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## Chapter 28

# Hisamatsu Shin'ichi: Oriental Nothingness



André van der Braak

HISAMATSU Shin'ichi 久松 真一 (1889–1980) was a well-known Zen philosopher and Zen Buddhist scholar. As a student of NISHIDA Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), and a teacher of ABE Masao (1915–2006), he can be seen as loosely connected to the Kyoto School. However, although he was a professor at Kyoto University and received an honorary doctoral degree from Harvard University, Hisamatsu has primarily become known in the West as a charismatic lay Zen master, who criticized Japanese Zen for its focus on awakening (J. *satori* 悟り) at the expense of consideration of social and political issues. His aim was to come to a reformed, true Zen.

Although more members of the Kyoto School were both philosophers and Zen practitioners, notably NISHITANI Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990) and UEDA Shizuteru 上田関照, in Hisamatsu's life and work one finds most strongly the tension between academic philosophy and its limits, on the one hand, and Zen practice and awakening, on the other hand. Throughout his life, Hisamatsu aimed to bridge the gap between philosophy and religion:

Philosophy wants to know ultimately, and religion wants to live ultimately. For the whole man, however, both are one and not two; they are inseparable. The religion isolated from philosophy falls into ignorance, superstition, fanaticism, and dogma, while the philosophy with religion estranged from it cannot but be deprived of life. Both religion and philosophy in their present conditions seem to expose such faults. (Hisamatsu 1996: 435)

While Christopher Ives has extensively written elsewhere about Hisamatsu as a Zen master (Ives 2010), this essay will focus on his contributions as a philosopher.

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## 1 Biography

In his autobiographical essay *Memories from My Student Life*, Hisamatsu recounts how he was first raised in a devout Shin Buddhist family but then underwent a “conversion from the religious life of naive religious belief which avoids rational doubt, to the critical life of modern man based on autonomous rational judgment and empirical proof” (Abe 1981: 28).<sup>1</sup> As a result, he entered Kyoto University in 1912 and studied philosophy with NISHIDA Kitarō. Western philosophy had been introduced in the Meiji period (1868–1912) as a highly rational and logical discipline. Many young Japanese that were religiously inclined turned to philosophy in order to probe their religious concerns in greater depth. As Abe notes, however, Hisamatsu’s motivation for turning to philosophy differed: he had already left behind the religious faith in which he was reared and deeply believed, a faith that he described later as merely a case of “leave-it-up-to-the-Almighty-ism which avoided all doubt” (Abe 1981: 30).

However, his philosophical life also proved unsatisfactory. Hisamatsu came to despair of philosophy and human reason. As Abe notes, this reason was the autonomous reason of the Western Enlightenment:

For Hisamatsu, reason was not merely a means to idealistically contemplating the world of intelligibility in some transcendental beyond. Nor was it dualistic intellectual reason scrutinizing the objective world. More than anything else, it has to be autonomous reason, laying by itself the subjective foundation of the self and examining critically all dogmas and pre-suppositions, those of religion included. (Abe 1981: 31)

Autonomous Enlightenment reason could not address Hisamatsu’s deeply felt existential religious concerns. As Abe explains, the standpoint of autonomous reason will inevitably crumble away to the extent that it is penetrated: “The further autonomy is penetrated the deeper one falls into a kind of self-entanglement, until the self-entanglement extends itself throughout one’s entire existence. Such self-binding, or self-collapse, is an inescapable self-contradiction inherent in autonomous reason” (Abe 1981: 32).

