11 Nietzsche and East Asian thought: Influences, impacts, and resonances

I imagine future thinkers in whom European-American indefatigability is combined with the hundredfold-inherited contemplativeness of the Asians: such a combination will bring the riddle of the world to a solution. (1876)

The conjunction signified by the "and" of the main title is to be taken in three ways. First of all the question of what influence, if any, ideas from Asian philosophies may have exerted on the development of Nietzsche's thinking. Conversely, there is the issue of the enormous impact Nietzsche's ideas have had in Asia and the enthusiasm with which he continues to be studied there today – especially in China and Japan. A subsidiary theme here concerns the ways his thought has been appropriated by those quite alien cultures and thereby transformed, as well as the relevance of such appropriations to Nietzsche scholarship in the West. And finally the field of comparative research, which embraces a variety of styles of discourse. A comparison of Nietzsche's ideas on a certain topic with those of an appropriate Asian philosophy can enhance our appreciation of both sides. For people familiar with Nietzsche, a comparison with an East-Asian thinker might serve as a way into hitherto unfamiliar modes of thought. And since Chinese and Japanese philosophies are for the most part unmetaphysical in outlook, insofar as Nietzsche's ideas can be shown to resonate sympathetically with features of those quite alien traditions of thinking, such resonances may boost his standing in the competition, among such figures as Hegel and Heidegger, for the distinction of being the first Western thinker to "overcome" the metaphysical tradition.
Since the relations between Nietzsche and Indian ideas have already been the subject of some study, the primary – though not exclusive – focus of what follows will be on East Asian thought.

I. THE PAUCITY OF INFLUENCE

It is hardly surprising that Nietzsche should have had some acquaintance with Asian thinking, in view of the long history of the engagement of German philosophers with ideas from India and China – even though those engagements may not, until recently, have gone very deep. Leibniz was fascinated by the Chinese classic *The Book of Changes* (*I jing*) and Neo-Confucian philosophy. Hegel treated Indian and Chinese philosophy in his comprehensive *History*, and Schelling engaged in some brief – and more positive – discussion of Buddhism and Daoism. Schopenhauer, in his research into Indian philosophy, appears to have attained the most comprehensive understanding among nineteenth-century German thinkers of a system of Asian thought.

Nietzsche came into contact with ideas from the Indian tradition during his later schooldays at Schulpforta (1862–4), where he gained at least some acquaintance with the two great Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. He appears also to have been exposed to some of the basic ideas of Hinduism and Buddhism during this period, such as the doctrines of karma and rebirth. It is easy to assume, in view of his long friendship with the Sanskrit scholar Paul Deussen and also the many allusions to Indian ideas scattered throughout Nietzsche’s work, that he had a keen interest in Indian philosophy which prompted him to acquaint himself with the subject as far as the extant translations allowed. But it now appears that his interest was not as great after all: one can account for the mentions of Indian ideas in his works on the basis of his having actually read a rather small number of books on the topic.

Nietzsche’s discussions of Hindu and Buddhist ideas suggest that his grasp of those philosophies was less than firm. And even if he had been more inquisitive, relatively few translations were available at the time, and many of those poor quality. While Nietzsche’s intuition granted him some insight into certain aspects of Indian culture, his views were conditioned to a large extent by his own projections. Nevertheless, a passage in a letter to Paul Deussen in which...
Nietzsche claims to possess a "trans-European eye" shows that he was by no means parochial in his understanding of philosophy, and that he was open to a broader, cross-cultural perspective.

I have, as you know, a profound sympathy with everything that you have in mind to undertake. And it belongs to the most essential fostering of my freedom from prejudice (my "trans-European eye") that your existence and work remind me again and again of the one great parallel to our European philosophy. With respect to this Indian development there still reigns here in France the same old absolute ignorance. The followers of Comte, for example, are making up totally naive laws for a historically necessary development and succession of the main stages of philosophy, in which the Indians are not taken into account at all — laws that are in fact contradicted by the development of philosophy in India.°

Nietzsche did possess a "trans-European eye," even if its sight was not much clearer than that of his physical eyes, and even if he chose not to cast it farther than Asia Minor and India. Even if he was not so interested in understanding Indian thought per se, and more in excursions into the realm of "the foreign" — das Fremde — for the hermeneutic purpose of distancing himself from his contemporary situation in order better to understand the phenomenon of European modernity. And yet there does appear in the unpublished notes from 1884 the following fascinating resolution: "I must learn to think more orientally [orientalischer] about philosophy and knowledge. Oriental [Morgenländischer] overview of Europe."°

The occasional comments Nietzsche makes about China and Japan do not suggest that he knew any more about East Asian culture than one would expect from the well-educated German of his time. The only mention of a Chinese thinker in the published works occurs in The Antichrist [aph. 32], where he suggests that if Jesus had appeared among the Chinese he would have employed concepts drawn from Laozi (Lao Tzu). In view of the context of this remark, Nietzsche appears to have picked up on the mystical and transcendent strain in the great classic of philosophical Daoism, the Dao de jing, rather than reading it as a political handbook addressed to a ruler in power. The only other mention of Laozi is to be found in a late letter in which he announces his discovery of a French translation of the Hindu Laws of Manu and adds an utterly fanciful remark
to the effect that Confucius and Laozi may have been influenced by
that ancient text.\textsuperscript{10}

There appear to be only two mentions of the Japanese in Nietzsche’s published works, neither of them of much philosophical con-
sequence, though there are several references in his letters to the
"Japonisme" of his friend Reinhart von Seydlitz.\textsuperscript{11} Indeed the brief
references to the Japanese in \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} and \textit{Toward the
Genealogy of Morals} probably stem from conversations with von
Seydlitz about Japanese culture. But the most remarkable mention
of Japan is in a letter to his sister in which, after the usual com-
plaints about his health, he writes:

If only I were in better health and had sufficient income, I would, simply in
order to attain greater serenity, emigrate to Japan. (To my great surprise I
discovered that Seydlitz too has undergone a similar inner transformation:
artistically he is now the first German Japanese – read the enclosed newspa-
per articles about him!) I like being in Venice because things could be some-
what Japanese there – a few of the necessary conditions are in place.\textsuperscript{12}

Since the paragraph ends with a lament over the general ruin and
corruption of Europe, the fantasy of emigration is to be taken more
as a reaction against the contemporary situation than as a sign of
genuine attraction to Japan. (It is nonetheless fascinating to specu-
late on what the post-Zarathustra writings would have looked like
had they been written in the Japan Alps rather than the Upper
Engadin.)

