

The Reception and Transformation of Chinese Thought: Focusing on Daoist Thought and *the Journal of The Society of Philosophy*

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1. The Missing Piece of “Chinese Thought” in Modern Japan

It is well known that from the time Japan began dispatching envoys to the Sui and Tang dynasties in the 7th century (during the Asuka period) until the Edo period (1603–1868), Chinese culture and scholarship exerted a profound influence on Japan. This influence extended across various domains, including food culture, clothing, architecture, literature, philosophy, and language. In particular, Chinese thought—especially Confucianism—was regarded as essential knowledge for samurai during the Edo period, as it was considered indispensable for the proper governance of the country.

During the early modern Japan, Chinese thought was generally referred to as *Kangaku* (漢学, the Chinese Classical Studies), and it was often synonymous with the concept of “scholarship.” Naturally, in addition to Confucianism, other schools of Chinese thought, such as those of the Hundred Schools of Thought, were also studied. A notable example concerning the reception of Daoist thought—one of the central topics of this paper—is Hayashi Razan (林羅山), a leading Confucian scholar of early modern Japan and a prominent interpreter of Laozi’s teachings. Several studies have examined Hayashi Razan’s engagement with *Roshi Kensai Kōgi* (『老子禩斎口義』), a commentary on the *Dao De Jing* authored by Lin Xiyi (林希逸) during the Southern Song dynasty¹. Ono² (1996) has also pointed out that a key feature of Razan’s later interpretation of Laozi lies in his clear distinction between Confucian ideas—often mistakenly conflated with the *Dao De Jing*—and the original philosophy of Laozi, thereby seeking to provide a legitimate and independent evaluation of the *Dao De Jing* itself (p. 87).

In the modern era (from the Shōwa period, 1926 to the present), numerous scholars have produced commentaries on Daoist classics, including the *Dao De Jing*. Notable figures include Tsuda Sōkichi, Hasegawa Nyozeikan, Kimura Eiichi, Kanaya Osamu, Ogawa Tamaki, Mori Mikisaburō, Kōzen Hiroshi, and Fukunaga Mitsuji.³

¹ Ōno, I. (1997). *Nihon no kinsei to Rōsō shisō* [Early modern Japan and Lao-Zhuang thought]. Perikansha.

² Ōno, I. (1996). *Hayashi Razan’s view of Laozi*. *Journal of Philosophy and Thought*, (21), 87-140. University of Tsukuba, Department of Philosophy and Thought.

³ For example, Tsuda, S. (1939). *Dōka no shisō to sono tenkai* [The thought of Daoism and its development]. Iwanami Shoten. Hasegawa, N. (1936). *Rōshi* [Laozi]. Daitō Shuppansha. Kimura, E. (1959). *Rōshi no shin kenkyū* [A new study of Laozi]. Sōbunsha. Kanaya, O. (1959). *Rōsōteki sekai* [The world of Laozi and Zhuangzi]. Heirakuji Shoten.

Ogawa, T. (1978). *Sekai no meicho 4: Rōshi, Sōshi* [Great books of the world vol. 4: Laozi and Zhuangzi]. Chūōkōron sha. Fukunaga, M. (1997). *Rōshi* [Laozi]. Asahi Shimbunsha. Fukunaga, M., & Kōzen, H. (2013). *Sōshi: Naiben, Gaiben, Zappen* [Zhuangzi: Inner chapters, outer chapters, miscellaneous chapters]. Chikuma Shobō. Mori, M. (1994). *Rōshi, Sōshi* [Laozi and Zhuangzi]. Kōdansha.

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During the transitional period of modern Japan (1868–1926), the end of the national isolation policy of the Edo period—brought about by the Meiji Restoration—ushered in an era of rapid modernization and Westernization. Nevertheless, the legacy of Chinese studies cultivated during the Edo period persisted. With the influence of the Meiji Restoration, which was rapidly advancing in its modernization, the academia appeared to shift away from Chinese Classical Studies, including Daoist thought, while actively seeking to absorb Western civilization. However, this is not entirely the case. One key aspect of the reception and transformation of Chinese classical studies in modern Japan was that philosophers did not seek to abandon Chinese Classical Studies. Instead, they aimed to reinterpret and integrate them by comparing them with Western philosophical traditions. It is no exaggeration to say that the conflict and integration between Eastern and Western thought became a defining characteristic of Chinese studies in modern Japan, particularly during the Meiji and Taishō periods.

