

The Structure of Reality in Izutsu's Oriental Philosophy

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Abstract: This paper aims at elucidating the structure of reality in Toshihiko Izutsu's "Oriental Philosophy" by discussing the main characteristics of his philosophical perspective of reality and consciousness. From semantic perspectives, Izutsu attempted to construct Oriental Philosophy by a creative "reading" of variegated traditional Oriental thought, which has developed in the Orient since ancient times. His philosophical reflection is characterised by his unique semantic theory, whose sphere ranges from East Asian philosophical traditions to Middle Eastern ones. On the basis of his "reading" of Oriental thought, he undertook the "synchronical structuralisation" of varieties of Oriental thought by artificially creating "an organic space of thought," which could structurally incorporate all these traditions. An important characteristic of this Oriental Philosophy consisted in the way Oriental philosophers opened the dimension of depth-consciousness as their own experiential facts. Thus, Izutsu developed his semantic theory of Oriental Philosophy characterised by a multi-layered correlation of reality and consciousness.

Keywords: reality, consciousness, existence, semantic articulation, Oriental philosophy, synchronical structuralisation

From his semantic perspectives, Toshihiko Izutsu attempted to construct his "Oriental Philosophy" by a creative or hermeneutical "reading" of variegated kinds of traditional Oriental thought, which developed in the Orient since ancient times. Izutsu was familiar not only with the Semitic thought represented by Judaism and Islam, but also a wide range of Oriental thoughts, including the thought of Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese and Japanese thinkers. As is well known,

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he was at home in many languages of the East and the West. In comparison with the Occidental tradition of thought, he was conscious that Oriental philosophical traditions, all of which traditionally provided their own historical development of thought, were “lacking in unity” and “left almost in the state of confusion.”¹ On the basis of his profound insights of the Occidental and Oriental traditions of thought, he became gradually convinced that the various traditions of Oriental thought, which include such areas as the Middle East, India and China, must be semantically structuralised. He was thus engaged in a philosophical attempt to integrate Oriental traditions of thought into an organic unity. He called such an organic unity of thought “Oriental Philosophy.”

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the structure of reality in Izutsu’s Oriental Philosophy, especially paying attention to his interpretation of the structural relationship of reality with human consciousness in his philosophical reflection of Oriental thought. From a hermeneutical point of view, this paper thus focuses on the characteristics of Izutsu’s semantic theory and on his discussion of the Oriental philosophical structure of reality. While discussing the main characteristics of his philosophical perspective of reality and consciousness as a clue for my hermeneutical research, I would like to elucidate the structure of reality in his Oriental philosophical perspective.

The “Synchronical Structuralisation” of Oriental Philosophical Thought

Izutsu’s philosophical reflection is characterised by a unique theory of semantic articulation, whose sphere ranges from East Asian philosophical traditions to Middle Eastern ones. On the basis of his hermeneutical or semantic “reading” of Oriental thought, Izutsu undertook the “synchronical structuralisation” (*kyôjiteki kôzôka*) of the varieties of Oriental thought by artificially creating “an organic space of thought, which could include all these traditions structurally.” In regard to the so-called “synchronical structuralisation,” he maintains:

This manipulation begins with transposing the main philosophical traditions of the Orient spatially into an ideal plane at the present point. In other words, it is an attempt to

create artificially an organic space of thought, which could include all these traditions structurally, by taking off the philosophical traditions of the Orient from the axis of time and by recombining them paradigmatically.²

The space of thought, artificially constructed with his theoretical manipulation of “synchronical structuralisation,” consists of a multi-polar and multi-layer structure. By analysing this synchronical structure of thought, he attempted to take off some basic patterns of thought from the axis of time, which deeply influenced philosophical reflection in the Oriental cultural contexts. For example, as Izutsu maintains in his book entitled *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of Being in Islamic thought presents similarities in its abysmal depth of thought to Lao-tzū’s metaphysics of Tao in Chinese thought, although these two systems of thought have no historical connection.³ In his comparative consideration of the two ontological structures of thought, these two worldviews are developed upon “two pivots, the Absolute and the Perfect Man;” in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, the “Absolute” is called *ḥaqq* (literally, “truth” or “reality”) and the “Perfect Man” is called *insān kāmīl*, while in Taoist thought, the “Absolute” is *tao* and the “Perfect Man” is called *shêng jên* (sacred man or saint), *chên jên* (true man), and so on. The opposition of “the Absolute and the Perfect Man” as the two pivots of a worldview consists of a basic pattern of thought, not only peculiar to Sufism and Taoism, but also common to various types of thought in different places and ages. Through a comparative consideration of different types of thought with the intellectual manipulation of “synchronical structuralisation,” Izutsu argues, one may prepare a common ground for the meta-historical or transhistorical dialogue, that is, “un dialogue dans la métahistoire” as referred to by Henry Corbin.