As a philologist Nietzsche may have known that Japanese is gener-
ally counted among the Ural-Altaic languages – he in any case
makes an interesting remark about that family in \textit{Beyond Good and
Evil}. On the premise that the singular “family resemblance” be-
tween “Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing” arises from “the
common philosophy of grammar” that comes with affinities among
languages, he surmises that “Philosophers in the domain of the
Ural-Altaic languages [in which the concept of the subject is most
poorly developed] will most probably look ‘into the world’ differ-
ently and be found on different paths from Indo-Germans or Mus-
lims” (BGE 20). This is remarkably apropos with respect to Japanese,
though Nietzsche may not have realized it. In invoking “the spell of
particular grammatical functions” Nietzsche is not engaging in any
kind of competitive philology by suggesting that a strong sense of the subject makes for more powerful thinking. The epithet "most poorly developed" is purely descriptive; and since the context is the culmination of a series of devastating attacks on precisely "the concept of the subject," the implication is that a weak concept of the subject may well conduce to some quite robust philosophizing. Indeed the lack of a well developed concept of the subject in Japanese syntax does appear to conduce to styles of philosophy from which the metaphysical subject is absent – some of which are on this account eminently comparable to Nietzsche's own.

2. INITIAL IMPACTS IN EAST ASIA

In view of the minor influence of Asian ideas on Nietzsche's thought, the impact of his philosophy on the intellectual worlds of China and Japan has been enormous. Indeed its magnitude suggests a prior and more than superficial affinity between his ideas and the indigenous ways of thinking. Nietzsche's influence in India has probably been no more powerful than was the influence of Indian ideas on him, though this question has apparently not been the object of serious study. Let us then look to the reception of Nietzsche's thought in East Asia.

Even though Nietzsche's fantasy of emigrating to Japan came to naught, his ideas arrived in that distant land within a decade, in the mid-eighteen-nineties – while he was still alive, though unaware of the world beyond his sick-room in the Villa Silberblick on a hill overlooking the city of Weimar. Just after the turn of the century the name "Nietzsche" – the figure of "the mad philosopher" who went "beyond good and evil" rather than the texts written by the author bearing that name – helped precipitate a crisis of conscience in the intellectual world of Japan. From 1901 to 1903 the "aesthetic life" debate was ignited by the proposal, supposedly drawn from Nietzsche, that the highest experience is guided by mere instinct and constrained only by aesthetic considerations. Fueled mainly by uncritical readings of secondary literature rather than Nietzsche's own texts, the debate raged throughout the land, leaving in its wake a number of ruined reputations and – in the worst cases – careers on the part of its less fortunate participants. It was a classic case of an external fuse's setting off accumulated tensions within the Japanese
intellectual community, centering around problems of instinctual life, moral strictures, and individualism.\textsuperscript{15}

A number of Chinese students were studying in Japan at this time, and when they returned home some brought with them a fascination for the figure of the recently deceased thinker who had been the occasion for such vitriolic controversy in that otherwise civilized land. Two major figures in the early Nietzsche reception in China are Wang Guowei and Lu Xun,\textsuperscript{16} who began to publish discussions of his ideas in 1905 and 1907 respectively. Such was their stature in the Chinese intellectual world that there arose a surge of interest in Nietzsche that reached a peak around the May Fourth Movement of 1919, when many revolutionary enthusiasts espoused the German thinker as a source for ideas with which to build a "new China." Interest peaked again in the early forties at the opposite end of the political spectrum, when right-wing intellectuals associated with the Guomindang (Kuomintang) selected an alternate set of passages from Nietzsche's works to prosecute a quite different ideological agenda. Needless to say, enthusiasm for Nietzsche's ideas waned – or, rather, the people were weaned from them – with the takeover by the Communists in 1949.

In the past few decades, however, there has been a tremendous resurgence of interest in Nietzsche in the People's Republic, and a replay of many of the ideological debates of the first forty years.\textsuperscript{17} The apparently eternal return of conflicting views of "the same" thinker serves to underscore the remarkable phenomenon – more pronounced perhaps with Nietzsche than with any other author – of the successive appropriation of his ideas by proponents of extremes at either end of the ideological spectrum. Weakened by the ever-present tendency to vulgarize Nietzsche's ideas, the resurgence faltered – understandably – in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Nevertheless, a visit to Beijing in 1992 left the impression that interest in Nietzsche is very much on the rise again, and is reaching – as a result of revised translations and increasing access to better secondary sources – a more sophisticated intellectual level than before.\textsuperscript{18}

Since most of the combatants in the "aesthetic life" debate in Japan had gained what little understanding of Nietzsche's ideas they had from the secondary literature, the reception of the texts proper did not begin in Japan until 1911, when the first translations of his
writings into Japanese were made. (The complete works were not available in Japanese until 1929.) Once accessible in a Japanese edition, Nietzsche's books would exert a considerable influence on the literary world of Japan, especially by way of such figures as Akutagawa Ryunosuke and Mishima Yukio. There was initial resistance - as there always is - to the acceptance of Nietzsche as a philosopher, but considerable inroads were made by the publication in 1913 of a volume entitled *Nichte kenkyū* (Research on Nietzsche) by a young philosopher named Watsuji Tetsurō.

Although Watsuji remarks in one of his prefaces that his version of Nietzsche is a very personal one, the book is a landmark in Nietzsche studies in Japan. Considering the level of discussion in the Nietzsche literature in Western languages up to 1913, it also has to be said that Watsuji's detailed analyses were ahead of their time. The twenty-four-year-old author enjoyed a remarkable attunement with the spirit of Nietzsche and his philosophical project which afforded him insight into several of its major themes. Watsuji's book long enjoyed a well-deserved reputation as the definitive study of Nietzsche's philosophy in Japan.

Although he was active early on as a writer of stories and plays, and also as editor of a literary magazine (he was a personal friend of two of the most famous novelists of the time, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and Natsume Sōseki), Watsuji eventually opted to study philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University. He proposed a doctoral dissertation on Nietzsche, but the proposal was rejected and he was advised to write on a "real" philosopher, such as Schopenhauer. He submitted a thesis entitled "Schopenhauer's Pessimism and Theory of Salvation," and two years later he published his study on Nietzsche. While the study shows some influence by Schopenhauerian ideas, Watsuji is clearly aware of the important respects in which Nietzsche differed from his erstwhile spiritual mentor. The book also undertakes some apt comparisons of Nietzsche with Bergson and William James, both of whom were being much discussed in Japanese philosophical circles at that time.

The plan of Watsuji's book is based on the sketches Nietzsche made for a philosophical *Hauptwerk*, as adopted (and adapted) by Peter Gast and Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche in their collection entitled *Der Wille zur Macht* and published in the *Grossoktavausgabe* of 1911. (Watsuji also makes use of some of the *Nachlass* published in the Kröner
The study is divided into two parts, of which the first bears a title corresponding to that of the third book of *Der Wille zur Macht*, "Principles for the Establishment of New Values." After an introductory chapter entitled simply "Will to Power," which discusses Nietzsche’s methods and explicates the idea of will to power as "life," the remaining four chapters correspond to the subsections of the third book of *Der Wille zur Macht* – dealing with will to power as knowledge or cognition, as nature, as "character" (the original German has "Will to power as Society and Individual"), and as art. The second part of the study bears the title "The Destruction and Construction of Values," and the structure of its first half corresponds to that of the second book of *Der Wille zur Macht*, with chapters entitled "Critique of Religion," "Critique of Morality," and "Critique of Philosophy." The remaining three chapters are "Critique of Art," "The Decadence of European Civilization" (which deals with some of the topics in the first book of *Der Wille zur Macht*, "European Nihilism"), and "New Standards of Value." While Watsuji does mention Dionysus and the idea of eternal recurrence, there is little discussion of the idea of the order of rank, which is the main theme of the fourth book of *Der Wille zur Macht*, "Zucht und Züchtung" (Discipline and Cultivation/Breeding). On the publication of the second edition, the author added an appendix dealing with *Ecce Homo*.