Hisamatsu turned to Zen in an attempt to break through such inescapable self-contradiction and to find a standpoint beyond both the theocentric, heteronomous faith of his youth, and the anthropocentric, autonomous reason of academic philosophy. With Nishida’s recommendation, he joined the Rinzai Zen monastery at Myōshinji temple in 1915 and studied with Zen Master IKEGAMI Shosan. During the *rōhatsu sesshin* 臘八接心 of December 1915, he attained awakening, *kenshō* 見性.<sup>2</sup> As he would write himself later, in such an awakening,

the rational self is cast off in negation. This results in autonomy of a deeper dimension, which has broken beyond and completely shaken off the limitations of rational autonomy. It is fundamental, absolute autonomy free of the fatalistic, absolute antinomy that characterizes rational autonomy. (Hisamatsu 1975a)

<sup>1</sup>Abe’s essay was originally published in Japanese as “Hisamatsu Shin’ichi Sensei no Kaku no Tetsugaku” 「久松真一先生の覚の哲学」. *Risō* 理想 424 (September 1968): 10–24.

<sup>2</sup>As Abe notes, Hisamatsu himself does not take *kenshō* (seeing one’s Nature, insight into the Self) as an experience, for “experience” indicates something happening in time and space, whereas *kenshō* by nature is trans-temporal and trans-spatial (1981: 32, n4).

The standpoint of such an awakening is, in Abe's terms,

a world with neither God nor man, transcendence nor immanence, self nor other, mind nor matter, life nor death, good nor evil, right nor wrong, love nor hate, inner nor outer, movement nor stillness, time nor space, past nor present nor future.[...] It transcends all aspects of man and God, the profane and the sacred, time and eternity, philosophy and religion, knowledge and faith. It brings about the absolute transcendence of transcendence, though not in the direction of some distant beyond: the very standpoint of transcendence is inverted from its foundation. This is a fundamental conversion of all things, including even the standpoint of immanence transcended by transcendence. (Abe 1981: 37f)

Hisamatsu spent the rest of his life attempting to express such a religious awakening, in philosophical as well as non-philosophical ways. In 1928, he taught in Kyoto at what is currently Hanazono University and at Ryūkoku University. From 1932 on, he taught at the Philosophy Faculty of Imperial Kyoto University, and from 1943 to 1949, he served as the chair for Buddhism and philosophy of religion. In 1957–1958 he traveled to Europe and the United States, teaching at Harvard University and meeting with Paul Tillich (1886–1965), Martin Buber (1878–1965), Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976).

Abe Masao claims that Hisamatsu's philosophy "is not philosophy as it is understood in the West, but Awakening itself. Hisamatsu, the philosopher of Awakening, was not a philosopher in the ordinary sense: he was an awakened man" (Abe 1981: 28). Regardless of the truth value of such an assertion, such claims create problems for the assessment of Hisamatsu's philosophical thought. What if someone claimed that "Thomas Aquinas was not a philosopher in the ordinary sense: he was a saint"? We would legitimately protest that such assertions have no place in philosophical discourse. Abe also states that

Hisamatsu's philosophy, then, however important it may be, was but one of many self-expressions of his awakening, all stemming from the same source. The philosophy of Awakening differs in no way from a flower arranged by Hisamatsu for the tea ceremony. In that one flower his philosophy is fully manifested. Those who cannot see the philosophy of Awakening in that flower will fail to see it in his philosophical works as well. (Abe 1981: 28)

Nevertheless, in this essay we will attempt to assess Hisamatsu's philosophy of awakening on its own terms, regardless of his awakened state as a Zen master. Therefore, we will have to make a distinction between philosophy and religion.

## 2 Oriental Nothingness

Whereas the fundamental question of the onto-theological mainstream of the West has been "what is being?" the counter question of the Kyoto School has been "what is nothingness?"<sup>3</sup> Rather than an ontology, the philosophy of the Kyoto School can

<sup>3</sup>General information on the Kyoto School in this paper has been taken from Davis 2010.

be described as a meontology, a philosophy of non-being or nothingness (Davis 2010: section 3.1).

The Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of “nothingness” is connected to both the Indian Buddhist notion of *śūnyatā* (“emptiness”) and the Chinese Daoist pre-ontology of *wu* 無 (“nothingness”). *Śūnyatā* in the work of Nāgārjuna (ca. 150 C.E.) means that all things come to being in “*pratītya-samutpāda*” (“interdependent origination”) and are therefore empty of “*svabhāva*,” a complex notion that can mean, depending on the context in which it is used, substance, essence, or true nature (Westerhoff 2009: 12f; 19–52). The notion of “*wu*” emphasizes an indeterminate, distinctionless reality as the origin of all things. This unnamable nondualistic source of all being and relative non-being is also referred to as the nontranscendent field of *dao*. Both of these two strands of thought, Nāgārjuna’s *śūnyatā* and the Daoist *wu*, were combined in the Zen notion of nothingness (Kasulis 1981: 14f).

“*Śūnyatā*” is technically translated as “*kū*” (C. *kong* 空), and the Chinese “*wu*” is changed only in pronunciation into the Japanese “*mu*.” The thinkers of the Kyoto School tend to favor the term *mu*, which is found predominantly in Zen. The nothingness of the Kyoto School thinkers, however, is not a relative nothingness, an absence of being, but an “absolute nothingness” (J. *zettai mu* 絶対無), a term coined by Nishida, that encompasses both being and not-being. The term “*zettai*” literally means a “severing of opposition,” which implies the sense of “without an opposing other.” Absolute nothingness must embrace, rather than stand over against, relative nothingness (Davis 2010: section 3.3).

Hisamatsu, also, no doubt influenced in this by his teacher Nishida, initially attempted to express his “standpoint of awakening” by the term “Oriental nothingness” (J. *tōyōteki mu*). In 1928, Hisamatsu gave a talk entitled “Oriental Nothingness.” Until about 1946, this expression was used by him to indicate the standpoint of awakening to the true Self (Ohashi 1990: 229).

Hisamatsu’s primary text on Oriental nothingness is his 1939 essay “The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness,” published in Japanese in 1946 and in English in 1959.<sup>4</sup> In his Preface, he distinguishes between the mere conceptual demands and scholarly interests of men that drive academic descriptions of nothingness and the religious impulse to provide a signpost for those who seek to realize nothingness. This religious impulse has driven Zen patriarchs throughout the ages to “make a compass to sail the ocean of fog” (ON 66). It is in this latter spirit that Hisamatsu aims to provide conceptual clarification of the notion of Oriental nothingness, first by negative delineation, then by positive description.

Hisamatsu starts by arguing that Oriental nothingness is different from five common Western conceptions of nothingness. First, nothingness is not the negation of being, such as when one says “there is no desk” or “there is no pleasure.” Second, it is not a predicative negation as in “the desk is not a chair” or “pleasure is not grief.” Third, it is not an abstract concept that would indicate nonbeing in general rather than being. Fourth, it is not a conjecture, as when while alive, one would imagine

<sup>4</sup>For this article, the revised translation by TOKIWA Gishin has been used (Hisamatsu 2005). References will be indicated as ON.

oneself as dead or non-existing. Fifth, it does not refer to an absence of consciousness, as in deep sleep, unconsciousness, or death (ON 66–75).

According to Hisamatsu, Oriental nothingness has a meaning that is distinct from all five meanings of nothingness in the Western context. Oriental nothingness is beyond the dualism of being and nonbeing. It is not a passive, contemplative state that can be achieved through meditation practice but an active contemplative mind. Hisamatsu then goes on to enlist six positive delineations of Oriental nothingness.

### 3 The Six Characteristics of Nothingness

(1) *Not a single thing*: According to Hisamatsu, there is a reason for the fact that Oriental nothingness is often understood as an absence of being: it does have a characteristic that could be expressed in this sense. This is the characteristic of “not a single thing,” which means that “as regards that which is generally said “to be,” there is in and for Oriental nothingness not one single such thing” (ON 75). Oriental nothingness does not refer to an objective world outside the mind that can be perceived. In this sense, it is radically different from the ordinary structure of human consciousness that always assumes a perceiver that is connected with an internal or external object. Hisamatsu calls this the structure of *noema-noesis*, and explains:

