

Comparative Asian Research Network (CARN)

Monthly Lecture Series on Issues and Research in the Asian Region

Organized by the Department of Japanese Studies CUHK

What is Japanese philosophy?

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Time: 4:30pm–6:00pm

Venue: FYB UG02

ALL ARE WELCOME!

Abstract:

In East Asia, there is a tradition of the searching truth, good and beauty, but there was no word for “philosophy.” In pre-modern Japan, there was a discipline called *rangaku*, which means the knowledge from the Netherlands. Through the study of *rangaku*, Japanese began to import Western knowledge such as modern science and medicine, and soon they met “the knowledge of all knowledge” in the Western world, i.e. philosophy. However, philosophy was a completely novel concept to the Japanese, who found that there was no Japanese word equivalent to the meaning of philosophy. A *rangaku* scholar, Nishi Amane, translated philosophy into *tetsugaku*. Japanese did not simply find a translation for the word philosophy, but they also founded a new discipline that differed essentially from the tradition of Confucian thoughts pursued during the Tokugawa period. Meanwhile, doing philosophy was a political signal to the rest of Asia—Japanese is leaving Asia and entering the West. I shall discuss the twofold-structure of Japanese philosophy. On one hand, Japanese philosophy is presumed as a part of the project of Westernisation. On the other hand, Japanese philosophy is conceived as an “original” philosophical tradition which can overcome the predominant Western culture.

No registration necessary.

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