Contents

Translators and Contributors ................................. xvi

FRAMEWORK

Historical Overview ........................................... 4
Defining Philosophy ........................................... 17
Translating the Philosophical Idiom ....................... 23
Editorial Conventions ......................................... 28
Acknowledgments ............................................... 30

TRADITIONS

Prelude: The Shōtoku Constitution ............................ 33

Buddhist Traditions

Overview ......................................................... 43
Kūkai (774–835) ................................................. 51
  Esoteric and Exoteric Teachings
  Realizing Buddhahood
  Voice, Word, Reality
  The Ten Mindsets
Kakuban (1095–1143) .......................................... 75
  The Esoteric Meaning of "Amida"
  The Illuminating Secret
Myōe (1173–1232) ............................................. 81
  A Letter to an Island
Nichiren (1222–1282) .......................................... 86
  Buddhist Views on Current Issues
Original Enlightenment Debates .............................. 92
  Universal Buddha-Nature (Saichō)
  Suchness (Genshin)
  Buddhahood in Plants (Kakuun and Ryōgen)
  Critical Buddhism (Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō)
JIUN Sonja (1718–1804) ............................................. 104
   The Non-Abiding Mind

ISHIZU Teruji (1903–1972) ........................................... 110
   The Real Aspect of Things

NAKAMURA Hajime (1912–1999) ................................. 117
   Japanese Culture, World Culture
   Natural Law and Conventional Law

TAMAKI Kōshirō (1915–1999) .............................. 125
   Buddhism and the Total Person
   A Viewpoint of Existence

The Zen Tradition

Overview ............................................................. 135

DŌGEN (1200–1253) ................................................. 141
   Zen as Practicing Enlightenment
   Meaning and Context
   Temporality
   Nature
   On Good and Evil
   On Language in Zen Buddhism
   On Teacher and Disciple

MUSŌ Soseki (1275–1351) ........................................... 163
   Dialogues from a Dream

IKKYŪ Sōjun (1394–1481) ............................................. 172
   Skeletons

TAKUAN Sōhō (1573–1645) ......................................... 178
   Undisturbed Wisdom

SUZUKI Shōsan (1579–1655) ........................................ 183
   Death Energy

SHIDŌ Bunan (1603–1676) ........................................... 190
   This Very Mind is Buddha

BANKEI Yōtaku (1622–1693) ....................................... 195
   The Unborn
   The Spiritual Ability of Women

HAKUIN Ekaku (1685–1768) ........................................ 202
   The Awakened Mind
   Meditation
   Köan and the Great Doubt

IMAKITA Kōsen (1816–1892) ...................................... 211
   The One True Reality
Suzuki Daisetsu (1870–1966) .......................... 214
   The Logic of Affirmation-in-Negation
   The Leap across to Other-Power
Hisamatsu Shin’ichi (1889–1980) .................. 221
   Oriental Nothingness
Karaki Junzō (1904–1980) .......................... 227
   Metaphysical Impermanence

The Pure Land Tradition

Overview ............................................. 235

Hōnen (1133–1212) ................................. 242
   The Philosophy of Nenbutsu
   The Hermeneutics of Nenbutsu
   The Three Mindsets
   Historical Consciousness

Shinran (1173–1263) ............................... 249
   A Philosophical Anthropology
   Entrusting Oneself to Amida’s Vow
   Nenbutsu: The Will of No-Will
   The Non-Instrumentality of Practice
   Naturalness as Sacred
   Attaining Faith is Attaining Nirvāṇa
   Wisdom as Light
   Good and Evil
   History and the Transhistorical

Kiyozawa Manshi (1863–1903) ..................... 262
   Outline of a Philosophy of Religion
   Morality and Religion
   Absolute Other-Power

Soga Ryōjin (1875–1971) ......................... 273
   Shakyamuni, Subjective and Objective
   Monotheism and Polytheism
   Self as God and Buddha

Yasuda Rijin (1900–1982) ......................... 280
   Self-Awareness and the Nenbutsu

Confucian Traditions

Overview ............................................. 289

Fujiwara Seika (1561–1619) ....................... 298
   Cleansing the Mind

vii
Human Nature and Principle
The Nature of Trade

Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) .................. 304

A Vernacular Guide to Confucianism

Nakae Tōju (1608–1648) ................. 318

Filial Piety
Guarding the Treasure of Humanity
Learning

Yamazaki Ansai (1618–1682) ............ 324

Reverence and Education
The Three Pleasures
Shinto

Kumazawa Banzan (1619–1691) ........ 329

Views on the Great Way
Buddhist and Daoist Ideas
The Virtues of Governance
The Tale of Genji

Yamaga Sokō (1622–1685) ............... 335

The Essence of the Sages

Itō Jinsai (1627–1705) ................. 347

A Lexicon of Philosophical Terms

Kaibara Ekken (1630–1714) ............ 360

Great Doubts
The Pursuit of Happiness

Satō Naokata (1650–1719) ............ 374

Quiet Sitting
Critical Thinking
Chauvinism and False Loyalty

Asami Keisai (1652–1711) .......... 381

Reverence to Rulers and Tradition
In Praise of Shinto
Universal Way, Japanese Way
The Forty-Six Rōnin

Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725) .......... 387

Era Names
Against Christianity
Ghosts and Spirits

Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728) ............ 393

The Way and the Names
Answers to Questions
ISHIDA Baigan (1685–1744) 411
Knowledge Innate and Learned
Gods and Spirits

ANDÔ Shôeki (1703–1762) 416
Living Nature’s Truth
A Symposium on Changing the World
A Metaphysics of Mutual Natures

TOMINAGA Nakamoto (1715–1746) 430
The Writings of an Old Man
Words after Meditation

TESHIMA Toan (1718–1786) 436
Against Rationalizing

MIURA Baien (1723–1789) 441
Errors in the Old Yin-Yang Theories
The Complexity of Natural Phenomena
Deep Words

