasty, and quotes from Inoue Enryō's *Points of Ethics* (『倫理摘要』) to draw attention to Western philosophy's knowledge, emotion, and ideas of good and evil. From this, we can surmise that Liu Shi-pei had devoted considerable time to studying ethics as it was understood in both the West and in Japan.

Cai Yuan-pei by and large agreed with Liu Shi-pei. Both accepted the form of ethics from the West, though Cai Yuan-pei concentrated more on methods of research, adapting traditional culture to what he had understood of other countries from his reading of Japanese sources. During the time he spent in Germany to learn from the West, his appreciation of the importance of Chinese education and its focus on ethics deepened. This is reflected in his 1908 *Textbook for Middle-School Discipline* (『中學修身教科書』). He published a partial translation of Friedrich Paulsen's *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, which outlined the concepts, objects, and methods of ethics, with numerous digressions on the consequences of good and evil, on pessimism, evil wickedness, egotism, altruism, the relationship between morals and religions, freedom of the will, and so on. Through Cai Yuan-pei's translations, neo-Kantian ethics came to shape the foundations of modern Chinese ethics.

In 1910, Cai Yuan-pei published a *History of Chinese Ethics* (『中國倫理學史』), written in the light of *The History of Eastern Ethics* (『東洋倫理學史』) by Kimura Ōtarō 木村鷹太郎, and *An Outline of the History of Eastern Ethics* (『東洋倫理史要』) by Kubo Tenzui (1875–1937). Cai Yuan-pei's book is similar in content to Kubo's. He divides the work into three parts: Pre-Qin establishment, the heritage of the Han and Tang, and the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties. In each part he lays out the characteristics, correlations, and development of each school of thought. In addition to introducing more than thirty significant philoso-

phers and their accomplishments, he analyzed their successes and failures in as fair and objective a manner as he could. For example, he writes:

Confucianism represented fully the root idealism of our nationality... yet its philosophy was not as deep as Daoism, its theory as detailed as legalism, or as focused on human equality as Moism. (CAI 1900, 151)

Cai argued that Mozi's belief in universal well-being would "last three hundred years"; that Xun Zi's belief was that human nature is inherently evil; that Lao Zhuang focused on the individual's freedom of will; but that Han Fei (韓非, 281–233 BCE) had advocated monarchical authoritarianism, with only the sovereign having freedom of will. Although Han Fei's idea had its advantages, Cai found it ill-suited to ethics. At the end of his *History of Chinese Ethics*, Cai strongly recommended the views of Dai Zhen (1724–1777), Huang Zongxi (1610–1695), and Yu Lichu (1775–1840). He praised them for their progressive thinking and for representing the first voices of "freedom in the East." Finally, he concluded by listing the four flaws of Chinese traditional ethics:

1. A lack in the basis of science. Only Moists studied science in the pre-Qing dynasty. This died out soon after the Han Dynasty.
2. All studies of ethics were only focused on discussion, and only Xun Zi and Mozi concentrated on the practicalities. This also died out after the Han Dynasty.
3. The teaching of politics and religion were mixed.
4. The lack of comparison from other cultures was also a flaw. Although Buddhism was around, becoming a monk was not compatible with the soul of Chinese ethics.

Cai was impressed by the results gained from absorbing Western ethics at the end of the Qing Dynasty, and believed that "the development of Chinese ethics will move forward to a new phase."

In 1924, Cai edited and published another book, *Philosophy Made Simple* (『簡易哲學綱要』), in which he further identified and explained the sources of problems and methods in Chinese ethics. He indicated that "the value of ethics is equivalent to the purpose of human behavior," and that ethics should be therefore incorporated into personal morality, sociology, and historical philosophy (CAI 1900, 120). He also sought to

integrate Western judgment further into Chinese ethics. He proposed ideas such as “freedom, equality, and universal well-being” as principles for “good citizens.” Righteousness is for freedom, forgiveness for, equality, and altruism for universal well-being. He wanted to keep both politics and ethics together since ethical well-being defines the highest good as the greatest happiness attainable by an individual or a society. In this sense, Chinese ethics was clearly different from the Japanese ideals of loyalty and filial piety or “good citizenship,” even if such notions merit further consideration on their own.