Such an “I” is an “I” which can not but be limited by color when seeing color, by sound when hearing sound, by evil when thinking of evil, and by good when thinking of good. It is an “I” which is always limited and captured by the “internal” and “external” realms, that is, by objects. [...] But, on the contrary, the “I” which does not have an object, the “I” which does not have a single thing, is the “I” which is no longer dependent upon or attached to anything. It is the “I” which is not of the nature of *noema-noesis*. (ON 77)

Oriental nothingness as “not a single thing” refers to such a non-objectified form of consciousness. It is the same as Huineng’s “One-direct-Mind,” (T 48.2008.352c) which refers to “a Straightforward Mind, which is not captured by anything” (ON 78). Only such a mind, Hisamatsu adds, is capable of a “*samadhi* of free unattached play” (C. *youxisanmei*; J. *yugezanmai* 遊戲三昧). This is not, however, an individual experience of *samadhi* but one beyond subject and object altogether, a “One-Form Samadhi” that is explained by Huineng 惠能 (638–713) as follows:

If in all places you do not give rise to form, and if, as regards all forms that are, you do not give rise to either love or hate, and if, further, there is no accepting or rejecting, if you do not think of profit, coming to be, passing away, and such things, if you are peaceful, tranquil, unimpeded and unconcerned, this is called One-Form-Samadhi. (T 48.2008.361ab)

Therefore, the first characteristic of Oriental nothingness refers to a non-discriminating, non-objectified consciousness that leaves behind the distinction between subject and object.

(2) *Empty space*: Oriental nothingness has also frequently been explained in the Mahāyāna Buddhist literature through the use of the concept of empty-space.

Hisamatsu explains this in terms of Yongming's ten meanings of empty-space:<sup>5</sup> no-obstruction (it does not get in the way of anything), omnipresence, impartiality (it has no preferences), broad and great, formless, purity (it lack afflictions), stability (it does not come into being or pass away), voiding-being, voiding-voidness (beyond the opposition of being and nonbeing), and without obtaining (it neither clings to anything nor can be clung to). However, Hisamatsu stresses that "Oriental Nothingness is not the same as empty-space, which has neither awareness nor life, whereas Oriental Nothingness is the One who is 'always clearly aware.' Therefore it is called 'Mind,' 'Self,' or 'The True Man'" (ON 82).

(3) *Mind-in-Itself*: The concept of empty-space does not fully exemplify Oriental nothingness, since it does not capture the qualities of awareness and life. Oriental nothingness is living and possesses mind, even self-consciousness. This is the "Mind-in-Itself" nature of Oriental nothingness. However, this is not the same as what is ordinarily called mind, since it also possesses the ten characteristics of empty space.

(4) *Self*. The Mind that possesses the characteristics of empty space can be misunderstood as something viewed objectively outside of oneself. Oriental nothingness, however, is fundamentally subjectivity. Therefore, Hisamatsu adds "Self" as a fourth characteristic of Oriental nothingness in order to stress this aspect of Mind: "This Mind is not the mind which is seen, but is, on the contrary, the Mind which sees. Speaking in terms of 'seeing,' this Mind is the 'active seeing' and not the passive 'being seen'" (ON 88).

However, such an active seeing does not mean that Oriental nothingness is a subject as opposed to an object. Hisamatsu merely uses the image of subjectivity in order to prevent it from being taken as something transcendent and objective, as is often the interpretation of the Zen phrase "Mind is Buddha":

As indicated before, the Mind of which I am speaking is not merely that which is ordinarily called mind, but is the Mind which is itself Buddha. But when I say Buddha, this, again, is frequently taken as transcendent and objective. Buddha is often considered to be, in relation to us humans, "other" and objective. If Buddha were something perceived as an object by our senses, then its being "other" and objective would go without saying. But even a Buddha which becomes an object of feeling, faith, volition, or reason must also be said to be something other and objective. In such a case, we are not Buddha; we rather stand in contrast to Buddha. The "I" which thus stands in contrast to Buddha can not be said to be a Self or Subject. (ON 88)

Therefore, Hisamatsu's notion of Self does not refer to a subject that stands in contrast to objects. It is not, Hisamatsu remarks, the naïve self-subject of modern anthropocentrism but rather an absolute subject that also includes that which a naïve subject would consider something "other." Later, Hisamatsu would expand this metaphor of the Self into his notion of the Formless Self, which would even replace the metaphor of Oriental nothingness itself.