NINOMIYA Sontoku (1787–1856) 447
The Good Life
Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism

Shinto and Native Studies

Overview 457

KAMO no Mabuchi (1697–1769) 466
The Meaning of Our Country

MOTOORI Norinaga (1730–1801) 472
The Way of Japan
In Defense of the Japanese Way

FUJITANI Mitsue (1768–1823) 493
Illuminating the Kojiki
On Kotodama
Distinguishing Kami from Humans

HIRATA Atsutane (1776–1843) 509
The True Pillar of the Soul

ÔKUNI Takamasa (1792–1871) 523
The Divine Principle

ORIKUCHI Shinobu (1887–1953) 536
The Goal of Native Studies
Shinto’s Rebirth as a Religion
Modern Academic Philosophy

Beginnings, Definitions, Disputations

Overview .................................................. 553

Nishi Amane (1829–1897) ............................... 583
  Governing, Freedom, Independence
  Principles, Reasons, Science

Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) ....................... 589
  Virtue, Knowledge, and Wisdom
  In Praise of Methodic Doubt
  The Equality of Men and Women

Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901) ............................ 604
  No God, No Soul

Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–1944) ......................... 611
  Fragments of a Worldview

Inoue Enryō (1858–1919) .............................. 619
  Buddhism and Philosophy
  A View of the Cosmos
  The Temple of Philosophy
  Addressing the Divine

Ōnishi Hajime (1864–1900) ............................. 631
  Questioning Moral Foundations

The Kyoto School

Overview .................................................. 639

Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945) ............................ 646
  Pure Experience
  The Logic of Place
  The Eternal in Art and Poetry
  A Religious View of the World
  My Logic

Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962) ............................ 670
  The Logic of the Specific
  The Philosophy of Dōgen
  Philosophy as Metanoetics
Twentieth-Century Philosophy

Overview ........................................... 801

Hatano Seiichi (1877–1950) ....................... 808
   The Eternal and Time

Abe Jirō (1883–1959) .............................. 816
   A Critique of Human Life

Takahashi Satomi (1886–1964) .................. 822
   A Standpoint of Empirical Totality
      Inclusive Dialectics
Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941) .................................................. 829
  Contingency
Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960) ................................. 850
  Shinran and Dōgen
  A Phenomenology of the Cold
  Ethics
Miyake Gōichi (1895–1982) ................................. 870
  Human Ontology and History
Tosaka Jun (1900–1945) ........................................ 877
  Time, History, and Morality
Ichikawa Hakugen (1902–1986) ................. 882
  Absolute Nothingness Stumbles
Imanishi Kinji (1902–1992) ........................................ 890
  Life and the Social Environment
Funayama Shin’ichi (1907–1994) ................. 895
  Before the Turning Point
  After the Turning Point
  After the War
Takizawa Katsumi (1909–1984) .................. 902
  The Logic of Irreversibility
Ienaga Saburō (1913–2002) ....................... 907
  The Negation of Otherworldliness
Izutsu Toshihiko (1914–1993) .................. 913
  Zen and the Ego
  Consciousness and Essences
Maruyama Masao (1914–1996) .................. 922
  In Search of a Ground
Minamoto Ryōen (1920– ) ......................... 930
  Kata as Style
Ōmori Shōzō (1921–1997) ......................... 936
  Time Does not Flow
  Words and Things
Yuasa Yasuo (1925–2005) ............................... 943
  Cultivation and Theory
  Meta-physika and Meta-psychika
  Modern Japanese Philosophy
Nakamura Yūjirō (1925– ) ......................... 952
  Common Sense
  The Knowledge of Pathos
Kimura Bin (1931– ) .................................................. 958
  Time and Self
HIROMATSU WATARU (1933–1994) .......................... 973
The Subjective Duality of Phenomena

SAKABE MEGUMI (1936–2009) ......................... 979
The Problem of the Subject

FUJITA MASAKATSU (1949–) .......................... 993
The Question of Japanese Philosophy

ADDITIONAL THEMES

Culture and Identity

Overview .............................................. 1005

FUKANSAI HABIAN (1565–1621) ................. 1038
Deus Defended
Deus Destroyed

MORI ARIMASA (1911–1976) ....................... 1047
Experience, Thought, Language

YAGI SEIICHI (1932–) .............................. 1053
Interreligious Philosophy

CHUÔKÔRON Discussions (1941–1942) .......... 1059
First Session: 26 November 1941
Second Session: 4 March 1942
Third Session: 24 November 1942

Overcoming Modernity: A Symposium (1942) .. 1078
Detoxifying Culture
Demechanizing the Spirit
An Ethic of Subjective Nothingness
Deromanticizing Music
Demythifying Western Literature

TAKEUCHI YOSHIMI (1910–1977) ................. 1085
The Nature of Modernity
Overcoming Modernity
Japan and Asia

KARATANI KÔJIN (1941–) ......................... 1093
Nationalism and Écriture

Samurai Thought

Overview .............................................. 1103
Death and Loyalty
Essentials of Samurai Thought

xiii
Women Philosophers

Overview .................................................. 1115
Yosano Akiko (1878–1942) .......................... 1138
  Women and Thinking
  Freedom to be a Full Person
  Conditions for Reform
  A Poet’s Mind
Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971) .................... 1148
  Two Manifestos
  The Rise of Women’s Movements
  Neither Capitalism nor Marxism
  Thoughts at the End of the War
  The Value of Virginity
Yamakawa Kikue (1890–1980) ...................... 1159
  An Inquiry into Feminism

