

# NISHI AMANE'S RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN DUALISM

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The dichotomy between *noesis* (intellectual perception) and *aisthesis* (sensory perception), and the philosophical predilection for the former, has played a decisive role in conceptions of the aesthetic in Western European philosophy. At the moment of the inception of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline in its own right, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) coined the term 'aesthetic' on the basis of this dichotomy, and attempted to redeem the epistemic value of *aisthesis*. This article examines how this dichotomy was perceived by a culture in which such a dichotomy had been absent. It does so through an examination of the work of the Japanese philosopher Nishi Amane (1829–1897).

Scholars have acknowledged the historical importance of Nishi, who was a pioneer in introducing Western aesthetics to Japan. It is also known that Nishi developed utilitarian aesthetics under the influence of Ogyū Sorai's Confucianism and John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, in which beauty or art is valued as a means of cultivating society.<sup>1</sup> Nishi's attitude is furthermore captured by a famous slogan of the time, '*datsua nyūō*', which means 'rejecting Asia and embracing Europe.'<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, aesthetics, for Nishi, is thought to be subservient

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<sup>1</sup>Hamashita 2005, pp. 268-272.

<sup>2</sup>Hamashita 2002, p. 96.

to cultural policy and under the control of politics.<sup>3</sup>

While there has been much research on Nishi's aesthetics in studies of arts or beauty, his conception of *aisthesis* has not attracted much attention. This is due to the fact that Nishi did not write cohesive works on aesthetics from the viewpoint of sensory perception or sensibility.<sup>4</sup> However, re-examination of Nishi's philosophical works in their entirety makes it possible to see a potential resolution of the dichotomy between *noesis* and *aisthesis*, by re-consideration of the concepts of '*kotowari/ri* 理' (the principle) and '*michi/dō* 道' (the way).<sup>5</sup> Taking this into consideration, his philosophical attitude is not necessarily reducible to the '*datsua nyūō*' doctrine, and as such his ambition to synthesize cultural difference is worthy of our attention. The purpose of this article is to clarify the way in which Nishi approached the two traditions with regard to this dichotomy, and to look at the methodology he employed for a reconciliation.

## 1 Dualism in European epistemology

This section will briefly explain the term 'epistemic' as it is used in this context, and how the dichotomy we referred to above has been constituted in European philosophy.

A wide range of philosophical inquiries that concern the process and results of 'knowing', 'recognising', and 'perceiving' have been labeled 'epistemology'. Citing Richard Rorty's definition of 'epistemological'—that is, "describing, judging, or evaluating an 'object' according to given criteria"—Gianni Vattimo contrasts 'the epistemological' with 'the hermeneutical'.<sup>6</sup> Vattimo argues that only the experimental natural sciences can truly be called 'epistemological'. The hermeneutical, by contrast, deals with "an encounter of an inaugural disclosure of Being."<sup>7</sup> The epistemological, in this restricted sense, should remind us

<sup>3</sup>Katō 2002, pp. 13-14.

<sup>4</sup>Hamashita 2005, pp. 272-273.

<sup>5</sup>*Kotowari* and '*michi*' are the Japanese readings, or '*kun'yomi*', while '*ri*' and '*dō*' are the Chinese readings, or '*on'yomi*'.

<sup>6</sup>Vattimo 2002, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 9-10. In defining 'the hermeneutical' Vattimo draws on Heidegger's idea of a work of art as

of Immanuel Kant, who attempted to reduce the epistemic or the cognitive to the conceptual. However pre-Kantian epistemology did not have such a clear distinction; it even included the aesthetic as an object of epistemology. As such, I use the term 'epistemic' in this classical sense in order to think about how something was valued as knowledge or truth before Kant. Therefore, 'the epistemic', in this article, includes differences in the thought process or paradigmatic thoughts *behind* the perception of knowledge or truth in a wider sense—as well as the results of this 'knowing'.

In Western Europe, epistemology in the above sense developed a dichotomy between *aisthesis* and *noesis* as one of its central foci. As is well-known, in Western European intellectual history one pervasive philosophical axiom has been the principle of dualism. This assumes that reality can be broadly divided into two categories: matter and mind (or body and soul, appearance and substance). Since Plato, however, there has been a far greater emphasis on *noesis*. This view runs parallel to the view that human beings are radically separated from other animals, and to the identification of humanity with a God-given capacity for obtaining true knowledge. Plato wrote in the *Phaedrus* that "the soul which has never seen the truth will not pass into the human form. For a man must have intelligence by what is called the Idea, a unity gathered together by reason from the many particulars of sense." (*Phaed.* 249b-c) In the *Theaetetus* he also clearly separated knowledge from sensory perception (*Theat.* 164b). In the Christian era, as claimed by Kai Hammermeister, the devaluation of the senses followed the Christian tradition of the mortification of sensory perception. Descartes played a decisive role in developing the modern version of epistemology, in which sensory perception is understood to be the source of error, and unreliable for any acquisition of truth. From this viewpoint, sensory perception needs to be controlled or repressed rather than relied upon as a source of guidance.