While Watsuji places considerable emphasis on material from the Nachlass – in this he is an archetypal "lumper," in Bernd Magnus’s felicitous coinage – he also discusses themes in Nietzsche’s published works. It should be mentioned that conventions of scholarship in Japan are quite different from those prevailing in most Western circles: In explicating the thought of a philosopher, the Japanese scholar will paraphrase passages of text far more than quote them verbatim, and is thus relatively parsimonious with footnotes. (Some writers presumably wish to avoid insulting the reader’s intelligence by assuming that he doesn’t know where to find the passage under discussion; others may be motivated by considerations of Confucian pedagogy, according to which the reader is expected to learn better if he has to work for it. Nor are these motives mutually exclusive.) Watsuji is relatively forthcoming, insofar as he supplies at the end of the book a list of passages from Nietzsche’s texts on which the discussion in each of his chapters is based.

Being himself a writer with literary sensibilities, Watsuji was espe-
cially sensitive to the artistic aspects of Nietzsche's work, and fully appreciative (as expressed in the introduction to his study) of the remarkable way in which Nietzsche's artistic talents were synthesized with his abilities as a thinker and a scholar. Watsuji is renowned for the clarity and elegance of his prose, and the engagement with Nietzsche's texts inspires him on occasion to flights of complementary lyricism.

A sense of Watsuji's philosophical orientation and approach to his subject can be gained from the beginning of his first chapter:

True philosophy is not simply the accumulation and organization of concepts but the ideational expression of the most direct inner experience. Direct pure inner experience signifies living as the essence of existence. . . . If we refer to direct inner experience as intuition, this intuition lives as "life itself." "Cosmic life" is of course ceaseless creation; accordingly, direct inner experience, too, operates creatively. Self expression is this creative activity. The arts and philosophy all derive from this.¹⁹

Watsuji clearly takes seriously Nietzsche's contention that the thought of a philosopher is an expression of his life and of the life that moves through him in the form of instinctual drives [BGE 3–6]. He takes equally seriously the thought experiment Nietzsche proposes in which he suggests that we understand our entire instinctual life – and ultimately the world as a whole – as a play of will to power [BGE 36]. Throughout his study Watsuji gives a distinctly "vitalist" reading of Nietzsche (in part, perhaps, under influence from Bergson) that takes the main aim of the Nietzschean project to be the recovery of the full flow of ascending life.

Some readers will be unhappy with Watsuji's talk of "cosmic life" and his penchant for identifying the fully realized human self with the self of the cosmos. The temptation to ascribe this orientation to a projection onto Nietzsche's text of Buddhist ideas is mitigated by the consideration that until 1917 Watsuji's works dealt exclusively with Western topics. (In 1915 he published a substantial tome on Kierkegaard, which was to remain for many years the definitive study in Japanese.) However, recent research into his unpublished notes shows that Watsuji was in fact already familiar with Buddhist ideas by the time he wrote his study of Nietzsche. In these notes Watsuji asserts a basic harmony between Nietzsche's philosophy and the Buddhist idea of self-negation in the sense of the elimination
of the ego, on the grounds that the self of Nietzsche's "selfishness" refers to "a deep, supraconscious self." If one understands nirvana not negatively, as Schopenhauer did, as extinction of desire, but rather as "pure activity" or "life" in the Bergsonian sense, then the affirmation of the self as "Buddha-nature" will be consonant with Nietzsche's life-affirming stance. Even though recent comparative studies on Nietzsche suggest that Watsuji was very much ahead of his time with these ideas, some readers will no doubt resist them as misinterpretations of the texts. At the very least, however, readings such as Watsuji's from the East Asian perspective highlight themes in Nietzsche's writings that have tended to be downplayed or overlooked in the West.

Watsuji's emphasis on "intuition" in Nietzsche, which is a recurrent theme in the first part of his study, is somewhat puzzling—especially since he nowhere says which term in Nietzsche's texts the Japanese term (chokkaku) corresponds to. It is true that Nietzsche early on praises Heraclitus for his tremendous powers of "intuition [intuitiv Vorstellung]," a term he borrows from Schopenhauer (and with which Watsuji must have been familiar). But Nietzsche hardly ever uses the terms intuitiv or Vorstellung in his subsequent works, nor does he exalt any faculty of "intuition." The idea of intuitive experience or understanding does, however, play an important role in a text that is regarded as the first masterpiece of modern Japanese philosophy, An Inquiry into the Good by Nishida Kitarō, which was published in 1911. Since Watsuji's study shows a number of influences from this work, it is likely that the emphasis on intuition has its major source there. On the other hand, Watsuji also engages in some salutary discussion of the importance for Nietzsche of scientific method, and speaks of the "fusion of intuition and scientific method" (p. 53) in Nietzsche's works—an apt characterization, surely, if one understands "intuition" as something more like imagination.

A major theme in the first part of Watsuji's study is the idea that consciousness is a superficial and paltry power in comparison with the vigorous forces of life that underlie and sustain it. He fully appreciates Nietzsche's discussions of the dark wisdom of the instinctual drives, and of the decisive importance of unconscious mental or psychical processes. (Again, his acquaintance with Schopenhauer will have sensitized him to this kind of theme.) Approaching Nietzsche, as he does, from a tradition that emphasizes the unity of mind-
and-body and frequently privileges the somatic over the psychical aspects of human existence, Watsuji is naturally attentive to the corresponding themes in Nietzsche’s thinking. He places similar emphasis on Nietzsche’s analyses of the “I” into a multiplicity and his exposure of the ego as a conceptual synthesis or fiction.

To sum up Watsuji’s reading of Nietzsche in his 1913 study: The predominant trait is a vehement anti-intellectualism that, while it may present a faithful enough picture of the author of The Birth of Tragedy, gives a somewhat biased view of the philosopher as a whole. While it is true that Nietzsche is concerned to point up the narrowness and superficiality of consciousness and to acknowledge the limitations of reason in fathoming the depths of existence, after The Birth of Tragedy, with its apotheosis of unconscious instinct, he moves to a less extreme position in which the exercise of intellect (albeit understood as a certain configuration of instinctual drives) is regarded as the sine qua non for a fully human life. (It is significant that Watsuji makes hardly any reference at all to Human, All Too Human.) Notwithstanding, Watsuji’s reading is insightful and comprehensive - and his achievement especially remarkable coming, as it did, from the hand of an author in his early twenties.

After publishing his study of Kierkegaard in 1915, Watsuji turned his attention away from Western thinkers and toward the history of Japanese culture. Although there is hardly a mention of Nietzsche in the series of studies that flowed from his pen after the 1918 collection Güzô saikô (Restoration of the idols – an interestingly Nietzschean title), these works still show traces of Nietzsche’s influence. Just as Nietzsche had gained from the ancient Greeks a vantage point from which to criticize the decadence of contemporary German culture, so Watsuji adduced the cultural achievements of ancient Japan in order to highlight the shortcomings of a country in the throes of enthusiastic modernization. It is as if he later acknowledged Nietzsche’s early rejection of Romantic individualism and came to appreciate his classicism.