Aesthetics

Overview .................................................. 1167
  Calm Contemplation (Fujiwara no Shunzei)
  Human Feelings (Hori Keizan)
  Mono no aware (Motoori Norinaga)
  Transiency (Kobayashi Hideo)
  Kotodama (Fujitani Mitsue)
  Mystery and Depth (Shōtetsu)
  Nō and the Body (Konparu Zenchiku)
  Nationalism and Aesthetics (Umehara Takeshi)
  Iki (Kuki Shūzō)
  Cutting (Ōhashi Ryōsuke)
  The Way of Tea (Hisamatsu Shin’ichi)
  Ikebana (Nishitani Keiji)
  Calligraphy (Morita Shiryū)
Kamo no Chōmei (1155–1216) ...................... 1203
  The Style of Uta
Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443) ...................... 1209
  Knowing the Flower
Ōnishi Yoshinori (1888–1959) ..................... 1216
  Yūgen
Izutsu Toyoko (1925– ) .............................. 1220
  Kokoro
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<td>Twentieth Century</td>
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<td>Twentieth Century</td>
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<td>VV Valdo Viglielmo</td>
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The idea that people of different cultures actually think differently has been slow to find its way into the heart of western philosophy. Over the past century or so, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists have often examined this issue and compared results. But until recently, the majority of philosophers in the West have exempted themselves from the debate, often assuming that philosophy’s kind of thinking is universal and transcultural. Others have claimed to the contrary that philosophy is so distinctively western an enterprise that there is little point to look for it elsewhere. In either case, “nonwestern philosophy” is dismissed as an oxymoron.

Meanwhile, Japanese studies has seldom focused specifically on the philosophical dimensions of the culture, typically treating them only in the background or margins of scholarly works in literature, religion, politics, intellectual history, or the arts. Although books dedicated to Indian philosophy and Chinese philosophy have played a central role in the development of Asian studies for many decades, this has not been the case for Japanese philosophy. This omission leaves the impression that, even compared with its Asian neighbors, Japan has not been very much engaged in philosophical reflection, analysis, and argument. Indeed, the romanticized image of Japan in much popular writing explicitly says as much. Japanese culture’s face to the western world is one of haiku, Zen gardens, tea ceremony, the martial arts, woodblock prints, novels, and, more recently, anime and manga. Behind those phenomena, however, are powerful critical traditions of thought and value for which there is no better word than “philosophy.” A focus on Japanese philosophy, therefore, can broaden and deepen not only our understanding of philosophy, but also of Japan.

This Sourcebook addresses these issues by making available, for the first time in a single volume, translations of a wide variety of texts from multiple intellectual traditions spanning the whole of Japan’s recorded history. Our working assumption is that the philosophical nature of a cultural heritage—its forms of analysis, its use of distinctions, its patterns of argument, its selection of issues on which to focus—cannot be fully appreciated by looking at any single work by any given author from any particular period. Rather, Japanese thinkers can
best be appreciated as philosophers only by seeing how they have argued with each other, how intellectual traditions have developed over centuries, and how individuals and traditions have responded throughout history to new ideas from continental Asia or the West. The Sourcebook not only tries to establish parameters for the study of Japanese philosophy in the West; it also aims to address readers intrigued by the question of how culture and systematic thinking have interacted in a sophisticated literary tradition radically different from that of Western Europe.

The perception of what counts as philosophy in Japan today is radically ambiguous. First, it has come to represent a meticulous study of mainline currents of western philosophy, and along with that a large number of minor currents, some of which are given attention disproportionate to what they enjoy in the cultures of their birth. As the discipline took hold in universities a little over a century ago, its study broadened to include parallels in Islamic, Russian, and Jewish thought, not to mention a healthy interest in the esoteric traditions accompanying them.

Second, Japanese scholars have not merely approached western philosophy as a subject of historical and objective interest; they have taken their own critical stance, making their own adjustments and contributions in light of their own experience and intellectual history. In a few notable cases, this has led to major contributions to philosophy that have attracted attention around the world. Most often, however, the changes have been more subtle and aimed at specialists in the field. In both instances, the primary audience for philosophical texts has been Japan and the language Japanese. What is known to scholars abroad through translation is a small, and often far from representative, sampling of the entire contribution.

Third, preceding the entrance of the western academic discipline, there were traditional Japanese systems of theory and praxis associated with Buddhism, Confucianism, artistic expression, and Shinto. These contained understandings of language, truth, human nature, creativity, reality, and society that were explained and argued in a variety of ways. For many Japanese today, these may not be “philosophy” in the modern academic sense, but they are parallel to traditions of what we call in English “classical Indian philosophy” or “classical Chinese philosophy.” They are part of the cultural background against which modern Japanese thinking develops. That modern Japanese thinkers have typically filtered so much of western philosophy through their own modes of thought, aesthetic feeling, and religious experience is hardly surprising. Such filtering belongs to the story of great ideas and great philosophical systems everywhere; as they cross back and forth between civilizations and from one epoch to another, they become transfigured, reoriented, even radically inverted.
Yet there are special circumstances that set the history of philosophy in Japan apart. The most obvious of these is that academic philosophy, and indeed the university system itself, as it is known throughout the West and much of the rest of the world, did not arrive until about one hundred and fifty years ago. As a result, the technical term philosophy came to be reserved for what was fundamentally a foreign import. Cut off from the long history of conflict and synthesis that led to the forms of western philosophy that came to Japan as completed systems of thought, Japanese thinkers at first tended to embrace the western import not so much as a colleague to be engaged in dialogue, but rather as a foreign dignitary to be shown respect and proper attention. This reception was further reinforced by the awareness, never far from the mind of Japanese scholars, that by the time literacy had come to Japan, this western discipline called philosophy was already into its second millennium.

More important for the aims of the Sourcebook are the native resources on which Japanese philosophy as a modern academic discipline draws for its critical appraisal of ideas. These differ from those of traditional philosophy in the West. The ways of thought tacitly embedded in religious scriptures, literature, theater, art, and language that run between the lines and beneath the surface of western philosophical texts received from abroad are, at least until recently, largely absent from the Japanese mind. In their place we find different, no less rich and variegated, ways of thinking and valuing. Assumptions transparent to the western historian of ideas are often opaque to the Japanese, and vice-versa. The range of resources open to the Japanese thinker is as broad and deep as the culture itself, and any attempt to generalize about them is fraught with danger from the start. One way to get at them is to probe the history of Japanese ideas for philosophical “affinities,” that is to say, comprehensive worldviews, systematizations of moral values, methods of analysis and argument, and, in general, reflection on what we consider universal questions about human existence and reality. This is the task we have set ourselves in the pages of the Sourcebook.