Admittedly there have been periodic attempts to redeem the epistemic value of sensory perception. Wolfgang Welsch has re-considered Aristotle's conception of *aisthesis*, which is the source of practical wis-

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<sup>1</sup>the disclosure of a new way of experiencing the world!

dom. Pre-Kantian aestheticians, such as Baumgarten, attempted a positive re-evaluation of the epistemic role of sensibility. Nietzsche's reconsideration of the concept of body, and some phenomenological or hermeneutical re-configurations of the concept of 'knowing' in the twentieth century, can also be seen as counterparts to traditional dualism. However, in terms of Western European intellectual history (especially before Nietzsche) the dichotomy and the predilection for noesis has been highly influential—and this is the tradition which Nishi drew upon. Consequently, Nishi's view of Western dualism followed a different modality from European philosophers who questioned dualism. This aspect of Nishi's thought can be observed in his translations as well as in his philosophical writings.

## 2 Nishi's translations

The European dualism that resulted in a detailed classification of mental faculties—such as understanding, reason, sensibility, and so on—made translation work in the Meiji era intractable. Equivalent concepts to describe these terms were rarely found in existing words—as Nishi himself admitted.<sup>8</sup> In the face of such difficulties, Nishi chose to create his own original glossaries. There are at least two discernible motives behind this decision. First, the translation was in part meant to be an edification. Although Nishi generally advocated empiricism and opposed idealism, he partly agreed with the German Enlightenment—in particular a Kantian epistemological account which assumes that a capacity for obtaining knowledge is *a priori* inherent in every human being.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, in his *Jinsei Sampō Setsu*, he proposed moving away from a feudalistic way of life and living as equal members of society—and this would include sharing methods of gaining knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Translation was treated as a medium for making European wisdom accessible not just to intellectuals but also to wider society. It resulted in coining terms by combining exist-

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<sup>8</sup>Nishi 1970, pp. 8-9.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>10</sup>Nishi 1970, pp. 555-559; Kuwaki 2008, pp. 54-57.

ing Chinese characters or borrowing phrases from classical texts, so that readers could guess the meaning of new concepts. Nishi's second motive lay in the fact that, for him, translation was not only linguistic but also philosophical. One might argue that the selection of words in translation is trivial, because a word is ultimately a matter of sound and its meaning can be negotiated through communication. However, Nishi invested words with significance. To Nishi words were not mere signs; they comprised languages with history, custom, and, thus, concepts. In the case of ideography, not only words but also characters can be related to concepts. Nishi took this into account and chose to use existing phrases or original translations. His translation work was underpinned by a view that translation was a means of conveying concepts contained in the two languages being used. As a result, even after many amendments or discontinuation, according to a report by Teshima Kunio 606 out of Nishi's 2872 translations are still in use in Japan.<sup>11</sup>

Chart One is a partial list of Nishi's terminology relating to central argument of this article. It highlights how he perceived the absence of certain concepts in Japan, in contrast to the importance of some core concepts in European philosophy. It also shows how much he relied on Confucian ideas in order to explain new concepts. Furthermore, it is possible to see that the concept of '*kotowari* / *ri* 理' played an important role for Nishi. In fact an examination of his consideration of '*ri*' demonstrates how he contrasted and reconciled different paradigms of thought.

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<sup>11</sup>Both this paragraph and Chart One are indebted to (Teshima 2001, pp. 301-309; Teshima 2005, pp. 73-88).

ENGLISH	TRANSLATION	KANJI	NOTES
<i>a priori</i>	Senten	先天	These counterwords were borrowed from the <i>Yi Jīng</i> and used to generate new meanings.
<i>a posteriori</i>	Kōten	後天	
Understanding	Gosei	悟性	Referring to these three terms, Nishi argued that the division of mental faculties in European thought is more diverse and complicated. ‘理性’ is his original word.
Reason	Risei	理性	
Sensibility	Kansei	感性	
Conscience	Dokuchi	独知	This term is derived from Inaba Mokusai’s commentary on <i>Da Xue</i> .
The natural law	Rihō	理法	Nishi frequently used the term ‘ <i>ri</i> ’. Among these four concepts, he stated that the term ‘ <i>seirigaku</i> ’ was derived from the Song School.
Theory	Risetsu	理說	
Logic	Ronri	論理	
Psychology	Seirigaku	性理学	