In any case, in accordance with the basic patterns of thought, educed by the theoretical manipulation of “synchronical structuralisation,” Izutsu undertook the construction of his Oriental philosophical perspective. His above-mentioned construction of “Oriental Philosophy” gradually took shape in his lectures at the Eranos Conference. The Eranos Conference, held in late summer on the shore of Lake Maggiore in Switzerland, was founded by Olga Froebe-Kapteyn in 1933. Among the main lecturers at the Eranos

Conference were such scholars as the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, the historian of religions Mircea Eliade, and the Islamicist Henry Corbin. Izutsu was selected in 1967 as the main lecturer for this conference and later delivered his lecture there almost every year until 1982. He delivered a total of twelve lectures on Oriental thought at this conference. A grand edifice of his “Oriental Philosophy” gradually came to be constructed through his lectures at the Eranos Conference, and one may notice this in reading his published book entitled *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy: Collected Papers of the Eranos Conference*.⁴

His participation at the Eranos Conference as the main lecturer became an important motive toward his intention in constructing an Oriental Philosophy. In regard to his participation in this conference, Izutsu relates such aspirations:

These twenty years happened to be the time I began giving my heart to the East and sought to ‘read’ Oriental thought from my own point of view. I began to hope (or aspire?) to bring the traditions of Oriental philosophy into an intellectual actuality in the modern world.⁵

Through his long participation in the Eranos Conference, he gradually held his philosophical intention of making the traditions of Oriental thought more broadly available to contemporary international philosophical circles. In his twelve lectures, he discussed various themes of Oriental thought, especially in relationship with Zen Buddhist thought. His emphasis on Zen Buddhist thought in his lectures was surely determined by the conference organiser’s request to clarify the characteristics of Zen Buddhist thought, but more profoundly, it was a response to his perception of cultural paradigms in the East and West.⁶

Izutsu’s Theory of “Semantic Articulation”

In Izutsu’s philosophical attempt to construct his “Oriental Philosophy,” the so-called “semantic articulation” by language is a methodological foundation for his “synchronical structuralisation” of Oriental thought. Through “semantic articulation” by language, Izutsu argues, one discriminates reality as an organic unity of meaning, for the original function of language is “semantic articulation.” As scholars of language and culture often emphasise,

language in general differentiates human beings from animals; it is language that forms the boundaries between nature and culture. It is true that language is an important means of communication, but more essentially, it contains the functions of “semantic articulation” by which one articulates or discriminates reality as consisting of innumerable units of meaning. By articulating or discriminating objects semantically, a word can function by denoting a meaning.

From his semantic perspective, Izutsu emphasises that all things and events in the ordinary empirical world are, when properly viewed, merely meaningful units of being that come into existence through the “semantic articulation” by language. In Izutsu’s terminology, such a fundamental condition for the appearance of beings is called “semantic articulation, that is, ontological articulation” (*imi-bunsetsu-soku-sonzai-bunsetsu*). He regards the theory of “semantic articulation” by language as “the essence of Oriental philosophy or, at least, one of its main currents.”⁷ According to his Semantic Theory, the articulation of reality begins at the level of sensory experience. The “sense-image,” which is the means of articulation at this level, creates an ordered world. Thus, reality becomes primarily meaningful to us. We are prone to think that we are in direct contact with external things and events. In his words, “the semantic configuration of an image is a product of interactions between the meanings of all words that have come to be associated with each other in their actual usage in designating, and making reference to, the object.”⁸ Semantically speaking, however, what we normally build up around ourselves is a very complex network of various relations of meaning. The cosmos or the world inside which humans live is thus “a meaningful order of Being,” in which the whole of ontological units is meaningfully structured. It constitutes “a multi-strata structure of numerous units of meaning.” In the cosmos, the different things and events, that is, the innumerable units of meaning, are mutually combined in multi-layers, constituting an integrated existence.⁹