The Sourcebook is divided into two parts of unequal length. The first, historical part treats philosophical resources from the major traditions of Japanese intellectual history: Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto and Native Studies, and Modern Academic Philosophy. The second part, “Additional Themes,” picks up a sampling of recurrent topics that are not treated in detail elsewhere and that cut across the lines defining the traditional schools of Japanese thought. In settling on this dual method of presenting the material, we were aware that the story of philosophy in any cultural context not only has to respect the development of arguments and themes within schools of thought, but also has to take into account important topics that overlap traditions and involve the interface of philosophy and other forms of intellectual discourse.
Watsuji Tetsurō was not only Japan’s premier ethical theorist and historian of ethics in the first half of the twentieth century, but also an astute philosopher of culture and interpreter of religious traditions and practices. Born the son of a country physician in a village near the Inland Sea, at age sixteen he ventured out to the metropolis of Tokyo to study at its First Higher School and then the Imperial University, graduating in 1912 with a thesis on Schopenhauer’s pessimism. Forty years later he published a memoir of his philosophy professor there, Raphael von Koeber. In his student years he took up the study of Nietzsche, the subject of his first publication in 1913, followed two years later by a book on Kierkegaard, the first in Japan. In 1918 he issued a critique of Taishō-era infatuation with democracy, coupled with an appeal to ancient nature cults, under the ironic title, *The Revival of Idols*, and then began work on *A Critique of Homer* published nearly twenty years later. Among the religious, cultural, and historical studies he authored were *The Cultural-Historical Significance of Primitive Christianity* (1926), and *The Practical Philosophy of Primitive Buddhism* (1927).

Although he was not the first person to find philosophical thought in Dōgen* or Shinran*, the essay cited below opened Dōgen’s writings to nonsectarian, philosophical inquiry for the first time. Watsuji’s works were informed by the philosophical methods he learned from Koeber and later by the hermeneutical approach he gained during a year spent in Europe from 1927 to 1928, when he studied in Berlin, engrossed himself in Heidegger’s just-published *Sein und Zeit*, and made excursions to the cultural centers of Italy. The trip proved to be a turning point in Watsuji’s career and interests. Soon after returning to Japan he was made a professor of philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University, and in 1934 was appointed to the chair in ethics at Tokyo Imperial University. Inspired to develop the hermeneutical phenomenology he had come to know in Germany and further elucidate cultural differences, he published *Climate and Culture*, demonstrating how human spatiality shapes the intentionality of our perceptions and actions, and how climatic zones shape the character of interhuman relations and give rise to distinct cultures: pastoral, desert, and monsoon. The excerpt below from this work represents perhaps the world’s first phenomenological description of weather.

Watsuji later abandoned these rather impressionistic idealizations of cultural types but continued to focus on interrelations among humans and between humans and their environments. His three-volume work on *Ethics* was completed in 1949 and followed Heidegger’s lead in exploiting the literal meanings and the cultural
nuances of terms in his native language to drive home the insights of his analysis. The term translated as “human being” is an example. The ordinary modern Japanese word *ningen* refers to humans but its sinographs literally indicate the inter-human or relationship between one person and others, all who live together in a shared cultural space or “betweenness.” At the same time, he argued that Heidegger’s *Dasein* was individualistic and overemphasized the temporality of human existence to the neglect of relationality—spatial, temporal, cultural, and climatic—that Watsuji considered central. The passage cited below on the negative, dialectical structure of human existence reveals the influence of Nishida’s philosophy and Buddhist thought as well, but the work overall implies a critique of traditional Confucian and Buddhist thought that lacked a notion of intentionality and therefore an adequate base for philosophical analysis.

For Watsuji, ethics forms the core of philosophy, and in a two-volume *History of Japanese Ethical Thought* published in 1952 he attempted to lay out the manifestations of universal human relatedness in the particular historical strata of Japanese value systems, including that of emperor veneration as opposed to a feudal *bushidō*. His critique of the samurai ethic did not, however, keep from applauding the benefits of self-negation, the superiority of Japan’s view of the human, and the virtue of the nation-state as the supreme form of human community—all of which served military factions during the Asian Pacific War with a rationale. While the political status of his views remains controversial, the clarity of his analyses is striking.

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**Shinran and Dōgen**

Watsuji Tetsurō 1923, 192–203

The most remarkable part of Shinran’s* teaching is his explanation of boundless ‘compassion’. For Shinran, compassion is the image of the absolute being…. But Shinran does not explain infinite compassion in phrases such as “love thy neighbor,” “love all humankind,” or “love between people is the most meaningful thing in life.” This is because he understands how feeble human love truly is, and how difficult it is for human beings to love selflessly. He distinctly separates human compassion from the Buddha’s compassion…. The path of sages is one of cultivating pity and sorrow. However, as long as people live in this world, we cannot truly help others, no matter how much our hearts pity or yearn for them.

Shinran’s great love for humanity is expressed here; we cannot help but be moved deeply by it. Indeed, how many hurting souls can we see immediately around us? And how much do we suffer because we cannot save people from their pain—or rather, because their pain is such that they cannot be saved from it? It is not that we don’t know the means to eradicate their suffering. The prob-
lem is that we can never embody these means, because our love is too meager, and human ability cannot go beyond certain limits.…

This is where Shinran explains the compassion of the Buddha: The compassion of the ‘Pure Land’ is nothing other than chanting the name of the Buddha, quickly attaining buddhahood and, with that great compassionate heart, saving all sentient beings according to one’s heart. It is not suffering due to unending compassion, but rather the interpenetrating compassion that is attained by chanting the Buddha’s name, which we must call an all-encompassing compassionate heart. In other words, to save oneself is simultaneously to save others. To save others, one must be saved oneself. If you want to perfectly manifest the idea of “love thy neighbor,” there is no alternative but to call upon ‘Amida’ Buddha. Through Amida we can be perfectly loved and we can love perfectly.