Chart 1 — A partial list of Nishi Amane’s translations

In order to translate ‘reason,’ as a human capacity to understand and form judgment, Nishi coined the term ‘*risei* 理性,’ which is a combination of the noun ‘*ri* 理’ (the principle) and the noun ‘*sei* 性’ (the nature), because he thought that both *ri* and reason relate to the con-

cept of 'the principle,' in the word, 'hō 法' (the law).<sup>12</sup> However, in his *Shōhaku Sakki*, he also noted that 'ri' and 'reason' are not completely translatable, because in the European concept of reason there is a clear separation between the law of humanity and the law of nature.<sup>13</sup> Due to dualism, reason as a symbol of humanity disregards the rest of nature. But according to Nishi, the traditional concept of *ri*, which was influenced by neo-Confucian thought, includes both the laws of nature and the laws of humanity. Consequently, if the concept of reason can be re-configured based on the concept of *ri*, it follows that the concept of *risei* could offer a new understanding of humanity, that is, a concept of humanity that does not disregard the rest of nature. In other words, humanity is not defined by the separation of human beings from other animals, but is an indication of the continuation of human beings with the rest of nature. Although this re-configuration was not taken any further, his terminology implies the potential for such reconfiguration.

While Nishi did not reconfigure these concepts, he did reconcile them. In order to do so, he manifested a deep understanding of the division between the laws of humanity and the laws of nature; he was aware that confusion between the two might support old-fashioned folk beliefs, such as geomancy, which asserts that people are intimately determined by their immediate environment. Nishi did not support this account of knowledge, and instead advocated both empiricism and August Comte's positivism—which he thought lacking in traditional Japanese ideas. At the same time, he shifted the focus on the division between the laws of humanity and the laws of nature from its duality to the relationship between the two. This was done by relating the concept of *ri* to 'dō / michi 道'—'the way'.<sup>14</sup> Citing the *Shuowen* lexicon, in which 'ri (li)' means polishing jade, he interpreted the ideography of the character 'ri' as veins on a piece of jade after be-

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<sup>12</sup>'Nature' in this context means the basic qualities that are inherent in human beings. Uno Mieko argues that this understanding of the concept of 'sei' is influenced by Sorai, rather than by early Chinese thought. For more detail see Uno 2008.

<sup>13</sup>Nishi 1970, p. 169.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 598-602.

ing polished.<sup>15</sup> In Nishi's view, the veins are the symbol of the word '*suji* 直路', which signifies a direct relationship between things. The '*suji*' was rephrased as '*michi*', or 'the way'. That is to say, *ri* was construed as a holistic term that could be used to describe a network of relationships that permeate the world around human beings. In other words, it was taken as a symbol of truth referencing factual relationships in this world. Just as patterns on a piece of jade can't be seen unless it is polished, these relationships are hard to see unless the object is closely examined and studied in detail. Generally such relationships are invisible even if they exist as matters of fact. The examination and observation required to make the relationship visible Nishi conceived as the role of academic learning. According to Nozaki Morihide, seeing the concept of 'the way' as the holistic symbol of truth can be traced back to two Confucians: Itō Jinsai and Ogyū Sorai.<sup>16</sup> Despite radical differences in the way they define the meaning of 'the way', Nozaki argues that both agreed that the concept of 'the way' is not reducible to ethical norms for individuals or groups, but instead should be construed as a symbol of truth that is ubiquitous and simultaneously comprehensive. In fact, Jinsai claimed that 'the way' is latent as truth in both the realms of humanity and nature, and it is the task of human beings to find and practice 'the way'; this 'way' exists not outside but *inside* human beings. Sorai also argued for the pervasiveness of truth in the world, but, unlike Jinsai, he considered 'the way' in the realm of humanity to be illuminated through '*reigaku*' (rites and music), where righteousness comes through beauty.

Although Nishi does not insist on 'rites and music' as a means of finding 'the way', his interpretation of the way as a relationship might also be seen as a redemption of the power of *aisthesis*. Taking Nishi's thought into consideration, *noesis* and *aisthesis* do not always run parallel. They can intersect, and human beings should pursue this occurrence. Knowledge, action, and awareness of beauty need to be synthesised. For Nishi, the difference between the processes of *noesis* and *aisthesis* is not intrinsic but methodological. Unlike the Platonic concept

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 168; p. 598.