Moreover, Izutsu argues that the main stream of Oriental philosophy has been traditionally “anti-cosmic,” that is, “ontologically destructive.” In this regard, he says:

It [the author’s note: the main stream of Oriental philosophy] intends to destroy the cosmos thoroughly from its base, by

introducing such fundamentally negative concepts as the 'Void' and 'Nothingness' into the structure of the ontological world itself and by putting them at the starting point of the cosmos. At the first stage, this ontological destruction begins with disclosing that the existence of the empirical world, or what we usually call 'reality,' is an illusion (a transient appearance), and by doing so, pointing out that the empirical world, or every being which exists there, is lacking a foundation of reality. In short, it argues for the non-realistic characteristics of 'reality.' Therefore, in the Orient, many philosophers use such metaphors as 'dream' and 'illusion.'¹⁰

In Izutsu's view, the proposition that Being is a "dream" or an "illusion" is a declaration of such representative perspectives of Oriental philosophy as Zen Buddhist philosophy and Śāṅkārā's advaita (non-dual) Vedānta philosophy, which I will discuss later, and also reminds us of what the postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida refers to as the ontological "déconstruction." This proposition, which can be found everywhere in the history of Oriental thought, represents the negation of the reality of things and events in the empirical world. Moreover, Izutsu says:

That a certain thing is *essentially* itself refers merely to the superficial stage of Being. At the deep level of Being, nobody can see a certain, unchanging, ontological core there, worthy to be called 'essence.' That a thing has no essence, however, represents that there primarily exists no line of ontological demarcation, which divides various things from one another.¹¹

His Oriental Philosophical perspective primarily negates the common-sense ontology as being mere superficial. To those who are awakened to the depth of reality, it becomes obvious that every line of demarcation of reality is a product of human discriminating consciousness, and does not exist in reality. In regard to "semantic articulation," he maintains that the word "articulation" is almost synonymous to the Buddhist term *vikalpa*, or "discrimination," which governs a human being's entire mental activity in daily consciousness. The "discriminating cognition" or *vikalpa*, which Buddhist traditions call the basic function of the human mind, is in contradistinction to "transcendental or non-discriminating cognition" or *prajñā*. The very first step of the *vikalpa* is to identify or recognise a thing as itself by discriminating it from all other things. This

identification based upon discrimination is the basis for all subsequent stages of mental activity. Without the basis of discrimination, he argues that the whole world of human empirical experience would crumble to pieces, and that things and events would irremediably fall into utter disorder.

According to Izutsu, however, Zen Buddhist philosophy begins by pointing out the questionability of the law of identity in the empirical world. To look at a thing as “a thing” is to see that thing from the very outset in the state of a particular delimitation; it must be thus seen in its indetermination. Moreover, he continues arguing, that in order to see a thing in its indetermination, one as a perceiving subject must see it with *wu hsin*, a Chinese technical term meaning literally “no-mind,” for “only when we approach anything with the ‘no-mind,’ does the thing reveal to our eyes its original reality.”¹² From his perspective of “Oriental Philosophy,” all ontological boundary lines at the empirical world are merely apparent divisions on the basis of the “semantic articulation” by language; at the depth of ontological experience, all things and events lose their superficial fixation or solidarity of “semantic articulation” when one sees them with *wu hsin*.

The Multistratified Structure of Reality in Oriental Philosophy

The fundamental structure of Izutsu's “Oriental Philosophy” is constructed on the basis of his above-mentioned theory of “semantic articulation.” The essence of his philosophical reflection consists of his view that various Oriental thoughts share a common characteristic that Oriental thinkers open up their deep dimensions of consciousness through their own religious or philosophical experiences. From such a perspective, he argues that there exists a one-to-one correspondence of objective reality with subjective consciousness. Thus, he semantically attempted to develop his “Oriental Philosophy,” characterised by a multi-layered correlation of reality and consciousness. Throughout his philosophical works, the important characteristic of his “Oriental Philosophy” is that it consists of a multistratified structure of consciousness or reality.