3. THE CASE OF NISHITANI KEIJI

Between the wars there was something of a lull in Nietzsche studies in Japan – in part because of the prevalence of Marxist thinking in the twenties, which was followed by a repression of intellectual
life in general by the militarists and fascists in the thirties—though one major figure in Japanese philosophy, Miki Kiyoshi, did produce some significant Nietzsche commentary during that period. Interest in Nietzsche was rekindled after the Second World War, in the atmosphere of general disorientation and in the context of attempts to understand the postwar situation in Japan. Nishitani Keiji was, like Miki, a philosopher of the “Kyoto School” who had also (following the example of Miki and another philosopher from Kyoto, Tanabe Hajime) studied with Heidegger.\textsuperscript{23} The year before his return from Freiburg to Japan in 1939, Nishitani wrote a long essay comparing Meister Eckhart and Nietzsche’s Zarathustra.\textsuperscript{24} This essay marked the beginning of a lengthy engagement with Nietzsche on Nishitani’s part as well as a new turn in Nietzsche studies in Japan.

Like Watsuji before him, Nishitani experienced as a young man an immediate empathy with Nietzsche and his ideas. In an autobiographical essay entitled “The Days of My Youth,” he writes of the utter hopelessness that pervaded his early youth and of his despair’s being compounded by the death of his father when he was sixteen.\textsuperscript{25} Shortly thereafter, Nishitani was struck down by an illness similar to the tuberculosis that had killed his father, in the course of which—in an uncanny parallel to Nietzsche’s situation some fifty years earlier—the young student felt “the specter of death taking hold” of him. It was the ensuing mental torment that brought him to the enterprise of philosophy as an attempt to plumb the experience of nihilism to its depths.

My life as a young man can be described in a single phrase: it was a period absolutely without hope. . . . My life at that time lay entirely in the grips of nihility and despair. . . . My decision, then, to study philosophy was in fact—melodramatic as it might sound—a matter of life and death.\textsuperscript{26}

Like many intellectuals of his generation (he was born the year Nietzsche died, in 1900), Nishitani was not only raised on the Chinese classics but was also exposed to a wide range of European and American literature. He thus embarked on the study of philosophy from a grounding in a remarkable range of reading.

Before I began my philosophical training as a disciple of Nishida, I was most attracted by Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, Emerson and Carlyle, and also by the Bible and St. Francis of Assisi. Among things Japanese, I liked best
Such a grounding in two quite disparate traditions gave Nishitani a philosophical starting point of a kind possessed by no major thinker in the Western tradition. Since many Japanese philosophers of his generation were similarly well versed in the tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy that originated in India and became sinified in China with admixtures of Confucian and Daoist thought before arriving in Japan, and since they also undertook thorough appropriations of the European and Anglo-American literary and philosophical traditions, their contributions to modern philosophy deserve to be taken very seriously indeed.

A great advantage enjoyed by Nishitani in his approach to Nietzsche derives from the perspective afforded him by his hermeneutic distance from the metaphysical tradition. Western commentators on Nietzsche themselves stand in the current of the tradition that he strove to overcome, which makes it difficult to attain sufficient perspective to evaluate the success of that striving. Nishitani’s standing outside that tradition grants him a synoptic overview of Western intellectual history, so that as he works toward a comprehensive grasp of the major trends in Western philosophy he is able to retain a salutary sense of perspective on Nietzsche’s position relative to those currents. Another advantage for the Japanese thinker approaching Nietzsche is that his native philosophical tradition is quite unmetaphysical (indeed sometimes resolutely anti-metaphysical in reaction against the speculative tendencies of Indian philosophy), so that there is little danger of his interpreting ideas like will to power metaphysically.

The title of the first section of Nishitani’s essay on Eckhart and Zarathustra, “The Primordiality of Life in Nietzsche,” suggests that his reading will proceed along the lines projected by Watsuji’s study. The essay begins with a close reading of the first two sections of “Zarathustra’s Prologue,” in which Nishitani talks of “fully overflowing life,” “the infinite depth of great life,” and “pressure pushing up from the deep bottom of life.” But the force of the contrast he draws between Zarathustra and the old saint in the forest concerns a difference in the kind of life that animates them, in remark-
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ing which Nishitani takes Watsuji’s understanding of “life” in Nietzsche a step further.

Nishitani argues that though the saint has died away from the human world to be reborn in “the life of God in the world of great nature” in the forest, this “higher life” is still one that forms a duality with “holy life” and in which God is experienced as an object vis-à-vis the self. This life with God thus means that the saint “has lost the path that connects him to human life” (p. 7). Zarathustra is already at a stage beyond the saint, insofar as a further negation of that higher life has taken place (as evidenced by his realization that “God is dead”), a negation that issues dialectically in a creative affirmation of life – as symbolized in the “overflowing” that is propelling Zarathustra back down the mountain so that he may become human again. Nishitani alludes to Bergson’s notion of \textit{élan vital} in emphasizing that the creative life embodied by Zarathustra issues only from the second dialectical movement and is not to be found in “direct, simple [Watsuji would have said “pure”] life” (p. 12).

Thanks to his appreciation of Eckhart’s intellectualism, Nishitani is able to go beyond Watsuji’s anti-intellectualist emphasis on “pure, direct life” in Nietzsche: “In contrast to what is popularly believed, Nietzsche did not simply advocate direct life and will” (p. 30). His comparison of Zarathustra with Eckhart is judicious and enlightening – and prompts one to wonder how much of Nietzsche’s vivid imagery concerning the soul has a source in Eckhart’s lyrical effusions concerning \textit{Gottheit} and overflowing. In spite of the vast differences between their respective historical (not to mention a/theological) situations, Nishitani suggests that it might be possible to see Eckhart and Nietzsche “as having met up unexpectedly at the zenith of great life [or at its root],” and as standing together “at the point where the bottomless depth of life alone combusts in the present instant . . . at the life of life” (pp. 28–30). Nishitani’s reading of Eckhart downplays the Neoplatonic strains in his thinking just as it highlights its “transcendence-in-immanence” elements, which in turns allows him to harmonize it with a religious view of Nietzsche’s resolutely “this-worldly” orientation.

The suggestion made above to the effect that it is to Nishitani’s advantage as a reader of Nietzsche to be standing outside the Western
tradition gives negative expression, as it were, to the value of his reading. The more positive contribution of his view comes from his immersion in the tradition of East Asian Buddhist thinking – and in Zen in particular. The Buddhist standpoint continues in Nishitani, as it did with Watsuji, to bring into relief a nexus of issues in Nietzsche’s thought that have not generally been emphasized in Western readings. This first becomes evident in a work Nishitani first published in 1949, which has been translated into English as The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism, almost half of which deals with Nietzsche. Although there is relatively little explicit mention of Buddhist ideas in the text itself, it is obvious to the reader familiar with the doctrine of karma and ideas such as “dependent arising” and the “momentariness” of the elements of existence that such ideas are behind Nishitani’s treatments of the complex interrelationships between amor fati, will to power, and the eternal recurrence.