According to Sato Masayuki, after Nishi Amane (1829–1897) introduced the term *tetsugaku* (哲学) as a translation of “philosophy” in the early Meiji period, Japanese philosophers began attempting to reconstruct traditional Chinese thought—including Confucianism—under new frameworks such as *Shina tetsugaku* (支那哲学, “Chinese philosophy”) or *Tōyō tetsugaku* (東洋哲学, “Eastern philosophy”)⁴.

In summary, previous studies on the academic field of so-called ‘Chinese philosophy’ have typically focused on Nishi Amane’s coinage of the term *tetsugaku* (philosophy) and on the institutional development of philosophy (and Sino-Japanese studies) departments at the University of Tokyo. However, **the discourses we define as related to ‘Chinese philosophy’ did not emerge directly from the use of the translation term ‘philosophy.’ Nor did they begin only in the late Meiji period, when comprehensive histories of ‘Chinese philosophy’ began to appear. Rather, the academic field of ‘Chinese philosophy’ gradually took shape over an extended period throughout the Meiji era. Based on the historical materials currently available, the formation of this field appears to have developed in parallel with the expansion of philosophy-related disciplines and curricula at the University of Tokyo during the 1880s.** The specific discourses were produced by professors and students involved in this institutional evolution. In their attempts to construct what they called ‘Eastern philosophy,’ they ‘revived’ Yang Zhu—who had received little attention in traditional East Asian thought—and elevated him into one of the indispensable philosophers in the narrative of Chinese philosophical history. (p.72)

However, since no books formally titled “Chinese Philosophy” or “Eastern Philosophy” existed prior to 1897, our understanding of the early development of these concepts must rely on university

⁴ Sato, M. (2022). The formation of “Chinese philosophy” and the discourse on Yang Zhu during Meiji Japan. *Journal of East Asian Civilizations Studies in Taiwan*, 19(2), 56–88. National Taiwan Normal University.

lecture transcripts, students' notes, and other essays or articles⁵.

Therefore, this paper will try to examine articles published in *the Journal of The Society of Philosophy* (哲学学会雑誌 *Tetsugaku Kai Zasshi*) during the Modern period and argue that the conflict and integration between Eastern and Western thought was a defining characteristic of Chinese studies in modern Japan.

2. From “Chinese Classical Studies” (漢学, *Kangaku*) to “Eastern Philosophy” (東洋哲学, *Tōyō Tetsugaku*) and “Chinese Philosophy” (支那哲学, *Shina Tetsugaku*)

Before we examine the articles in *the Journal of The Society of Philosophy*, it is important to first provide a brief overview of the formation of “Eastern Philosophy” and “Chinese Philosophy” during the Meiji period. Inoue Tetsujirō and Katō Hiroyuki, for instance, were pivotal figures at the Imperial University (now the University of Tokyo), where they helped establish a connection between philosophy and the East. Thanks to their efforts, *Kangaku* (Chinese classical studies) was first incorporated into the field of philosophy in the early Meiji period and came to be regarded as a part of Eastern philosophy.

According to Sang Bing's observation, the period from 1881 (Meiji 14) to 1884 (Meiji 17) marked a rapid transformation in how *Kangaku* (Chinese classical studies) was perceived and taught within the academic sphere and at the Imperial University. The following is a brief summary of the transformation.