In his book, *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy*, Izutsu asserts that most contemporary philosophers in the West have their own method of overcoming “naive realism,” a method based on modern

science. In his words, naive realism is “a philosophical position which holds that things really *are* as they are perceived by us;” the majority of Western philosophers attempt to overcome the defects of naive realism, on the basis of the “conviction that the plane of consciousness on which perception, sensation and thinking normally function is the only plane of consciousness to be taken seriously.” Of course, Izutsu is aware of the academic field of analytical psychology or depth psychology, which holds the perspective that the human psyche, instead of being a single-layer structure, consists of a multilayer structure ranging from ordinary consciousness to the “subconscious or unconscious.” But according to him, such a psychological view still remains a “theoretical possibility.” In contrast to it, Izutsu mentions the characteristic of Oriental Philosophy:

The major schools of Oriental philosophy start by positing a multilayer structure of consciousness. The primary assumption for them is that there are a number of strata differing in depth from each other to be distinguished in the mind. And in such a perspective, our ordinary experience of the physical world through sensation, perception and rational thinking belongs only to the surface level of consciousness, all the rest of the strata remaining unknown and undisclosed unless our mind be subjected to a special, systematic training.¹³

On the basis of such a view provided by Oriental Philosophical thought, he properly emphasises that through their own systematic trainings for opening the depths of reality, the major schools of Oriental philosophy, whether it is Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Islamic, or Confucian, assert a multilayer structure of consciousness or reality. Thus, Oriental philosophical thought is characterised by the Oriental philosophers’ peculiar ability to see things and events as undetermined by the ontological limits which condition their existence in the ordinary world of experiences.

In his view, Oriental philosophers realise the significance of viewing things and events with so-called “compound eyes,” for they have learned to see things and events both at the dimensions determined by ontological boundaries and at a dimension completely free from all determination. In such a state of consciousness, the “many” correspond to the “one” while they are still “many”; “being” is “nothingness” while it is still “being.” In other words, one could

see the “many” only at a superficial level of existence and the “one” at a deep level. Likewise, one could see “being” only at the superficial dimension of reality and “nothingness” at its deep dimension.

The Depth-Structure of Reality in Hua Yen Buddhist Philosophy

In order to understand how Izutsu actually treats Oriental philosophical thought from a semantic perspective, three examples which represent characteristics of his discussion on “Oriental Philosophy,” are highlighted.

The first example is Izutsu's discussion of Hua Yen Buddhist philosophy as described in the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*. This thought was philosophically elaborated by the outstanding monks of the *Hua Yen* (Japanese: *kegon*) school of Mahāyāna Buddhism in China. It was developed by incorporating such thoughts as the Madhyamaka thought of *śūnyatā* (emptiness), the Yogācāra thought of consciousness, the thought of *Tathāgata-garbha*, and the Taoist thought of *tao*. It is said that Daisetsu Suzuki (1870-1966), famous for his study of Zen, regarded the Hua Yen thought as representing the peak of Mahāyāna Buddhism thought. He actually attempted to translate the Garland Sūtra, i.e., *Avatamsaka-sūtra* into English just prior to his death but did not complete it. The ontology of this Buddhist school, called the doctrine of the Four Domains of Reality, shows a peculiar view of reality in Oriental philosophy.

Izutsu refers to four different ways of viewing one and the same world. Each of these four views subjectively produces an image of reality corresponding to a particular “depth” of human consciousness. In regard to the Four Domains of Reality in Hua Yen philosophy, Izutsu explains it as follows. (1) The first domain is of “sensible things” (Chinese: *shih*), which represents the ordinary worldview of the ordinary people whose depth-consciousness has not been opened. (2) The second domain is of the “absolute metaphysical Reality” (Chinese: *li*), which is the “pre-phenomenal ground of reality” out of which all sensible things arise. It is the state of the “all-pervading, all-comprising oneness of metaphysical non-articulation.” (3) The third domain is of the “free, unobstructed interpenetration of *li* and *shih*” (Japanese: *riji-muge*), in which every sensible thing (*shih*) embodies the one absolute Reality (*li*) totally and perfectly. Although all individual things ontologically seem to

be independent and different entities, they are homogeneously permeated by the same *li*. (4) The fourth domain is of the “interpenetration of *shih* and *shih*” (Japanese: *jiji-muge*), which means the “mutual ontological penetration of everything into everything else in the empirical dimension of experience.” The interpenetration of *shih* and *shih* is the highest point reached by Hua Yen philosophy.¹⁴ As Izutsu emphasises, it represents the ontological climax of Hua Yen Buddhist philosophy. According to this philosophical perspective of reality, all individual things are correlated with one another, and thus, all things mutually arise.