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<sup>5</sup> In his *Records Mirroring the Original Source* (C. *Zongjinglu* 宗鏡錄), fascicle six (T48.2016.446c), YONGMING Yanshou 永明延壽 (904-975) explains these meanings quoting from the *Commenting on the Mahāyāna śāstra* (C. *Shimoheyanlun* 釋摩訶衍論) fascicle three.

(5) *Freedom*: Oriental nothingness as the subject is, moreover, the completely free subject. Hisamatsu lists several kinds of freedom. He addresses the Zen saying “If you wish to go, go; if you wish to sit, sit; when hunger comes, take food; when drowsiness comes, sleep” (ON 91). This does not refer to the freedom to indulge in all desires but to the mature freedom out of which one criticizes and controls such indulgent freedom. This freedom even includes freedom from the Buddha. Hisamatsu notes that “the placing of Buddha transcendently and objectively outside of ordinary beings is a rope which still constrains freedom” (ON 92). He quotes Linji’s (J. Rinzai) 臨濟 (d. 866) famous saying, “encountering Buddha, killing Buddha, encountering the Patriarch, killing the Patriarch” (ON 92).

(6) *Creative*: Oriental nothingness can be likened to consciousness that reflects all things. However, this is very different from Western notions.

What Kant speaks of as the “mind which creates all things,” however, is so-called “consciousness-in-general” (*Bewusstsein überhaupt*). For Kant mind forms according to the formal categories of “consciousness-in-general” the impressions which it has received from what he calls the “thing-in-itself.” Such a mind is like a mirror which in turn reflects according to the form(s) of reflection that which comes to be reflected in it from the outside. In as much as that which is reflected by the mirror is something transformed by the form(s) of reflection it is not separate from the mirror. If, however, there were only the mirror and nothing coming to it reflected from the outside, there could be no reflected image. The image, thus, can not be said to be produced from within the mirror. (ON 95f)

Hisamatsu points out the limited usefulness of the analogy of the mirror: “In Buddhism, that which is reflected in the mirror is not something which comes from outside the mirror, but is something which is produced from within the mirror” (ON 96). Therefore, Hisamatsu prefers the analogy of the water and the waves:

Waves are not something which come from outside the water and are reflected in the water. Waves are produced by the water but are never separated from the water. When they cease to be waves, they return to the water—their original source. Returning to the water, they do not leave the slightest trace in the water. Speaking from the side of the waves, they arise from the water and return to the water. Speaking from the side of water, the waves are the movement of the water. While the water in the waves is one with the waves and not two, the water does not come into being and disappear, increase or decrease, according to the coming into being and disappearing of the waves. Although the water as waves comes into being and disappears, the water as water does not come into being and disappear. Thus, even when changing into a thousand or ten thousand waves, the water as water is itself constant and unchanging. (ON 96)

The relationship between the water and the waves illustrates the creative nature of Oriental nothingness. The waves, which are produced and disappear, can be likened to the ordinary self of man; the water can be seen as Oriental nothingness as the True Self. Therefore, the realization of the True Self is simultaneously a return to the creative source of Oriental nothingness. This aspect of Oriental nothingness is reminiscent of the Daoist pre-ontology of *wu* as the source of the ten thousand things.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Hisamatsu also cites Huineng: “Self-Nature, in its origin constant and without commotion, produces the ten thousand things” (T 48.2008.39a).