Thus the compassion that Shinran teaches is a great love that “cannot belong to humans.” His emphasis was not on the relationship of person to person but rather the relationship of people to love itself. It is in this relationship of people to love that we can see the special quality of his belief that “all is forgivable.” He says, “Of course even good people can reach the Pure Land (i.e., enter Heaven). Evil people are even more able to reach it…. ” According to this way of thinking, before the compassion of Amida there is no distinction between good and evil in human behavior. Indeed, it even seems that evil possesses more positive meaning than good.…

Here there is a clear distinction between the ‘karma’ that controls humans and the humans that are controlled by karma. While karma leads much of human behavior, it is possible for humans, while being moved by karma, to place their hearts on the other shore. Namely, they can chant the ‘nenbutsu’. Thus, as long as a man’s heart is on the other shore—or to put it another way, as long as he is chanting the name of the Buddha—no matter what evil deeds karma forces him to commit, he is not really the one responsible for them. Because of this, he is not punished for these evil deeds and can still be saved. However, if he does not entrust everything to Buddha, or in other words, if he believes he can make his heart one with karma and take the responsibility for his behavior himself, his fate and his karma must now go together. In this case, he cannot be saved. The question of whether or not a person can be saved is simply a matter of the attitude he takes toward humans and karma.…

I have clarified two points so far. First, Shinran preached about Amida’s compassion toward human beings, not about love between human beings. Second, at the core of his principle that all is forgivable is the condition that evil is both fearful and shameful. In contrast with Shinran, I will take up Dōgen*, who advocates “seeking the truth for the truth’s sake…. ” What is the basis of his teaching of compassion? On what basis does he forgive evil, or fear it?

Dōgen says ‘body-mind’ must be abandoned for the sake of the ‘dharma’.
Glossary

The following Glossary includes only technical terms that are not direct Japanese translations of standard western philosophical terms. These terms are flagged in the text with raised brackets (’’) on their first appearance in each chapter. Unless otherwise indicated, foreign terms are Japanese. The numbers enclosed in parentheses refer to the pages on which the term in question appears. Many of these terms have multiple uses across traditions and through time. The definitions here are limited to meanings most relevant to the use of the terms in the selections found in the Sourcebook.

absolute nothingness 絶対無 (J. zettai mu) → nothingness

Amaterasu 天照. The sun goddess in the Shinto pantheon of celestial ’kami’; considered the ancestor of the Japanese imperial family. (7, 327, 379, 459, 477–9, 483–5, 496, 510–12, 514, 529, 540–1, 909–10, 1019–21, 1023, 1118, 1129)


Amitābha → Amida

Avalokiteśvara → Kannon

birth-and-death → samsara

bodhi-mind 菩提心 (S. bodhicitta, J. bodaishin). The aspiration for bodhi or enlightenment. (220, 245)

bodhisattva 菩薩 (J. bosatsu). One who aspires to bodhi or enlightenment. In the context of ’Mahayana’ Buddhism as practiced in Japan, any Buddhist who believes in the Mahayana scriptures and cultivates practices described therein. It also refers to celestial beings whose compassion for suffering sentient beings makes them the object of Mahayana Buddhist devotion, contemplation, and supplication. (53, 56–7, 69–72, 74, 76, 82, 85, 96, 100, 104, 106, 108–9, 178, 180, 193, 205–6, 219, 228, 237, 243, 256–7, 273, 275, 279–82, 622, 630, 760, 793, 1044, 1174)
body-mind 身心 (J. shinjin). The human individual as a whole, a unity of the physical and mental. (20, 28, 47, 51, 145–6, 162, 852–3, 855, 945, 999, 1080)

bright virtue 明徳 (J. meitoku). Sometimes called “luminous virtue,” a Confucian term for virtue as it is brilliantly displayed for all to see. Also used politically in the sense of manifesting the kind of virtue that might transform not only the self, but society and the entire world. (211, 301, 303, 313–16, 322–3, 329, 340, 378, 436–8)

buddha-dharma 仏法 (J. buppō). Literally, the buddha-dharma. The term refers to the teachings of the Buddha as opposed to the teachings of other masters, and at times was used to identify the Buddhist religion as a whole. Also commonly used to represent the true way of living and perceiving reality. (160–1, 855)

Buddha’s teachings → Buddha’s truth

Buddha’s truth 仏法 (J. buppō). Literally, the buddha-dharma. The term refers to the teachings of the Buddha as opposed to the teachings of other masters, and at times was used to identify the Buddhist religion as a whole. Also commonly used to represent the true way of living and perceiving reality. (160–1, 855)

bushidō 武士道. A term often used anachronistically to mean the Way of the samurai or Way of the warrior. (14, 289, 374, 567, 708, 829, 851, 1103–15, 1107, 1112, 1123, 1245)


Consciousness-only → Yogācāra

cultivation 修行 (J. shugyō). One of a cluster of terms that can also be translated as “practice” or “praxis,” the activity of learning by way of bodily engagement and mental attention. Closely related terms include gyō 行 and keiko 稽古. (70, 79, 236, 251, 298, 265, 325, 375, 411, 418–20, 422–4, 426, 428, 447–8, 452, 545, 589–91, 627, 856, 943–5, 1033, 1130)
Bibliography

The following list contains all the original sources and, where applicable, English translations of material included in the Sourcebook. In some instances alternative translations have also been indicated. The dates to the left refer to the original date of publication or composition, or their nearest approximation. Bibliographic information specific to the introductions and historical overviews is contained at the end of each entry and is not repeated here.