THE SEARCH FOR JAPANESE ETHICS

Nishimura Shigeki (1828–1902), one of the members of the Meiji 6 Society, lamented the loss of moral principles in the Meiji period. He felt that the ethics that had been introduced to Japan from Europe was unable to save Japan from moral degeneration. He was further convinced that “ethics” was so excessively abstract as to be incapable of satisfying the Japanese need for a concrete morality. For this reason, it was all but impossible for European ethics to become “national principles.” Instead, Nishimura advocated the development of “Japanized morals,” an eclectic combination of secular principles East and West. More specifically, he proposed adopting modern, Western logic and language to reconstruct Confucian human principles based on the questions facing the Japanese nation at that time. In 1888 Nonaka Jun published his *Fundamentals of Japanese Morality* (『日本道徳原論』), a work that appears to be a response to Nishimura’s proposal for a Japanized morality. He begins by describing various schools of ethics, the foundations of ethics, and applied ethics. In fact, the work is little more than a piece of propaganda for Confucian doctrines. Although “ethics” appears in the title of every chapter, it has more to do with *rinri* rather than with ethics. Nonaka states:

Rin, in its Japanese pronunciation, is read *tomogara* or *tsuide*. The dictionary defines this as meaning rank, order, or principle, that is, the ordering of individuals within a group and the rules for getting

along with others in all human societies. This is why it is called *rinri*. (NONAKA 1888, 2)

Obviously, the ethics he refers to is a Confucian ideal that is not interested in corresponding ideals in Western ethics. In the early years of the Shōwa era, when Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960) published his *Study of Ethics in Human Formation* (『為人之學の倫理學』) and *Ethics* (『倫理學』), he believed that:

Ethics must challenge “ethics so-called”... The term “ethics” was neither created by us nor was it produced merely for the sake of the individual subject. Like other terms, even before we begin to question it, “ethics” has an objective existence all its own. This should suggest that we need to unravel the myth of ethics. *Rinri* originates from China, and was passed on to Japan, where it radiates, full of life. What conceptions can we create through this idea? (WATSUJI 1934, 6)

Watsuji drew on Dilthey’s historical hermeneutics to generate a “hermeneutical method.” Taking “ethics” as a vocabulary for life and “living human experience,” he related interpretations of ethics to daily life:

Human *ri* is the principle of human behavior. *Rin* refers to the order and conditions that human beings share. The meaning is expanded when the two terms are joined to form a compound, but the principles included in the original meaning of *rin* are emphasized in terms of *ri*. Therefore, *rinri* represents the basic principles of shared conditions. (1934, 7)

Watsuji viewed *rinri* and human beings as belonging to the secular world. Thus, as the study of human relationships, *rinrigaku* seeks to analyze the basic order that human beings share. Although his *rinrigaku* was constructed through the language and methods of modern Western philosophy, its content focused on “common human relationships.” In contrast to the modern European emphasis on the individual, Watsuji’s *rinrigaku* was clearly cut from another cloth.

As we have seen, the ethical discourse of Japan took its start from Inoue Tetsujirō’s translation of the term “ethics.” During the Shōwa period, certain professors of *rinrigaku* at the University of Tokyo held the nation (國家) to be the supreme structure of “human organization.” *Rinrigaku*

itself comprised a fuller theory of subjective morality, even when its focus was shifted to the national level. China initially took note of the study of *rinri* as a result of the Japanese translation. Cai Yuan-pei, as we saw, tried to establish freedom, equality, and love as the core of ethical morality. He saw moral praxis as including both moral education and the cultivation of the full personality, thus providing a framework for ethics in China. In addition, he considered the purpose of ethical education to be the preservation of traditional mores and the promotion of a healthy personality. We see his proximity to Hegel's ethics when we expand the aims of ethics to include the nation and the Great Self (*mahā-ātman*). In discussing war, for example, Cai's attitude is milder than Hegel's but still argues for its legitimacy. Here again, the emphasis on protecting the nation rather than on race came to take precedence in the ethical ideas of China and Japan in the early twentieth century.

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