- In 1881(Meiji 14): the University of Tokyo (then Imperial University) established its Philosophy Department and introduced Indian and Chinese philosophy courses for upper-year students. The Department of Chinese Literature also incorporated similar courses. These were primarily taught by Nakamura Masanao and Shimada Chōrei, both prominent scholars of Chinese literature. Nakamura, especially, held significant influence in Meiji intellectual circles. Despite the inclusion of new philosophical subjects, both educators maintained a traditional approach to teaching, avoiding the modern or reformist methods emerging in other disciplines during the Meiji period. This reflected a conservative stance in integrating Eastern philosophy into the academic curriculum of the time.
- In 1882(Meiji 15): the University of Tokyo revised its Philosophy Department curriculum to formally distinguish between Eastern and Western philosophy, introducing a course on the History of Eastern Philosophy from the second year. While this appeared to mark progress in defining Eastern and Chinese philosophy as academic categories, the actual content remained largely unchanged. Chinese philosophy continued to dominate, while Indian philosophy was largely neglected. The reform, therefore, was more structural than substantive. The metaphor

⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

“Before the 1890s, there were no books published specifically addressing ‘Chinese philosophy’ or ‘Eastern philosophy’ as the main subject. Particularly when analyzing the situation before the early Meiji period, we can only refer to lecture transcripts, students’ notes, and various articles or discourses to identify content related to ‘Chinese philosophy.’”

“old wine in new bottles” captures this reality—despite the new classification, the teaching approach and focus remained rooted in traditional Chinese philosophical content.

- In 1883(Meiji 16): Inoue Tetsujirō played a pivotal role in shaping Eastern philosophy as an academic discipline in Japan by teaching the “History of Eastern Philosophy” at the University of Tokyo, based on his own textbook system. His students, including Inoue Enryō and several others, went on to become influential figures in the development and promotion of philosophy, especially Eastern and Chinese philosophy, during and after the Meiji period. This marked a foundational moment in establishing Eastern philosophy as a formal area of study within Japan’s modern academic framework.
- In 1884(Meiji 17): In the Meiji period, Western philosophical influence began shaping Japanese thought, as scholars like Inoue Tetsujirō integrated Western and Chinese traditions using a comparative method. With Inoue Enryō’s initiative, the Philosophical Society was founded at the University of Tokyo, including key figures like Katō Hiroyuki and Nishi Amane. The Society held 26 meetings over three years, covering Western, Indian, Buddhist, and Chinese philosophy. Lectures by Inoue Tetsujirō, Shimada Chōrei, and Ariga Nagao helped solidify a tripartite philosophical division: Western, Indian, and Chinese. Inoue’s unique interpretative method and editorial work on *History of Eastern Philosophy* further defined Chinese philosophy as a distinct academic field.⁶

Therefore, several key figures of modern Japan—such as Nishida Kitarō, often regarded as the father of Japanese philosophy, and the renowned modern writer Natsume Sōseki—studied under this new curriculum after enrolling in the Imperial University post-1884. More significantly, according to the Imperial University’s curriculum⁷, five philosophy-related subjects were mandatory for students in the Faculty of Letters: *Introduction to Philosophy* (哲学概論), *History of Philosophy and Logic* (哲学史及論理学), *History of Philosophy and Psychology* (哲学史及心理学), *Comparative Religion and Eastern Philosophy* (比較宗教及東洋哲学), and *Ethics* (倫理学). For instance, although Sōseki majored in English Literature as a student, he was still required to take the aforementioned philosophy courses. One example is his report titled *The Philosophy of Laozi*, which he submitted to Inoue Tetsujirō as the final assignment for the course *Comparative Religion and Eastern Philosophy*. While Sōseki was not a philosopher by profession, the reforms in the university curriculum gave him the opportunity to study both Western and Eastern philosophy, engage with key philosophical figures of the time, and even serve on the editorial team of *The Journal of*

⁶ Sāng, B. (2013). *The Origins of "Chinese Philosophy" in Modern Japan*, translated by Murakami Ei, in *The Development of Translation Concepts in Modern East Asia: Research Report from the Center for Contemporary Chinese Studies, Kyoto University Institute for Research in Humanities*. Kyoto University Institute for Research in Humanities, Center for Contemporary Chinese Studies.

⁷ Tokyo Imperial University. (1890). *Tōkyō Teikoku Daigaku ichiran (Meiji 23–24 nen)* [Tokyo Imperial University overview (1890–1891)]. Tokyo Imperial University.

the Society of Philosophy. It is no exaggeration to say that the institutional adoption of philosophy influenced not only professional philosophers, but also the broader community of intellectuals.