Abbreviations used in the text


Kyōgyōshinshō See SHINRAN 1247.


NKC Collected Writings of Nishitani Keiji. See Nishitani Keiji 1949.

NKZ Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō. See Nishida Kitarō 1911.


Shōbōgenzō See Dōgen 1231.


Abbreviations used in the bibliography


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Umehara Takeshi 梅原猛


Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎


Yagi Seiichi 八木誠一

1988 Die Front-Struktur als Brücke vom buddhistischen zum christlichen Den-
# Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japanese Era</th>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Main Citation</th>
<th>Chinese Dynasty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kofun</td>
<td>Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574–622?)</td>
<td>35–9</td>
<td>Tang 唐 618–907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saichō 最澄 (767–822)</td>
<td>95–7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kūkai 空海 (774–835)</td>
<td>51–74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tokuitsu 徳一 (781–842?)</td>
<td>93–4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (868–945?)</td>
<td>1168–9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nara</td>
<td>Ryōgen 良源 (912–985)</td>
<td>101–2</td>
<td>Song 宋 960–1279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genshin 源信 (942–1017)</td>
<td>97–101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kakuan 覚運 (953–1007)</td>
<td>101–2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murasaki Shikibu 柿原俊成 (973–1014)</td>
<td>1118–19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kakuban 覚鑁 (1095–1143)</td>
<td>75–80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fujiwara no Shunzei 藤原俊成 (1114–1204)</td>
<td>1173–4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heian</td>
<td>Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212)</td>
<td>242–8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1155–1216)</td>
<td>1203–8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fujiwara no Teika 藤原定家 (1162–1241)</td>
<td>1169</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamakura</td>
<td>Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232)</td>
<td>81–5</td>
<td>Yuan 元 1264–1368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263)</td>
<td>249–61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253)</td>
<td>141–62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282)</td>
<td>86–91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muromachi</td>
<td>Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351)</td>
<td>163–71</td>
<td>Ming 明 1368–1644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房 (1293–1354)</td>
<td>1019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zeami Motokiyo 世阿弥元清 (1363–1443)</td>
<td>1209–15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momoyama</td>
<td>Shōtetsu 正徹 (1381–1459)</td>
<td>1181–2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ikkyū Sōjun 一休宗純 (1394–1481)</td>
<td>172–7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Konparu Zenchiku 金春禪竹 (1405–1468?)</td>
<td>1182–3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fujiwara Seika 藤原惺窩 (1561–1619)</td>
<td>298–303</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fukansai Haisen 不干斎巴鼻庵 (1565–1621)</td>
<td>1038–46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Takuan Sōhō 沢庵宗彭 (1573–1645)</td>
<td>178–82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edo</td>
<td>Suzuki Shōsan 鈴木正三 (1579–1655)</td>
<td>183–9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583–1657)</td>
<td>304–17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shidō Bunrō 至道無難 (1603–1676)</td>
<td>190–4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 (1608–1648)</td>
<td>318–23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yamazaki Ansai 山崎閑齋 (1618–1682)</td>
<td>324–8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢春山 (1619–1691)</td>
<td>329–34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Thematic Index invites us to explore topics in Japanese philosophy without privileging western philosophical categories. For example, the diagram of its organization below shows no discrete self apart from the world because most Japanese philosophers consider the two to be abstractions from a single continuous reality. From that starting point, they typically recognize two ways to engage that reality: through expression and comprehension. Just as the potter and the geologist engage clay in sophisticated but dramatically different ways, Japanese ethics requires both artistic responsiveness and epistemic analysis to do justice to the fullness of the communal world. In dealing with these issues, each of the principal philosophical traditions of Japan seeks to encompass the entire dynamic represented in the diagram.

To further explore these topics in their own vocabulary, the Thematic Index includes related items from the Glossary. The Glossary lists all page references where the terms in question can be found.
### Reality: The Human

#### The Meaning of being human

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human nature, original nature,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego, no-self</td>
<td>127–32, 144–5, 178–82, 270–2, 278–9, 817–19, 913–19, 1053–8, 1133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal identity</td>
<td>867–8, 1005–8, 1123–5, 1140–4, 1149–50, 1155–7, 1243–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>270–1, 678, 804, 812, 981, 1233–4, 1243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind</td>
<td>60, 104–9, 112–16, 181–2, 190–4, 202–3, 298–9, 353–4, 1211–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>65, 174, 176, 191–2, 812, 1122–5, 1157–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherhood</td>
<td>320, 1122–5, 1135–6, 1150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>172–7, 183–9, 270–2, 1105–7, 1234–42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Glossary: birth-and-death, body-mind, buddha-mind, buddha-nature, five relations, kata, original enlightenment, other-power, self-nature, self-power, temperament, tathāgatagarbha, unborn, yomi

#### The Dynamics of the human

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>125–7, 215–18, 647–9, 822–5, 856–9, 953–5, 958–72, 1047–52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience and nothingness</td>
<td>69–70, 172–7, 191, 222–4, 721–8, 882–5, 1080–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions, passions, defilements</td>
<td>78, 250–1, 311–12, 355–7, 370–3, 785–91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Index</td>
<td>Page Numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will, personal agency</td>
<td>11, 195–9, 253–4, 548, 658–9, 673–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuition</td>
<td>218, 374, 575–6, 621, 648–9, 657–8, 665, 674–7, 693–4, 707, 735, 793–4, 875–6, 883–4, 888–9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GLOSSARY:** mean, mind, no-mind, nothingness, temperament, thought–moment

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**REALITY: THE WORLD**

**Ground**

- **Nature**
  - 8–9, 12–13, 23, 120–4, 127–9, 151–60, 441–6, 746–9, 890–4
- **Space and time**
  - 148–51, 808–15, 936–9, 958–72, 1192–3
- **Eternity**
  - 659–62, 808–14, 1199–2000
- **Causality**
  - 63–4, 96, 103, 618, 624, 834–49, 1214
- **Metaphysics**
- **Eastern-western compared**
  - 127–32, 225–6, 733–7, 750–64, 946–51, 1236–8