A brief sketch of the premises of Nishitani’s discussion of amor fati may suffice as an illustration. Nietzsche’s equation of the self with fate is, for most readers, an enigma. While this idea (adumbrated in the Untimely Meditations and developed more fully in Human, All Too Human) plays an important role in Zarathustra and recurs as late as Nietzsche contra Wagner, Nishitani begins his discussion by quoting a posthumously published note from 1884 which ends with the emphasized words, “Ego fatum.”2 (Nishitani is, like Watsuji, something of a “lumper.”) If one approaches this idea from the perspective of the karmic doctrine that all actions proceeding from the self eventually – perhaps only after numerous cycles of reincarnation – come back on it, the equation of the self with fate immediately becomes more comprehensible. In discussing a passage from the epilogue to Nietzsche contra Wagner in which Nietzsche emphasizes that “only great pain is the ultimate liberator of the spirit,” Nishitani writes as follows:

What Nietzsche calls “the abyss of the great suspicion” and “the ultimate depths” of the philosopher is nihilism. In this rebirth from the depths “with a higher health” and “with a second and more dangerous innocence” one’s innermost nature bursts forth like a natural spring from which the covering debris has been removed. At this point the spring proclaims as its liberator the sharp pick-axe of necessity that has pierced down through the debris and brought it pain. . . . And ultimately the spring will come to affirm even the debris it burst through and which now floats in it. [SN 51]
The image of the pick-axe – a graphic analogue of Nietzsche’s hammer – is very much in the spirit of Zen. When one’s inner creativity is able to burst through the overlay of conventional values and conceptualizations, the resultant condition is not one of pristine purity but rather one in which the pool of the psyche is still polluted by debris from the barriers that have been breached. The point is that such debris need not be rejected, but may rather be used in the reconstruction of the new self. Though Nishitani does not himself suggest this, the self’s affirmation of the debris from an earlier obstruction would point up the idea that, for Nietzsche, certain features of a tradition previously regarded as repressive may in fact be reappropriated after the appropriate transformation of the self has taken place.

In this same context, Nishitani offers an illuminating reading of the idea of the *Wende der Not* ("turn of need") which Zarathustra plays off against the idea of *Notwendigkeit* (necessity). Under the compulsion of the need or necessity [Not] that prevents one from becoming oneself and from becoming free, one is forced to descend into the abyss within. But once one is freed within the abyss, the need is turned into an element of this life of freedom. When Zarathustra calls his own soul "turn of need" [Wende der Not] and "fate" [Schicksal], he means that the turn of need, in which necessity is turned into an element of the life of the free soul, is the soul itself. In this case necessity becomes one with the creative. (SN 52)

Not only does this reading make more sense of the relevant passages than most commentators have been able to do, but together with the karma-tinged understanding of fate it sets the stage for a satisfying treatment of *amor fati* combined with eternal recurrence as leading to "the self-overcoming of nihilism" [SN 60–8].

It is this last idea that is the outcome of Nishitani’s careful analysis of the various stages in nihilism as understood by Nietzsche. Given that Nishitani attended Heidegger’s lectures on Nietzsche from 1937 to 1939, the difference between his account of Nietzsche’s nihilism and Heidegger’s much longer treatment (in the second volume of his *Nietzsche*) is remarkable. Whereas Heidegger insists on seeing Nietzsche as a subjectivist of hyper-Cartesian proportions and on understanding will to power metaphysically, thereby concluding that Nietzsche’s thought is nihilistic in a none
too positive sense, Nishitani regards it as leading to the ultimate self-overcoming of nihilism – and thereby coming close to the distinctively nonmetaphysical standpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhism. As in the essay on Eckhart and Zarathustra, Nishitani emphasizes the religious aspect of Nietzsche's thinking, seeing it as embodying a form of Dionysian pantheism that issues in a fully creative affirmation of life.

In Nishitani's masterwork, Religion and Nothingness, originally published in Japan in 1961, the focus on figures in Western philosophy has been replaced by a predominance of Mahāyāna Buddhist ideas – though his engagement with such thinkers as Eckhart, Nietzsche, and Heidegger continues. While the English translation of this work is excellent and the writing style clear, it is an extremely subtle text that demands considerable time and effort for the fathoming of its depths. [It may not be overly rash to suggest that it will eventually come to be seen as one of the most important philosophical texts of the mid-twentieth century.] Somewhat puzzling, however, is the shift in Nishitani's estimation of Nietzsche, which now seems to be conditioned by a Heideggerian bias toward taking the idea of will to power metaphysically. There is consequently a definite sense that Nietzsche “falls short” of the Mahāyāna Buddhist standpoint, to which he was said to have come so close in The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism. Since considerations of space prohibit an examination of this difficult issue, the reader is simply asked to entertain the possibility that the duplex genealogy of Nishitani's thinking may give it greater breadth than philosophies originating in a single tradition.

4. NIETZSCHE AS A WAY IN TO EAST ASIAN THOUGHT

One of the grounds for the enthusiastic reception of Nietzsche's philosophy in China and Japan has to do with its resonance with the ideas of several major thinkers in the Asian traditions. Some work has already been done to show certain affinities between Nietzsche's ideas and early Buddhism in India, the pioneering text in the field being Freny Mistry's Nietzsche and Buddhism. Although this is a somewhat unpolished work written in an occasionally idiosyncratic style, and while it relies heavily on the unpublished Nachlass, the author undertakes a comprehensive review of all Nietzsche's re-
marks about or discussions of Buddhism and intelligently evaluates their validity. The study also marshals a considerable amount of evidence to show that much of Nietzsche’s thinking is consonant with the basic insights of early Buddhism. To summarize briefly: the Buddhist emphasis on impermanence and its concomitant antimetaphysical and atheistic tendencies; the denial of any substantial soul, or ego, which is viewed as a merely conventional unity of a number of “energy-aggregates”; a sense that whatever “self” there may be is better understood as the lived body than as anything mental or psychical – all these are shown to have counterparts among Nietzsche’s ideas.

If Mistry’s comparison eventually becomes overdrawn, it is in connection with the goal of nirvana as understood by early Buddhism and the ideal human existence as exemplified by the arhant (saint). These are simply farther from Nietzsche’s ideal of unconditional affirmation of life, whether or not one understands this through the condition of the Übermensch, than Mistry would have us believe. The detachment of the arhant who has attained nirvana issues in a condition that is insufficiently of the world – albeit still in it – to be comparable with the results of a full living out of the Nietzschean program. The author occasionally tries to close the gap by invoking the later Buddhist (Mahāyāna) denial that nirvana is different from samsara, that the world of enlightenment is different from the world of everyday life; but that denial is precisely the distinguishing feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which thus makes for a more fruitful comparison with Nietzsche than does the earlier tradition. Indeed, Mistry from time to time mentions the ideas of Nagarjuna, the philosophical founder of the Madhyamika school in the second century; and it is with his denial that nirvana is different from samsara, and the consequent reverence for this world, that the interesting resonances with Nietzsche’s thinking begin.