<sup>16</sup>Nozaki 1979, p. 115.



of the idea, truth is not attained by a soul cleansed of sensibility. Unlike Cartesian rationalism, there is no hierarchy between perceptions. While Kant restricted the epistemic role of sensibility to the transcendental realm, truth is thought to be known, perceived, and put into practice. Nishi explained the relationship between subject and object through an image of a road extending into the distance;<sup>17</sup> he also used to the image of archery to refer to the acquisition of *ri*. That is, that which can be grasped by *noesis* and *aisthesis* relate to the same dimension of the world. The gap between the two was thus resolved. Here his ambition for synthesis is apparent.

In his aesthetic theory, Nishi conceptualised the independent realm of beauty by stating that beauty can be sensed without will or knowledge. However, at the same time he wanted to retain inseparability between beauty and ethical values. Although one of his translations of the term 'aesthetics' as '*zenbigaku*' (a science of goodness and beauty) was later discarded, his ambition to synthesise them remained. This view may remind us of the Greek word *kalokagathia* (beauty and goodness), but philosophically it is based more explicitly on Sorai, who saw the connection between mind and sensory perception and valued the epistemic power of 'rites and music.' Sorai stated that "defining virtue vis-a-vis the mind, without mentioning rites or music, moreover reveals a person is 'unlearned and lacking in the methods of the way'".<sup>18</sup> Just as Sorai insisted on the inseparability of aesthetics, ethics, and learning, Nishi aimed to synthesize the different realms. By referring to Mill's greatest happiness principle, Nishi claimed that different academic disciplines should be synthesised for a single purpose, namely the practice of the doctrine. That is to say, acquisition of knowledge is not a purpose but a tool, and the practical role that the perception of beauty can play should be explored and acknowledged. This utilitarian perspective is supported by his epistemological account of '*ri*' as '*michi*', that is, the view that each faculty, each paradigm of thought, and human beings and nature are all inseparable, without being transcendental. And it is the task of each

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<sup>17</sup>Nishi 1970, pp. 578-580.

<sup>18</sup>Ogyū 2006, p. 182.

individual to find and strengthen this connection.

### 3 Conclusion

In summary, Nishi's philosophy is indeed eclectic. However his eclecticism should not be reduced to the doctrine of 'rejecting Asia and embracing Europe,' nor to eclecticism between Confucianism and utilitarianism. Rather, Nishi's philosophy freely moves through different schools of thought in order to reconcile those differences for practical use. As with his efforts to approach the dichotomy by interpreting it from the viewpoint of 'the way,' his methodology is not a mere accumulation of ideas without centre or attention on subtle differences. He was attentive to differences, but never lost his synthetic focus. He believed that the purpose of academia was not to discover truth but to make use of any such discovery. As long as academia is considered a tool, he believed that all academic disciplines could synthesise with one another for a single purpose: ethical practice.

In order to make the most of Nishi's philosophy in a contemporary context, it is helpful to look to the concept of 'transculturality,' as proposed by Welsch. While the traditional concept of culturality is characterized by social homogenization, ethnic consolidation, and cultural delamination, transculturality is, according to Welsch, 'a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures.'<sup>19</sup> A form is called transcultural 'insofar that it passes through classical cultural boundaries.'<sup>20</sup> Interculturality or multiculturalism is differentiated from transculturality because the two former concepts are still bound to the framework of traditional conceptions of culturality. That is, they seek mutual understanding of *segregated* cultures. In the state of transculturality, society is hybrid and complex, and the purely mono-cultural doesn't exist—on either a macro or a micro level.

Taking this configuration of the cultural into account, Nishi had an intercultural perspective. He was attentive to the differences be-

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<sup>19</sup>Welsch 1999, pp. 194-213.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

tween traditions in terms of processes of 'knowing', and he tried to build something new, culturally, through reconciliation of the differences. In this process the traditional concept of culturality was retained. However Nishi's philosophy also has the potential to approach what Welsch has defined as transculturality. Welsch argues that, 'the concept of transculturality sketches a different picture of the relation between cultures. Not one of isolation and of conflict, but one of entanglement, intermixing and commonness. It promotes not separation, but exchange and interaction.' That is to say, confrontation of different cultures should not result in particularization, such as monoculturalism, nor in universalization, such as we see in totalitarianism. It should not result only in the discovery of differences, either. Rather, it can help construct a new philosophical account with a clear purpose. Conducting such re-configurations might be one role of examinations of non-Western aesthetic discourses today. Nishi's reconciliation of Western European and Japanese thought—by means of drawing 'the way' between mental faculties and academic disciplines, and attempting to synthesize them for ethical purposes—offers us a way of thinking about a method and perspective for future re-configurations of the concept of 'the aesthetic.'

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