**Ontological status of**

- **Ghosts and spirits**
  - 295–6, 341–2, 358, 389–92, 400–1, 413–15, 438–9, 526–9
- **Kami and buddhas**
- **The phenomenal world**

**Mind**

- 69–74, 112–14

**Elements**

- 59–60, 63–4, 81, 220, 342–5, 348–9, 364–70, 404–6, 425–8

**Principle**


**Material reality, materialism**

- 566, 604–10, 611–18, 819–21, 895–901
### Expressing reality

#### Language

**General theories**


**Interpretation, myth, metaphor**

| Page Range | 235–7, 461–2, 494–9, 501–3, 1025–6 |

**Japanese language**


**Glossary:** Dainichi, dharma-body, dharmadhātu, dharmatā, emptiness, Indra’s net, jōri, kami, kō, kotodama. Shinto incarnations of the Buddha, supreme ultimate, three bodies, three worlds, unborn, unobstructed penetration of thing and thing, void, Way, will of heaven. yakṣa, yomi

#### The Arts

**Creativity, imagination**

| Page Range | 9, 11–12, 140, 225–6, 543–4, 663, 705–7, 945–6, 979–92 |

**Aesthetics**


**Poetics, poetry**


**Beauty**


**Literature**

| Page Range | 118–19, 334–5, 339–40, 1083–4 |
### Nō drama
1170, 1182–3, 1192, 1209–15

### music, song, dance
204, 334, 398–9, 912, 940–1, 965–6, 1082–3, 1210–11, 1212–13

### Martial arts
178–82, 183–89, 321–2

### Tea ceremony
900, 1172, 1194–97, 1224–27

### Flower arranging (ikebana)
1170, 1172, 1193–4, 1197–1200, 1209–10, 1214–15

### Calligraphy
296, 357, 1200–2

| Glossary: | bushidō, iki, gatha, kata, koto, kotodama, Man’yōshū, mono mo aware, Nō, sarugaku, uta, wabi, waka, yūgen |

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### Comprehending reality

#### Studying
- **Cultivation, meditation**
  59–61, 95–101, 125–7, 142–4, 203–7, 237–9, 374–6, 943–6, 1173–4
- **Practice, praxis**
  8–12, 25, 48–9, 51–3, 68–73, 78–80, 89–90, 101–2, 137, 141, 144–8, 153–4, 211–12, 244–7, 251–9, 284–5, 363, 578, 687–8, 704, 749, 998
- **Rectifying the mind**
  307–8, 322–3, 408–9
- **Stages**
  64–71, 325, 357–8
- **Teachers, sages, students**
  161–2, 170–1, 296–7, 324–5, 336–8, 406–7

| Glossary: | bodhisattva, buddhahood, cultivation, daimoku, dhyāna, expedient means, great matter, Hinayana, investigation of all things, kōan, learning, Mahayana, mind, nenbutsu, no–mind, place, pratyekabuddha, refined person, reverence, samādhi, satori, self–enjoying samādhi, śrāvaka, shingaku, sudden enlightenment, Tathāgata, thought–moment, vajra, Vajrayana, Way, wisdom, Yogācāra, zange, zazen |

#### Knowing
- **Kinds of knowing**
  - **Esoteric**
    8–9, 47–9, 52–9, 73–7, 78, 160–1, 434, 771, 1010, 1013, 1187, 1194–5, 1213–14, 1216–19
  - **Authentication**
    144–7, 666, 885
  - **Divination**
    326, 358–9, 409–10, 441, 474, 1028
Innate
Scholarly
Scientific
Reason and logic
Mysticism
Doubt, skepticism
Nondual wisdom, mind of oneness
Truth
Logical identity

Glossary: buddha-mind, Buddha’s truth, dharmadhātu, Dutch Studies, Enlightenment, inverse correlation, investigation of all things, jōri, learning, middle way, mind, no-mind, nothingness, prajñā, prajñāpāramitā, self–identity of absolute contradiction, soku-hi, vijñāna, wisdom

The Social
Culture
Japanese culture
Gender
Class
Community

The Communal World

The communal world
| Social change | 89–90, 1115, 1132–3, 1155–7 |
| Authority | 121, 124, 578, 796, 898–9 |

**Thematic Index**

| Glossary: bushidō, five relations, ordinary people, shingaku |

**The Political and Economic**

| Political identity | 682–3, 885–9, 897–901, 1018–27 |
| Law | 5–6, 120–4, 384–6, 398, 421–3, 463–4, 489 |
| Governance and rulership | 332–3, 381–2, 421–4, 1073–5 |
| Constitutions | 5–7, 35–9, 1018–9 |
| Shōtoku | 583, 1022–23 |
| Meiji | 885–9, 897–9, 1018–27, 1093–9, 1171, 1184–8 |
| Imperial system and nationalism | 584–5, 667–8, 1079–80, 1121–3, 1131–3, 1140–2, 1148–9, 1200–1 |
| Freedom, liberation | 6, 35–9, 356, 399–400, 422–5 |
| Harmony | 696–701, 1034–5, 1068, 1078–9, 1139, 1121–2, 1156–7, 1162–64 |
| Revolution and reform | 303, 531, 1086–7 |
| Trade | 303, 531, 1086–7 |
| Democracy | 897–9, 1022–3, 1091–2 |
| Capitalism | 700, 896–7, 1087, 1139, 1155–6, 1159–63 |
| Socialism, Marxism | 641–2, 696–9, 804–5, 895–901, 924–7, 1121–2, 1156, 1159–62 |