Moreover, in regard to the Hua Yen’s perspective of reality, Izutsu says:

Even the tiniest flower owes its existence to the originating forces of all other things in the universe. Beginning with the direct influence exercised by its immediately neighbouring things such as the earth, air, sunshine, rain, insects, birds, human beings, etc., the nexus of ontological relations extends to the ultimate limit of the universe. Indeed, the whole universe directly and indirectly contributes to the coming-into-being of a single flower which thus stands in the midst of a network of intricate relations among all things. A flower blooms in spring, and the whole universe arises in full bloom. The flower *is* the spring; it is the spring of all things.¹⁵

From the standpoint of Hua Yen Buddhist philosophy, Izutsu argues, even a flower is not a mere flower, but represents the dynamic, simultaneous and interdependent emergence and existence of all things in the world. This Hua Yen perspective of reality, he asserts, represents the depth-structure of empirical things and events, which could be disclosed only to the depth-consciousness.

The Structure of Reality in Sufism and Taoism

The second typical example is his comparative study of Sufism and Taoism, well-known in his book *Sufism and Taoism*. In this work, Izutsu asserts that although Sufism and Taoism were never historically or culturally connected with one another, they share the same structure of reality in their philosophical thoughts. In this regard, he says:

In terms of historical origin there is obviously no connection at all between Sufism and Taoism. Historically speaking, the former goes back to a particular form of Semitic monotheism, while the latter – if the hypothesis which I have put forward at the outset of this study is correct – is a philosophical elaboration of the Far Eastern type of shamanism.¹⁶

Moreover, he continues:

It is highly significant that, in spite of this wide historico-cultural distance that separates the two, they share, on the philosophical level, the same ground. They agree with each other, to begin with, in that both base their philosophical thinking on a very peculiar conception of Existence which is fundamentally identical, though differing from one another in details and on secondary matters.¹⁷

In these two philosophical thoughts, Izutsu finds the “same ground” characterised by “their philosophical thinking on a very peculiar conception of Existence.” In both cases, he asserts, “philosophical thinking,” i.e., “philosophising” has its ultimate origin in “*experiencing* Existence” and not in “*reasoning* about Existence.” According to Izutsu, “*experiencing* Existence” means “experiencing it not on the ordinary level of sense perception, but on the level (or levels) of supra-sensible intuition.”¹⁸ In his discussion of the essential characteristic of “philosophising,” one comes to understand the nature of his “Oriental Philosophy;” they are constructed on the basis of the “supra-sensible intuition” of those who are awakened to the depth of Being. Thus, the vision of “Existence or Reality,” experienced on supra-sensible levels, is completely different from the ordinary view of “reality” shared by common people.

For those who have experienced this awakening of “Existence or Reality,” Izutsu says, all things and events manifest the presence of “Something beyond.” In Sufism, for example, “Something beyond” is ultimately the *ḥaqq* to which Ibn ‘Arabī refers, while in Taoism, it is the *tao* to which Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū refer. In both Sufism and Taoism, the absolute and ultimate ground of Existence is the “Mystery of Mysteries.” Izutsu maintains that in Ibn ‘Arabī’s words, the “Mystery of Mysteries” is “the most indeterminate of all indeterminates” (*ankar al-nakirāt*), which means “Something that

transcends all qualifications and relations that are humanly conceivable.” It is noteworthy that Ibn ‘Arabī calls this ontological dimension the “level of Unity” (*aḥadīyah*). At this dimension, Izutsu argues, “the Absolute” is “One” in the sense that it refuses to accept any qualification; “being one” means “nothing other than absolute transcendence.”¹⁹ In Taoist philosophy, too, the Way (*tao*) is regarded as “One.” Izutsu remarks that the “One” in Taoist thought is conceptually to be placed between “the stage of Non-Being and that of Being,” for “it is not exactly the same as the Way *qua* Mystery.” In this regard, he continues:

The Way is ‘immanent’ in everything existent as its existential core, or as its Virtue, as Lao-tzū calls it. But whether regarded as ‘immanent’ or ‘transcendent’, the Way is the Way. What is immanent in everything is exactly the same thing as that which transcends everything.²⁰