## 4 The Way of the Absolute Subject: Realizing The Formless Self

As Ohashi notes, Hisamatsu used the term “Oriental nothingness” until about 1946 as an expression of the True Self (Ohashi 1990: 229). After 1946, he used the expression “the absolute subject.” Ohashi interprets this not as a shift in standpoint but as a further development of Hisamatsu’s philosophy of awakening (Ohashi 1990: 229).

In the 1950s, the comparative field of Zen and psychoanalysis led to dialogues between Japanese Zen masters and Western psychotherapists. In 1957, a conference on Zen and psychoanalysis was held at the National University of Mexico at Cuernavaca, resulting in the famous collection of essays *Zen and Psychoanalysis*. D.T. Suzuki (*Suzuki Daisetsu* 鈴木大拙) (1870–1966), who was very active in such East-West dialogues, invited Hisamatsu in 1957 to come to the West. In the fall semester of 1957, Hisamatsu taught at Harvard Divinity School, where he conducted dialogues with theologian Paul Tillich on the subject of the Formless Self.<sup>7</sup> In early 1958, Hisamatsu had conversations with Carl Jung, Martin Buber, and Martin Heidegger.<sup>8</sup>

Hisamatsu’s dialogue with Jung took place at Jung’s home in Küsnacht, on the outskirts of Zürich, on May 16, 1958. Later, Jung refused his permission to have the transcript of their talk published. He felt that a satisfactory mutual understanding had not been reached in their encounter (Abe 1985: 61, n6). Part of the transcript was published later. In reading it, one starts to wonder whether Hisamatsu’s adaptation of the term “Self” was a felicitous one. Jung and Hisamatsu are clearly talking at cross-purposes, as is obvious from the following exchange:

HISAMATSU: Is the “I-consciousness” (ego-consciousness) different from the “self-consciousness” or not?

JUNG: In the ordinary usage, people say “self-consciousness,” but psychologically it is only “I-consciousness.” The “self” is unknown, for it indicates the whole, that is, the conscious and the unconscious...

HISAMATSU: What! The “self” is not known?

JUNG: Perhaps only the half of it is known and it is the I. It is the half of the “self”. (Abe 1985: 62)

Hisamatsu’s dialogues with Tillich were somewhat more successful. They focused on the notion of the Formless Self. Tillich asked whether the Formless Self is conscious or possesses a psychological awareness. Hisamatsu answered that the split between subject and object is not present in the Formless Self. He gave the example of the functioning of one’s eyes:

If the seer is consciously aware of seeing—for instance, this glass of orange juice—then that is not pure seeing ... In pure seeing, however, in which the duality between the seer and

<sup>7</sup>A record of this dialogue was published as “Dialogues East and West: Paul Tillich and Hisamatsu Shin’ichi,” *Eastern Buddhist* 4/2 (1971): 89–107; 5/2 (1972): 107–128; and 6/2 (1973): 87–114.

<sup>8</sup>For a transcript of the Hisamatsu-Jung dialogue, see their “On the Unconscious, The Self, and Therapy: A Dialogue—Carl C. Jung and Shin-ichi Hisamatsu” (Jung and Hisamatsu 1968).

the seen is overcome, the orange juice in a sense “disappears.” It is there; yet it is not. It is this sort of “disappearance of mind” that is meant by “No-Mind” or “No-Mindedness.” When one is conscious of what one is doing, you can speak of a state of mind; for the mind remains. (Hisamatsu 1971: 94)

As opposed to Tillich’s term “Being itself,” which stands in dualistic opposition to nonbeing, Hisamatsu stressed that the Formless Self is beyond the opposition between form and formless. Tillich persisted that the Formless Self is somehow separate from the specific forms in which it manifests itself. However, Hisamatsu answered, the Formless Self does not have any form apart from the specific forms in which it manifests itself (Stambaugh 1999: 66). As Joan Stambaugh comments,