**Glossary:** Amaterasu, daimyō, kokutai, ordinary people, shogunate, Son of Heaven, will of heaven

**The Ethical**

<p>| Good and evil, morality | 156–60, 196–9, 257–60, 264–70, 448–9, 543–4, 589–97, 1068–76, 1080–2 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust, trustworthiness</td>
<td>38, 300, 310, 355–6, 862, 867–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist compassion</td>
<td>792–8, 851–6, 883–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinto morality</td>
<td>495–7, 534, 543, 546–9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samurai values</td>
<td>124, 379–80, 418, 1103–12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td>15, 545, 821, 896, 981, 1086–7, 1115, 1131–2, 1150–8, 1161–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bioethics</td>
<td>546–9, 1231–45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Glossary:** bright virtue, bushidō, compassion, filial piety, five constant virtues, humaneness, karma, middle way, not-doing, ordinary people, perfections, propriety, refined person, reverence, righteousness, shingaku, sincerity, transference of merit, zange

### The Religious and philosophical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy vis-à-vis religion</td>
<td>262–4, 577–82, 619–23, 683–8, 723–8, 744–6, 993–1001, 1053–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious identity</td>
<td>1027–37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin, religion, and morality</td>
<td>264–5, 276, 415, 543–4, 812–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>218–20, 244–7, 251–3, 255–6, 270–2, 539–42, 544–6, 788–91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>275–8, 660–8, 724–5, 759–63, 902–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>130, 225, 275–8, 387–9, 595–6, 642–3, 660, 735–7, 746–9, 808–15, 907–8, 1029–34, 1038–46, 1053–8, 1120–1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Glossary:** dharma, Enlightenment, Hinayana, inverse correlation, kami, Mahayana, middle way, other-power, self-power, Shinto incarnations of the Buddha, śrāvaka, tetsugaku, Vajrayana, Yogācāra, zange

### The Historical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significance of history</td>
<td>387–8, 693–6, 708–12, 746–9, 870–6, 878–81, 931–5, 1025–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dharma ages</strong></td>
<td>89–90, 247–8, 260–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>World history and Japan</strong></td>
<td>641–2, 747–8, 949–51, 1024–7, 1034–5, 1059–77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modernity</strong></td>
<td>127–32, 1078–84, 1085–92, 1127–9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Glossary:** Enlightenment, karma, Kojiki, mappō, Nihon shoki, semblance dharma

## Traditions of Thought and Value

### Shinto


**Glossary:** Amaterasu, kami, Kojiki, kokoro, kokutai, kotodama, Nihon shoki, Shinto incarnations of the Buddha, torii, uta, waka, Way, yomi

### Buddhist


**Glossary:** bodhi-mind, buddha-mind, buddha-nature, Buddha’s truth, compassion, dharma, dharma-body, dharmadhātu, dharmatā, empty, expedient means, Hossō, Indra’s net, karma, Kegon, mappō, middle way, mind, no-mind, nothingness, not-doing, original enlightenment, other-power, prajñā, prajñāpāramitā, pratitya-samutpāda, principle, samsara, self-nature, self-power, Shingon, Shinto incarnations of the Buddha, soku-hi, suchness, tathāgatagarbha, Tendai, thought-moment, three bodies, three worlds, trusting faith, unborn, unobstructed penetration of thing and thing, vijñāna, Way, wisdom, Yogācāra, zange

### Confucian


**Glossary:** bright virtue, filial piety, five constant virtues, five relations, humaneness, investigation of all things, jōri, ki, learning, Lord above, mean, mind, nonfinite, nothingness, not-doing, ordinary people, principle, propriety, refined person, reverence, righteousness, shingaku, sincerity, Son of Heaven, supreme ultimate, temperament, void, Way, will of heaven, wisdom
General Index

The General Index covers names of persons and places; titles of classical works; terms in the Glossary and Thematic Index; and Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Sanskrit words appearing in the body of the Sourcebook. Entries marked with a g or ti refer to the page in the Glossary or Thematic Index where cross-references and additional page numbers are provided.

Abe Jirō 阿部次郎 569, 802, 805, 816–21
Abe Masao 阿部正雄 640, 750–7
Abelard 843
Abhidharma 127
Abhidharmakośa 55, 83
Abraham 663
absolute nothingness 283, 643, 646,
658–9, 667, 670, 677, 680–2, 708, 725–6,
733–5, 737, 750, 752, 758, 778, 802, 827,
830, 882–4, 887–9, 902, 904, 1066. See also being and nothingness, experience and nothingness, mu; nothingness, G-1259
Achilles 740
Adam 813
aesthetics, Ti-1308
afterlife Ti-1306. See also yomi, Pure Land agency. See personal agency
agotra 46
aidagara 間柄 858
Aizawa Seishisai 会沢正志斎 1020–2
Aizu-Wakamatsu 会津若松 335
Ajataśatru 238
Akashi Kamon 明石掃部 1044
Akita 秋田 416
ālaya-vijñāna 273
Ama no Yasunokawara 天安之河原 909
amai 甘い 1190
Amakusa 天草 183, 1038
Amaterasu 天照, G-1249
Amatsukyō 天津教 923
Amatsumara 天津麻羅 909
Amenokoyane no mikoto 天児屋根命 419
Amenominakanushi no kami 天之御中主神 327, 483, 525, 540–1
Amenouzume no mikoto 天宇受売命
909, 911
Amida 阿弥陀, G-1249. See also Amitābha
Amidism 49, 75
Amitābha 96, 98, 109, 238. See Amida,
G-1249
Amoghavajra 55
Ānanda 107, 302, 1173
anātman 103, 294, 745
Anaximander 572
Andō Shōeki 安藤昌益 124, 292, 416–29,
430
Andronicus of Rhodes 947
Anesaki Masaharu 井崎正治 110, 631
animitta 755
Annei, Emperor 507
Anselm of Canterbury 1191
Aquinas, Thomas 23–4, 131, 554, 841–3,
947, 1116
Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 293, 387–92
Ariès, Philippe 1240
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