3. The characteristics of the papers on Chinese Philosophy and Daoist thought in the *the Journal of The Society of Philosophy*

As we saw in the previous section, the reforms of the academic curriculum at the Imperial University played an important role in reconstructing traditional Chinese thought into “Eastern Philosophy” and “Chinese Philosophy.” Meanwhile, *The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*, published by the Imperial University, provides valuable material that offers insight into how philosophers and intellectuals viewed Chinese thought and *Kangaku*. Several professors at the Imperial University were actively involved in teaching a variety of subjects. For example, Inoue Tetsujirō, a prominent figure in Meiji-period philosophy, was not only in charge of “Comparative Religion and Eastern Philosophy,” but also Shimada Chōrei taught *Kangaku*, Murakami Senshō taught “Eastern Philosophy,” and Motora Yūjirō taught “Psychology” and “Psychophysics.” These scholars, along with other intellectuals interested in *Kangaku* and Chinese thought, also actively contributed to *The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*.

3-1. Advocating for the survival of Chinese Classical Studies

As previously mentioned, the Meiji period witnessed rapid modernization and Westernization. Amid this trend, scholars of Chinese Classical Studies sensed the danger that their field might be abandoned. In response, they sought to reform the methods of Chinese classical scholarship by aligning themselves with the emerging current of “Eastern philosophy.”

Oyanagi Shigeta, a scholar of Chinese literature and Daoism, pointed out that to understand Chinese philosophy and literature, one must study core texts—from Confucius and Laozi to later dynasties’ thinkers and writers. Without this, the history and development of Chinese thought cannot be fully grasped. In contrast, Western scholarship offers accessible overviews through secondary sources, reducing reliance on original texts. This ease contributes to its broader appeal. Chinese studies, however, remain difficult and confined to a small scholarly circle. This exclusivity has hindered wider public engagement. To revitalize the field, it is essential to simplify and popularize Chinese studies, making them more accessible and relevant to a broader audience.⁸

⁸ Oyanagi, S. (1894) “The Necessity and Methods of Chinese Classical Studies” (*The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*, Vol. 9, No. 91).

“Thus, those who wish to know philosophy must study the works of the Confucians, from Confucius and Mencius to the philosophers of the Ming and Qing dynasties. As for Daoism, they must read the works of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and the other schools and philosophers. In literature, it is the same: one must read the works starting from the *Book of Songs (Shijing)* and move through the famous authors of the Han, Wei, Six Dynasties, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods to understand the development and evolution of Chinese literature. Without this, one cannot even grasp a part of its history and development.

In other fields such as law and institutions, one will encounter similar difficulties. However, if we turn to the academic world of the Western countries, it seems that they walk a well-trodden, orderly path. For instance, by reading the works of scholars like *Schwegler* and *Bax*, one can gain an overview of the rise and fall of Western

He also proposed the following measures for reforming both the methodological approaches and scholarly attitudes in the Chinese classical Studies.⁹

For scholars:

- 1) **The Unification of Chinese Classical Scholars:** Experts in various fields—such as Confucian classics, history, the Hundred Schools of Thought, and literature—should form a unified body by publishing regular journals and holding meetings, where they present their individual perspectives and engage in open discussion. Such efforts would yield great benefits and may lead to the sociological study of China as a natural outcome.
- 2) **The Necessity of Firsthand Exploration of China:** Scholars must enter the Chinese mainland to gain direct knowledge of its mountains, rivers, geography, historical sites, and customs. This is particularly essential for those studying history. Merely engaging in armchair theorizing or relying on the words of predecessors to discuss strategies of the Warring States or the rise and fall of the Han and Chu kingdoms may amount to clever rhetoric at best, but cannot be regarded as rigorous scholarly research.
- 3) **The Value of Chinese Studies in National Education:** Not only assert the absolute value of Chinese classical studies from the standpoint of national education, but also recognize how Chinese civilization has influenced Japan over the past 1,500 years. By comparing it with Japan's own academic traditions, we will come to understand the importance of studying Chinese thought. In fact, Chinese classical studies are even more essential to Japan than Greek and Roman classical studies are to the West.