With respect to the Chinese tradition, it has been shown that there are some remarkable parallels between Nietzsche’s thinking and Daoist philosophy – but there are some even more remarkable resonances with the ideas of the master himself, Confucius. A brief example will suffice to show the way in which a comparative approach to Nietzsche can point up hitherto neglected strains in his thinking.

The predominant image of Nietzsche in the West is of the great
iconoclast, the revolutionary who proclaims the death of God and calls for a revaluation of all values. This image tends, however, to obscure an important aspect of his thought that is in fact quite conservative – and is embodied in the idea that we have a tremendous responsibility as participants in a heritage stretching back thousands of years. The Chinese tradition in general, and Confucius in particular, places great emphasis on the individual’s indebtedness to the ancestors, an acknowledgment of which is a necessary condition of the full realization of one’s humanity and of appropriate, creative activity in the present.

To fully realize one’s humanity (ren) for Confucius, it is necessary for the individual not only to acknowledge the role of tradition in constituting the self, but also to appropriate the tradition creatively, to help “broaden the Way (dao).” Central to this task is somatic practice as exemplified in ritual activity as an outgrowth of sacred ceremony (li) – this emphasis on physical discipline and refinement being characteristic of the East Asian tradition in general (and of Japanese culture in particular). The idea of a responsibility stretching far back into the past is one that is developed in Nietzsche’s works from the time of The Gay Science, but it is given an especially forceful formulation in the section entitled “Skirmishes of an Untimely One” in Twilight of the Idols. In this section Nietzsche (whose putative individualism caused such an uproar in China and Japan) emphasizes that the “individual” is an error: “he is nothing in himself, not an atom, not a ‘link in the chain,’ not something merely inherited from the past – he is the entire line of humanity all the way up to himself” (§ 33). His criticism of modernity stresses the shortsighted irresponsibility of its proponents, who lack “the will to tradition, to authority, to a responsibility ranging over centuries” (§ 39). But the most Confucian feature of this line of thinking is its somatic-accented conclusion, in which Nietzsche argues that beauty is, like genius, “the final result of the accumulated labor of generations” (§ 47).

Everything good is the result of inheritance; what is not inherited is incomplete, a mere beginning . . . But one must not misunderstand the method: a mere disciplining of feelings and thoughts amounts to almost nothing . . . one must first persuade the body. . . . It is decisive for the fate of peoples and humanity that one begins inculcating culture in the proper place – not in the “soul” . . . the proper place is the body, gestures, diet, physiology; the rest will follow.
Nietzsche sees that lesson as having been forgotten after the age of the Greeks; but the same teaching of Confucius continues to be followed to this day in various spheres of Chinese and Japanese culture.

One other Confucian idea deserves mention in this context, the notion of "reciprocity" (shu) that informs Confucius's understanding of the central virtue of "human-heartedness" (ren). Confucius frequently exhorts people "not to impose on others what one does not oneself desire," but the theme is best expressed by the following passage from the Analects (7/22): "When walking in the company of two other men, I am bound to be able to learn from them. The good points of the one I emulate; the bad points of the other I correct in myself" (emphasis added). This "reflective" turn to one's own case first - a theme that runs throughout the Analects - has its counterparts in the Christian tradition (the mote in the other person's eye), and especially in Montaigne (from whom Nietzsche learned a great deal). But it is easily overlooked in Nietzsche's thinking. Something similar to the Confucian technique is to be found in Zarathustra's love for his fellow human beings, a "great love" that is intimately bound up with the "great contempt," and which is impossible to attain unless one has learned both to love and despise oneself first. Zarathustra's almost fatal nausea at the prospect of the eternal recurrence of the rabble is thus prompted as much by the rabble within his own most comprehensive soul as by the "other." Similarly, one can obviate misunderstanding of the role of the evil that Zarathustra believes needs to be cultivated if human existence is to be enhanced – the theme in Nietzsche his detractors most love to hate – if one sees it in the light of Confucian reciprocity. The cruelty and violence that are said to be necessary elements in the "great economy" are to be practiced on oneself first, before one would have the right to inflict them on others: and such cruelty may be necessary for true creativity. This is not to deny that one might, for Nietzsche, have earned the right to be hard on others after whipping oneself into shape – just as Confucius was well known for his sternness toward any disciple who was not exerting himself fully.

After Confucius came the two greatest philosophers of Daoism, known as Laozi and Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu), who filled what they saw as a lacuna in Confucian thought by bringing in the world of nature for philosophical consideration. While the tone of the classic
attributed to Laozi, the *Dao de jing*, harmonizes more with Heidegger's thinking, the longer and more complex text of the *Zhuangzi* resonates profoundly with Nietzsche's styles and ideas. Both works are regarded as gems of classical Chinese literature as well as thought. The *Zhuangzi* was highly regarded by the Chinese Buddhist thinkers, especially those of the Chan School, and thereby became equally important for the development of Japanese Zen, and of the Rinzai School in particular. (Several of the great modern Japanese thinkers acknowledge a debt to Zhuangzi, including Nishida, Kuki Shūzō, and Nishitani.)

The *Zhuangzi* is a composite text, only the seven “Inner Chapters” of which are held to have been composed by the historical Zhuangzi, the remaining twenty-six chapters being supplements from the hands of later Daoist thinkers. The Inner Chapters themselves are a riot of styles and modes of discourse, similar in many ways to Nietzsche’s multifarious stylistic experiments. In some ways Zhuangzi is the Chinese Heraclitus: though perhaps not quite as obscure as his Ephesian counterpart, and a whole lot more cheerful, Zhuangzi shares a number of structural similarities with that dark thinker and is every bit as deep. But the similarities with Nietzsche run deeper, and anyone familiar with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in particular will feel quite at home navigating through the complexities of the *Zhuangzi* (substituting the figure of Confucius for that of Jesus in *Zarathustra* and of Socrates in Nietzsche’s other works).

In the Japanese philosophical tradition, where Confucian and Daoist ideas have played an important role, there have also been several Zen Buddhist thinkers whose ideas are comparable with Nietzsche’s—especially with respect to their affirmation of this very life. The thirteenth-century Zen master Dōgen, whom the Sōtō school regards as its founder, is a profound and subtle thinker who effected an iconoclastic revolution in a writing style that is comparable to Nietzsche’s. Dōgen’s texts are not only pervaded by highly poetic imagery but are so dense as to resist easy understanding—especially on the topic that is considered by many to be his most original: his conception of temporality. It is in this area, where the experience of the moment is crucial, that readers may find an acquaintance with Nietzsche’s ideas about time to be of some help.