What Tillich is unable to understand or accept is that one expression or form is not the exclusive manifestation of the Formless Self, shutting out any other manifestations. The Formless Self can manifest itself in any form. And yet any one expression or form expresses the ultimate *entirely*. It is not a partial manifestation, but a *total* one. (Stambaugh 1999: 66)

## 5 Fas Society

Together with several of his students at Kyoto University, Hisamatsu founded the Gakudō Dōjō 学道道場 (Association for Self-Awakening) in 1944. Perhaps as a result of these international activities, in 1958 the Gakudō Dōjō was renamed the FAS Society: “F” stands for “realizing the Formless Self,” “A” stands for “All Mankind,” and “S” stands for “Suprahistorical history.” Its aim is to spread the standpoint of fundamental self-awakening of all mankind. In this way, Hisamatsu attempted to encapsulate his vision of a true, reformed Zen:

Awakening to the Formless Self,  
the dimension of depth, the Self as the ground of human existence;  
Standing on the standpoint of All Humankind,  
the dimension of width, human being in its entirety;  
Creating history Suprahistorically,  
the dimension of length, awakened human history. (Ives 2010: 218)

In such a three-dimensional view of awakening, awakening to the Formless Self is only the first dimension, that of depth. It is a basis for the dimensions of width (expanding this awakening to include all of humanity) and length (creating history supra-historically). For Hisamatsu, awakening to the Formless Self also implies taking the standpoint of all humankind and creating history anew:

The Formless Self, which is no-birth-and-death freed from birth-and-death, must function and give rise to all things in actuality. This is the True Self (F), which constitutes the source of A and S. It is Self-Awakening. In that it is spatially boundless (formless), it is the basis of All Humankind, and in that it transcends the three periods of past, present and future, it is the basis of Suprahistorical history. Since this Self is no-thought (*mu-nen*), no-mind (*mu-shin*), and the true reality of no-boundary, one can stand in the standpoint of all humankind and create history while transcending history. (Ives 2010: 227)

Awakening to True, Formless Self is connected to the Zen notion of “seeing into one’s nature.” By this, Hisamatsu means not a particular object that needs to be realized, not a ground or void:

By the seeing of one’s nature we do not mean any objective contemplation, objective awareness, or objective cognition of Self-Nature or Buddha-Nature; we mean the Awakening of the Self-Nature itself. Since there is no Buddha apart from this awakening, to ‘become Buddha’ means to come to the true Self-Awakening. (Ives 2010: 218)

Hisamatsu’s three-dimensional standpoint is further expressed in the Society’s “Vow of Humankind”:

Keeping calm and composed, let us awaken to our True Self,  
 become fully compassionate humans,  
 make full use of our gifts according to our respective missions in life,  
 discern the agony both individual and social and its source,  
 recognize the right direction in which history should proceed,  
 and join hands without distinctions of race, nation, or class.  
 Let us, with compassion, vow to bring to realization humankind’s deep desire for Self-emancipation and construct a world in which everyone can truly and fully live. (Ives 2010: 218)

## 6 Hisamatsu’s Legacy of Oriental Nothingness

The notion of absolute or Oriental nothingness occupied a specific, time-bound place in the discourse of the Kyoto School thinkers. As Ueda notes, Nishida and TANABE Hajime 田辺元 (1885–1962) attempted to use the notion of absolute nothingness with the purpose of “bridging the differences between East and West, with the aim of conceiving the world anew within a horizon that included these differences” (Ueda 2011: 24). After the Second World War, the problem of the arrival of nihilism in both European and non-European cultures increasingly made the notion of the “absolute” ring hollow: “even ‘absolute nothingness’—an idea conceived in the horizon of the world and with Eastern traditions in the background—had ceased to be effective in its present form” (Ueda 2011: 26). Therefore, it could no longer be the basic category of thought in a world horizon. Whereas Nishitani responded to this by “borrowing” the notion of *śūnyatā* and using it rather freely in his philosophy, Hisamatsu took a different direction: that of the Formless Self.