For school curriculum and teaching methods:

- 1) **Promote Unannotated Texts for Independent Learning:** Students have relied on annotated texts to study kangaku, limiting understanding. Schools should use unannotated originals to encourage direct engagement with classical Chinese, fostering deeper learning and independent interpretation.
- 2) **Simplify Editions to Improve Accessibility:** Chinese classics often have concise texts but bulky annotations, making books expensive and inconvenient. Removing unnecessary commentary and publishing compact, simplified editions would improve accessibility and wider

philosophy from ancient Greece to today, without necessarily needing to consult the original works of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, or Hegel. Similarly, reading the *History of English Literature* by Taine does not require reading the original works of Chaucer, Milton, or Carlyle.

The decline of Chinese studies, despite the many factors contributing to it, is partly due to the difficulty of the research. This is one reason why Chinese studies are not as widely known. For a long time, only a small group of Confucian scholars have handled Chinese studies in a limited way, keeping it confined to their own circles. It is essential that Chinese studies be made more accessible to the general public. In short, the urgent task at hand is to popularize Chinese studies.”

⁹ Ibid., p. 655-660.

dissemination.

- 3) **Integrate *Kanbun* 漢文 into Core Education:** The teaching of *Kanbun* should expand, even replacing second foreign languages in schools. Elementary education should include *kanbun* alongside national literature. The significance of texts like *Analects* and *Mencius* is increasing.
- 4) **Specialize *Kangaku* Programs by Discipline:** Imperial University's *kangaku* program lacks focus, covering too many fields. Like *kokugaku*, it should divide into Chinese philosophy and Chinese history tracks to improve research clarity and academic organization.

Therefore, scholars of *Kangaku* in the Meiji period clearly recognized the crisis surrounding its survival. In response, they implemented significant reforms in research methodology, pedagogical approaches, and university curricula, while aligning their efforts with the prevailing intellectual currents of Eastern philosophy.

3-2. Reconstructing “Chinese Classical Studies” into “Chinese Philosophy” and “Eastern Philosophy”

During that period, many researchers and philosophers approached Chinese classical studies through the lens of “philosophy,” with Inoue Tetsujirō being especially prominent in this regard. In his article “On the Concept of the Dao”¹⁰, Inoue mentioned that “The philosophers of the East, regardless of whether they belong to Daoism or Confucianism, have largely discussed the concept of the Dao.” (p. 1)

Meanwhile, in the previously mentioned article by Oyanagi, he also expressed his gratitude that Chinese classical studies had become embraced within the broader current of Eastern philosophy and had emerged as a legitimate subject of scholarly research.

The fact that people came to believe there was nothing to explain beyond works like *Wenzhang Guifan* (Standards of Literary Composition) and *The Writings of the Eight Masters (Bajia Wen)*, and that nothing needed to be authored outside of inscriptions and prefaces, reflects the traditional approach to Chinese classical studies—what, when taken more broadly, may be called Sinology. **Recently, however, this field has gradually begun to attract public attention, and part of it has come to be enveloped within the great vortex known as Eastern philosophy, becoming a subject of scholarly research—something we view with great delight. Nonetheless, we must not be satisfied merely with the inclusion of Chinese classical studies within philosophy. We must also examine them from various other perspectives.** In sum, our long-cherished aspiration is to methodically research all aspects of the more than four hundred provinces and four thousand years of Chinese civilization.¹¹

¹⁰ Inoue, T. (1919) “On the Concept of the Dao” (*The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*, Vol. 34, No. 383).

¹¹ Oyanagi, S. (1894) “The Necessity and Methods of Chinese Classical Studies”. p.653.

We can see that he also emphasized that scholars of Chinese classical studies should not be content with merely being incorporated into the discipline of Eastern philosophy; accordingly, as discussed in the previous section, he proposed reforms within the field of Chinese classical studies.

3-3. Paying Attention to the Translation and Researches of Daoist Texts in the West

As I have pointed out previously, Japanese philosophers in the early Meiji period began attempting to reconstruct traditional Chinese thought within new frameworks such as “Chinese philosophy” or “Eastern philosophy.” In other words, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this reconstruction was built in comparison to Western philosophy, which served as the representative model of “philosophy” itself. As a result, scholars of the time developed an interest in research on Chinese philosophy conducted abroad. Within this context, foreign-language translations of the *Laozi* naturally came into their view.