There are resonances, too, between Nietzsche and the eponymous
founder of the other major school of Zen, Rinzai, as well as with the greatest of Rinzai Zen's later representatives, the eighteenth-century master Hakuin. Practitioners of the Rinzai school tend to be the most dynamic and wild of the Zen tradition, vehemently rejecting what they deride as “dead sitting and silent illumination” in favor of “practice in the midst of activity.” They are also the most concerned with retaining and cultivating the energies of the emotions and passions within what Nietzsche calls the “great economy,” the common goal being transmutation of the passions rather than their annihilation. The unbridled style of the writings of Hakuin in particular, whose lifelong struggles with “Zen sickness” (illness stemming from Zen practice) are uncannily parallel with Nietzsche’s bouts, matches the hyperbolic extravagance of the latter’s styles.44

This is surely a most fertile field for Nietzsche studies, the common ground between the hermit of Sils-Maria and the life-artist-sages from the Chan and Zen traditions. The first wave of Zen to reach Western shores struck mainly litterateurs and religious types; now that Nietzsche is finally coming into his own is the time for a more philosophical engagement with thinkers of those Asian traditions, in which dialogue based on correspondences between both sides aims at precise elucidation of the divergences. Time, finally, for more of us to cast a trans-European eye over Nietzsche’s legacy, entertain East-Asian perspectives on his person and work, and let his example be a stimulus to reconsider – as “good cosmopolitans” – our own philosophical traditions in relation to those of China and Japan.

NOTES

1 The first book to discuss Nietzsche in relation to Indian thought is Max Ladner, Nietzsche und der Buddhismus (Zürich, 1933). This is sadly a quirky work, written from a partisan, quasi-Buddhist standpoint and with an interpretation of Nietzsche that is unsympathetic to the point of perversity. Much more worthwhile is the thorough study by Freny Mistry, Nietzsche and Buddhism (Berlin and New York, 1981), the aim of which is “to investigate the proximity of spiritual outlook in Nietzsche and the Buddha, both of whom, despite marked differences in expression and perspective, showed complementary ways to self-redemption” (p. 4). The book focuses almost exclusively on early (Theravada or Hinayāna) Buddhism, rather than the Mahāyāna tradition that was developed later in India, China, and Japan.
2 An interesting anthology of writings on China from the pens of German thinkers from Leibniz to Jaspers is Adrian Hsia, ed., Deutsche Denker über China [Frankfurt, 1985].

3 See Johann Figl, “Nietzsche’s Early Encounters with Asian Thought,” in Graham Parkes, ed., Nietzsche and Asian Thought [Chicago, 1991], 51–63. [Subsequent references to be abbreviated “NAT.”]

4 See Mervyn Sprung, “Nietzsche’s Trans-European Eye,” in NAT 76–90.

5 See Michel Hulin, “Nietzsche and the Suffering of the Indian Ascetic,” in NAT 64–75, as well as the essay by Sprung.

6 Letter to Paul Deussen, 3 January 1888. This passage is all the more remarkable in the light of Nietzsche’s frequently callous condescension toward the Schopenhauerian Deussen after his [Nietzsche’s] break with Wagner and his former intellectual mentor. For a fine analysis of the strange ambivalence that has informed the reception of Indian philosophy in modern Europe, see Roger-Pol Droit, L’oubli de l’Inde: Une amnésie philosophique [Paris, 1989].

7 See Eberhard Scheiffele, “Questioning One’s ‘Own’ from the Perspective of the Foreign,” in NAT 31–47.

8 KSA 11, 26[317]; 1884.

9 Nietzsche’s remark is probably based on a translation of the Laozi that was published in Leipzig in 1870: Lao-Tse’s Tao Te King, aus dem Chinesischen ins Deutsche übersetzt, eingeleitet und commentiert von Victor Von Strauss. This is also the translation Heidegger cites, in one of his rare references to Daoist ideas, in “Grundsätze des Denkens,” Jahrbuch für Psychologie und Psychotherapie 6 (1958): 33–41.

10 Letter to Peter Gast, 31 May 1888.

11 In Toward the Genealogy of Morals Nietzsche mentions “Japanese nobility” in connection with the first occurrence of the infamous “blond beast” (I, 11); and in Beyond Good and Evil he mentions “the Japanese of today, flocking to tragedies” among examples of the drive for cruelty (229). It is interesting that both references to the Japanese should be in the context of the “savage cruel beast,” insofar as Nietzsche’s claim that “higher culture” is based on “the spiritualization and deepening of cruelty” would apply especially well to the case of Japanese culture.

Reinhart von Seydlitz, a German aristocrat, was a painter and writer and a keen Japanophile. In 1888 he received a letter from the Japanese Emperor thanking him for his services to the cause of disseminating understanding of Japanese culture [see Nietzsche’s letter to his mother of 30 August 1888].

12 Letter to Elisabeth Förster of 20 December 1885. The letter carries an amusing postscript: “Why don’t you [and Bernhard] go to Japan? The cost of living is low and life there is so much fun!” While Nietzsche would
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probably have enjoyed living in Japan (given a suitable climate), the idea of the Försters' establishing their pure Aryan colony there is hard to countenance.


14 One figure in India who was deeply influenced by Nietzsche was the Islamic thinker and poet Mohammad Iqbal; see Subhash C. Kashyap, The Unknown Nietzsche (Delhi, 1970), and R. A. Nicholson’s introduction to his translation of Iqbal’s most Nietzschean work, Secrets of the Self (Lahore, 1944). For a brief overview of the global reach of Nietzsche’s influence, see “The Orientation of the Nietzschean Text,” in NAT 3–19.

15 For a more detailed account, see Graham Parkes, “The Early Reception of Nietzsche’s Philosophy in Japan,” in NAT 177–99.

16 Chinese and Japanese names are given in the East Asian order, with the family name first, followed by the given name(s).


18 When asked about the restrictions on teaching such figures as Nietzsche and Heidegger in university courses after 1949, one of mainland China’s foremost experts in German philosophy recounted how, after what he referred to (with a leaven of irony) as “the liberation of the country,” it was permissible to discuss their works in his courses—but only “mit Kritik,” of course. Nowadays, he said, he was free to teach such thinkers without bothering with the Kritik at all.

19 Watsuji Tetsurō, Nichie kenkyū, in Watsuji Tetsurō zenshū (Tokyo, 1961), vol. 1, 41. The translation is by David Gordon, to whom I am grateful for making available his translation of the first two chapters of Watsuji’s study.

20 Watsuji, Kōdō [Memoranda] (Tokyo, 1965), 281–2. I am grateful to David Gordon for bringing these notes to my attention, and have again borrowed his translations.

21 Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, § 5, and Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation I, § 3.

22 For an account of the important—and generally neglected—role played by imagination, or phantasy, in Nietzsche’s philosophy, see Graham Parkes, Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche’s Psychology (Chicago, 1994), chapter eight.
23 It is highly probable that Heidegger's personal association with such thinkers as Tanabe and Nishitani had a significant influence on the development of his thought; see Graham Parkes, "Heidegger and Japanese Philosophy: How Much Did He Know, and When Did He Know It?" in Christopher Macann, ed., Heidegger: Critical Assessments (London, 1992), vol. 4, pp. 377–406.

24 Nishitani Keiji, "Nīchie no Tsuaratsusutora to Maisutā Ekkukaruto," in Shūkyō to bunka (Religion and culture) (Tokyo, 1940).