As we have briefly noted above, the mature Hisamatsu stressed the multidimensionality of awakening. The realization of the Formless Self (Oriental nothingness) was only the basis for the dimensions of All Mankind and Suprahistorical History. Hisamatsu stressed the political and historical aspects of compassion, creating history anew for all mankind, and decried the overemphasis on satori in contemporary Zen in Japan, leading to an apolitical “Zen within a ghostly cave.”

Yet, ironically enough, Hisamatsu has become well-known to a larger audience in Europe primarily through his early notion of Oriental nothingness, that he left behind after 1946. The reason for this was the German publication in 1975 of his

1939 essay “The Characteristics of Oriental Nothingness,” translated as *Die Fülle des Nichts: vom Wesen des Zen* [The Fullness of Nothingness: on the Essence of Zen]. This essay was presented as Hisamatsu’s most important piece of writing (G. Kernstück) (Hisamatsu 1975b: 67). As a result, the notion of Oriental nothingness came to be associated with Hisamatsu’s philosophy, probably more strongly than was warranted by Hisamatsu’s own philosophical development. In an ironical twist of fate, the presentation of the realization of Oriental nothingness as the essence of Zen to a Western audience may have inadvertently encouraged the rise of a Western “Zen within a ghostly cave.” It is instructive to contemplate that a similar fate befell Nishida and his notion of “pure experience,” that had a large impact on Western interpretations of Nishida’s philosophy, even though he only used it in *An Inquiry into the Good* and left it behind in his later writings. These writings, however, were mostly only published in Japanese and therefore not accessible to a Western audience.

Thomas Kasulis points out an interesting contrast (intentionally overdrawn) between, on the one hand, Nishida, Nishitani, WATSUJI Tetsurō 和辻哲郎 (1889–1960) and Tanabe, who wrote primarily for a Japanese audience, and, on the other hand, Suzuki, Hisamatsu, and Abe, who wrote primarily for a Western audience (Kasulis 1998: 256ff). Although all these thinkers treasure the importance of direct personal awakening, they disagree with regard to the relationship between awakening and philosophy. Nishida and Nishitani tended to avoid references to the *satori* experience as a foundation for their philosophies. For them, *satori* is something to be explained philosophically, not something that explains (away) the problems of philosophy. Suzuki, Hisamatsu, and Abe, however, emphasized the immediate realization of nothingness, *satori*, as a precondition for philosophical thinking, as we have seen in Hisamatsu’s philosophy of awakening.

The assumption is that without the clarity of that experience, philosophical thinking runs into unavoidable obstacles. Philosophical problems may be solved in normal philosophical discourse, but their solution inevitably leads to further philosophical problems. Only in *satori* can philosophical problems be truly resolved (and, in a sense, dissolved). (Kasulis 1998: 256)

Kasulis explains this differences in terms of audience. For a Japanese audience, the reality and importance of Buddhist awakening was not in question. The problem was what awakening could mean in a modern context. The challenge was, therefore, to find ways in which the experience of awakening could enrich Western philosophy with new and useful categories.

For Suzuki and Abe, whose audience was primarily Western, the importance of Buddhist awakening could not be taken for granted. Therefore, their first task was to point to the importance of such an experience itself; the second task was to explain how it differed from Western notions of transcendence. Rather than locate *satori* within the everyday, they had to show their Western audience that it was *beyond* the everyday, but in a non-Western, non-Christian way. This might also have been a reason to select Hisamatsu’s early work on Oriental nothingness for translation into

German: it addresses both of these tasks very well, perhaps in better ways than his mature writings on F.A.S.

Therefore, a fundamental antinomy remains in Hisamatsu's legacy of Oriental nothingness. Hisamatsu's fundamental *kōan* 公案 for Zen practice was: "if whatever you do won't do—what do you do?" Perhaps this *kōan* is also a fitting description of Hisamatsu's own relationship to academic philosophy and his practice of it.

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