We can find an article titled “New Translations of the *Laozi* (*Tao Te Ching*),” written by S.T. (whose identity remains unknown), which highlights a tendency among European scholars to study Eastern thought—such as Laozi’s philosophy—through the lens of comparative religion or comparative philosophy.

During the time of the Meiji Restoration, when Western influence was spreading fiercely, the *Laozi* (*Tao Te Ching*), like other Chinese classics, was often relegated to the top shelves of libraries, and in some cases, it was buried among the scraps of books. However, **when we look at the present situation, it is undeniable that all fields of study have a tendency toward comparison, and it is no exaggeration to call this the age of comparative studies.** Consequently, when Europeans seek to study Eastern thought, they are entirely influenced by this tendency. For example, **the *Laozi* is often studied either from a religious or philosophical perspective,** and its research is aimed at contributing to comparative religious studies or comparative philosophy. This is an undeniable fact. Particularly, because the *Laozi* is relatively simple, it is easier to study, which explains why translations of this text are numerous.¹²

This article also introduces recent translations of the *Laozi* and explores how European scholars interpret its philosophy. For example, it features the French scholar Léon de Rosny—an Orientalist of the late 19th century known for his research in Japanese and Chinese studies—and his translation and commentary. De Rosny observed that Laozi’s philosophy emphasizes simplicity and a return to nature, containing principles relevant to academic inquiry. While acknowledging certain flaws and limitations from a modern scholarly perspective, he nonetheless regarded the philosophy as worthy of praise. The article’s author, S.T.,

¹² S.T.(1892) “New Translations of the *Laozi* (*Tao Te Ching*)” (*The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*, Vol.7, No. 64), p.65.

concluded that de Rosny's critique effectively highlights Laozi's weaknesses, yet ultimately aims to foster a deeper understanding of its core principles rather than dismiss them.

Meanwhile, the trend of engaging with Eastern philosophy in Europe continued into the Taishō period. Inoue Tetsujirō observed during his visit to Germany in 1922 that interest among Western scholars in Eastern thought remained strong. In particular, the philosophy of Laozi was notably popular, with new translations of the text appearing in rapid succession.¹³

From March to September this year, I traveled abroad and visited Germany as well. Recently, in Western countries, Eastern philosophy has been studied more extensively, and both Confucius and Laozi have been quite popular. Particularly in Germany, Laozi's teachings are in vogue, and translations of Laozi's work are being published one after another. It seems that Laozi is also attracting considerable attention in Japan.

Therefore, it can be said that Chinese classical studies were not abandoned amid Japan's modernization and Westernization; rather, they continued to be widely studied both in Japan and abroad, including in Europe.

3-4. Applying Western Concepts on the analysis of Chinese Thought

As mentioned previously, Oyanagi proposed measures to reform both the methodological approaches and scholarly attitudes within Chinese classical studies. One of his suggestions was the regular publication of academic journals and the organization of meetings where scholars could present their individual perspectives and engage in open discussion. The practice of publishing academic papers in journals was not only influenced by Western academic models but also reflected the incorporation of Western concepts—particularly philosophical ones—as comparative frameworks in discussions of Chinese thought.

Motora Yūjirō, who taught “Psychology” and “Psychophysics”, showed his interest in the *Dao* 道 in Confucianism. In his article “*Dao* (The Way)”¹⁴ in *The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*, he has attempted to discuss the “scientific basis” of the *Dao* in Confucianism.

Motora mentioned that regarding the traditional “Way” (*Dao*)—as seen in Confucianism, Zen Buddhism, and Christianity—there exist two concepts: one being the ancestral “Way made by humans,” and the other being the Confucian idea that “the origin of the Way comes from Heaven” (道之本源出乎天), that is, a Way created based on the phenomena of Heaven and Earth. In modern times, it has been argued that *emotion* (情, *jō*) should be understood as the fundamental basis of the Way, while *reason* (理, *ri*)

¹³ Inoue, T. (1923) “On the True Significance of the Dao and Its Relation to the Fundamental Principles of Ethics” (*The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*, Vol. 38, No. 431), p.1-2.