25 Nishitani Keiji, "Watakushi no seishun jidai," in Kaze no kokoro (Heart in/of the wind) (Tokyo, 1980).

26 Nishitani, "The Days of my Youth," cited in the translator's introduction to Nishitani Keiji, Religion and Nothingness, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley, 1982), xxxv [hereafter abbreviated as "RN"]. See also Nishitani's account of his early development in his Nishida Kitarō, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley, 1991), 3–9. He speaks there of being stimulated by Watsuji's study of Nietzsche to learn German – so as to be able to read Thus Spoke Zarathustra, which he read "over and over."

27 Nishitani, "Watakushi no tetsugakuteki hossokuten" (My philosophical starting point), as translated by Van Bragt in RN, xxxiv–xxxv. Later in this essay he writes of his enthusiastic reading of Plotinus, Eckhart, Boehme, and the later Schelling. In "The Days of My Youth," Nishitani mentions his avid readings of Tolstoy, Ibsen, and Strindberg, as well as of Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra. In a conversation in Kyoto in 1988, Nishitani said that as a young man he used to carry Zarathustra around with him wherever he went: "It was like my Bible."

28 The breadth and depth of Nishitani's understanding of the history of Western philosophy is evidenced by his treatment (in the third section of his essay on Eckhart and Nietzsche's Zarathustra) of the various intellectual currents that fed into Meister Eckhart's thinking. The benefits of hermeneutic distance are manifested especially by Nishitani's discussion of the history of European nihilism in The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism, trans. Graham Parkes with Setsuko Aihara (Albany, 1990) – hereafter "SN" – which will be discussed shortly.

29 "Nīchie no Tsuaratsusutora to Maisutā Ekkukaruto," 4–6; draft translation by David Gordon. Nishitani acknowledges Watsuji's study of Nietzsche as a major influence.

30 For example (aside from images mentioned by Nishitani): in attempting to characterize the abyss of Godhead (Gottheit), Eckhart speaks of it as "the ground, the soil, the stream, the source of Godhead" (Josef Quint, ed., Deutsche Predigten und Traktate, Predigt 26). He speaks also of God's great "joy in giving, insofar as he wants the soul to widen itself, so
that it can receive much and He can give much to the soul” (Predigt 36). In Zarathustra, abysmally deep life as will to power would correspond to Godhead in Eckhart – as suggested by Eckhart’s own remark that “life lives from out of its own ground and wells up out of its Own [aus seinem Eigenen]” (Predigt 6).

Nishitani went on to write a great deal more on Eckhart, and his work has been a major basis of the widespread view among Japanese philosophers that, of all the thinkers the West has produced, it is Eckhart who is closest to the spirit of Zen.

Nietzsche’s ideas about fate were deeply influenced by his reading of Emerson’s essay “Fate” at the age of seventeen. Emerson’s general influence on Nietzsche’s thinking is considerable; see the many references to Emerson in Composing the Soul.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III.14; also I.22, §1 and III.12, §30. Kaufmann’s translation of Wende der Not as “cessation of need” misses the point of the turn – though it is preferable to Hollingdale’s rendering, “Dispeller of Care.”

It should be mentioned that “The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism” was only a section heading in the original text, the title of which was simply Nihilism. However, Nishitani approved the choice of the longer English title as conveying the main idea of the book. The phrase apparently occurs only in a rather obscure note in the Nachlass (XVI, 422 of the Grossoktavausgabe).

See The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism, chapter nine, section 4.

Nishitani did concede in private conversation, after reading my essay “Nietzsche and Nishitani on the Self through Time” [The Eastern Buddhist 17/2 [1984]], that the parallels between Nietzsche’s thinking and his own run farther than he was prepared to allow in Religion and Nothingness. Some related themes are discussed in Graham Parkes, “Nietzsche and Nishitani on the Self-Overcoming of Nihilism,” International Studies in Philosophy 25/2 (1993): 585–90.

For a sketch of how such a comparison would proceed, see Glen T. Martin, “Deconstruction and Breakthrough in Nietzsche and Nāgārjuna,” in NAT 91–111.

See, especially, Montaigne, Essays III: 8 (“On the Art of Discussion”), and the discussion of this technique in Composing the Soul, “Interlude 2 – The Psychical Feminine.”

At the culmination of a magnificent passage in one of the unpublished notes, Nietzsche writes of how, owing to continual retrofitfection of the drives upon the self, even such things as “the stock exchange and the newspaper” (!) have become a part of us (KSA 9, 6[80]; 1880).
40 See, for example, Beyond Good and Evil 229–30 and Toward the Genealogy of Morals II, 18.
42 On the relations between Daoism and Nietzsche, see: Graham Parkes, “The Wandering Dance: Chuang-Tzu and Zarathustra,” Philosophy East and West 29/3 (1983): 235–50, and “Human/Nature in Nietzsche and Taoism,” in J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, eds., Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy (Albany, 1980), 79–98; also Roger T. Ames, “Nietzsche’s ‘Will to Power’ and Chinese ‘Virtuality’ (De): A Comparative Study,” and Chen Guying, “Zhuangzi and Nietzsche: Plays of Perspectives,” in NAT 130–50 and 115–29 respectively. A recent book on the topic of Nietzsche in China – Cheng Fang, Nicai zai zhong guo (Nanjing, 1992) – discusses the “Wandering Dance” essay, which appeared in Chinese translation in an anthology on Daoism and culture. After quoting the essay’s final paragraph, the author writes: “It is surely not easy for a foreigner to make such progress along this path [of comparing Nietzsche and Zhuangzi], and the comparison he carries out is most impressive in its details” (pp. 385–6). I mention this less out of a desire for self-aggrandizement than as evidence of the effectiveness of Nietzsche as a way into classical Daoist thinking, insofar as the essay was my first philosophical foray into the world of Zhuangzi, aided by a minimal acquaintance with the Chinese language and the kind assistance of a colleague familiar with the original text. To the extent that the comparison worked, it was on the basis of a fairly sound grasp of Nietzsche. (Indeed, if this entire essay reads like an exercise in self-aggrandizement, with its frequent references to my own writings, this is owing to a general paucity of work in this field.)
43 The interpretation offered by Joan Stambaugh in her Nietzsche’s Thought of Eternal Return (Baltimore, 1972) is in many respects reminiscent of Dōgen. Her recent book Impermanence is Buddha-Nature: Dōgen’s Understanding of Temporality (Honolulu, 1990) proceeds from the eminently sensible premise that to adduce some ideas from appropriate Western thinkers may help one “use what is more familiar and better understood as a bridge to what at first would appear to most Western readers . . . as simply unintelligible” (p. 3). However, the subsequent brief discussion of Nietzsche’s ideas fails to pursue the parallels, in my opinion, as far as they might helpfully go. Her reason for not taking them further – that Nietzsche “still retains remnants of substantializing and objectifying
tendencies in his thought" (p. 41) – fails to do justice to the extent to
which the thought of recurrence not only subverts the idea of duration
but also shatters the substantiality of any self or thing that might be said
to recur.

44 For a sketch of a comparison, see Graham Parkes, "Nietzsche and Zen
Master Hakuin on the Roles of Emotion and Passion," in Joel Marks and
Roger T. Ames, eds., Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Com-