¹⁴ Motora, Y. (1895) “*Dao* (The Way)” (*The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No. 104).

merely serves to support it. This perspective was examined from a sociological point of view and was further linked to evolutionary theory as its “scientific foundation.” It was pointed out that evolution serves as the scientific basis of the Way—namely, that the fundamental principle is the evolution of human emotion.

Also, in the article *On the Ultimate Essence of Lao-Zhuang (Daoist) Philosophy*,¹⁵ Matsumoto Bunzaburō applies Western philosophical concepts to Daoist thought, drawing parallels between Daoist philosophy and Western philosophical traditions.

Zhuangzi, in his philosophy, is not fundamentally different from Laozi in the essence of the Dao, but his teachings are not entirely the same as Laozi's. **In explaining the principle of individuation (“Principium Individuationis” was originally used in the article), however, there is a slight difference in their approach.**

Similarly, in Kitazawa Sadakichi's article *Reading Zhuangzi (Part II)*, it is pointed out that *Zhuangzi's* chapter ‘Xiaoyao You’ (Free and Easy Wandering) evokes the ideas of the Dutch Jewish philosopher Benedict de Spinoza and his younger contemporary Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.¹⁶

4. Conclusion

Chinese thought, especially Confucianism, shaped Japanese scholarship for centuries. During modernization, it was not abandoned but reinterpreted using Western philosophy. The Meiji period saw the emergence of “Chinese philosophy” as an academic field, marked by East–West integration and institutional development, particularly at Tokyo Imperial University through journals and lecture materials.

During the Meiji period, figures like Inoue Tetsujirō transformed Chinese classical studies into “Eastern Philosophy.” Through curriculum reforms at the Tokyo Imperial University, Chinese philosophy gained academic legitimacy. This influenced not only philosophers but also intellectuals like Natsume Sōseki, who, though majoring in literature, engaged deeply with Chinese and Western philosophical traditions.

The Journal of the Society of Philosophy, published by the Tokyo Imperial University, reveals how Meiji-period scholars helped reframe traditional Chinese thought. Professors like Inoue Tetsujirō, Shimada Chōrei, and others actively promoted *Kangaku* through teaching and publications. Their contributions focused on four major themes: preserving Chinese classical studies, redefining *Kangaku* as “Chinese” and “Eastern Philosophy,” introducing Western research on Daoist texts, and interpreting Chinese thought

¹⁵ Matsumoto, B.(1899) “On the Ultimate Essence of Lao-Zhuang (Daoist) Philosophy” (*The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*, Vol. 14, No. 144), p.94.

¹⁶ Kitazawa, S.(1909) “Reading Zhuangzi (Continuing from the Previous Part)” (*The Journal of the Society of Philosophy*, Vol. 24, No. 265), p.283.

“I believe that in this chapter (the *Xiaoyao Pian*-The Free and Easy Wandering), one can discern a form of thought similar to that of Spinoza or Leibniz, though presented in a rough and simple manner.”

using Western philosophical frameworks. These efforts mirrored larger academic reforms that institutionalized Chinese philosophy and marked a cultural negotiation between tradition and modernity, East and West, within Japan's emerging philosophical community.

The reception and transformation of Chinese classical studies in modern Japan—particularly Daoist thought, which has received relatively little scholarly attention—holds great significance when considered in the context of the formation of Eastern philosophy. One reason for this, as mentioned earlier, is that it influenced not only philosophers but also a broader range of intellectuals. For example, it is not that contemporary researchers have entirely overlooked the influence of Daoist thought on modern Japanese thinkers; rather, they have primarily discussed this influence by referring directly to the original texts of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, and by focusing on the original intentions and ideas expressed by Laozi and Zhuangzi themselves. What remains insufficiently explored, however, is how these modern intellectuals actually read and interpreted Daoist thought in their own historical and intellectual contexts. Little attention has been paid to the academic atmosphere in which Chinese thought—particularly Daoist philosophy—was studied, and to how that environment shaped its reception and influence.