According to Izutsu’s semantic perspective, the Taoist concept of “One,” referring to the Absolute itself, is “an exact counterpart of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *aḥad*, the ‘absolute One.’” But in so far as it is “One” comprising within itself “the possibility of Multiplicity,” the concept of “One” in Taoist philosophy is “a counterpart of *wāḥid*,” which means the “One at the level of the Names and Attributes” or the “Unity of the Many.” Thus, Izutsu semantically argues that “the Taoist One comprises the *aḥad* and the *wāḥid* of Sufism.”²¹

The Structure of Reality in Śaṅkara’s Vedānta Philosophy

Finally, the third example which represents the peculiar characteristics of Izutsu’s Oriental philosophical reflection focuses on his discussion of Śaṅkara’s advaita Vedānta philosophy in India. According to Izutsu, Śaṅkara maintains that “the world of our empirical experience is real only insofar as we remain on the level of empirical experience.” But in Śaṅkara’s view, there is the other level of experience or consciousness, that is, the *paramārtha* (absolute) level of truth, whose presence is revealed to us when we are in the “state of the most highly concentrated meditation” (*samādhi*). In this regard, Izutsu says:

And from the viewpoint of this second level of experience, the empirical world turns out to be unreal, losing its phenomenal reality, which it possesses on the level of

ordinary waking experience. It is in the light of this experience that the external world is pronounced to be a world of *Māyā*.²²

According to Śaṅkara's view, on the level of sensory cognition, all things and events are real, but on the absolute level of cognition, they disappear from human vision, for each of them discloses itself as a "misperception of the Absolute." In this regard, Izutsu continues:

This higher mode of cognition is the Brahman-experience in which Brahman is revealed in its absolutely unconditioned nature and in which there no longer remains anything perceivable. Then the whole empirical world disappears with all its swarming diversity of things, animate and inanimate, into a primordial metaphysical oneness where there is nothing to be perceived as a finite existent, be it a rope or anything whatsoever. Brahman for Śaṅkara is the Undifferentiated. And that precisely is Reality.²³

As Izutsu clearly points out, in Śaṅkara's philosophy, the "disappearance of the empirical world in the Brahman-experience" is not the "dissolution of the world into nothingness," for it is "a mode of appearance of Brahman itself," which is "the Undifferentiated." Thus, Izutsu argues, "what is really annihilated by the Brahman-experience is not the world; it is rather the *avidyā* "nescience" or "ignorance" on our part that is annihilated." According to Izutsu's view, *avidyā* to which Śaṅkara refers is "a noetic form peculiar to our relative and relational consciousness;" "Brahman which in itself is absolutely undifferentiated" is necessarily presented to the relative consciousness in multifarious differentiation. Thus, Izutsu says, "that which is essentially One never becomes Many, it only appears as Many."²⁴

The term "Brahman-experience" in Izutsu's explanation means the intuitive cognition of *nirguṇa-brahman*, the attributeless Being; this attributeless Being is the only ultimately existent being which is non-dual, impersonal, inexpressible and relationless. Since Śaṅkara considers the diverse beings in the world to be subject to illusion (*māyā*), all other things are not ultimately real in Śaṅkara's philosophy. Thus, in his theory, there is ultimately no ground for a polarity of beings in the world.²⁵ With the human ability of cognition, one cannot see *nirguṇa-brahman* in its purely single nature. Because

of the veil of *māyā*, one sees the attributeless *brahman* as many forms of reality into which it has been variously articulated. Accordingly, in regard to Śaṅkara's philosophy, Izutsu clearly points out that "all the real facts of Being which we universally experience are the products of human consciousness." From his semantic perspective, since all the ontological boundary lines are the "illusions of meaning" which are apparent divisions, all things and events lose their superficial fixation or solidity at the depth of ontological experience. Thus, they disappear into the "infinitely floating, amorphous, unlimited, unarticulated mass," which is implied with the term *nirguṇa-brahman*.

From the standpoint of Izutsu's "Oriental Philosophy," it is noteworthy that the *nirguṇa-brahman* (the attributeless Brahman) in Śaṅkara's philosophy is essentially the same unarticulated reality as the *hun tun* (the Chaos) of the Chinese philosopher Chuang-tzū, the *wu ming* (the Nameless) of Lao-tzū, which is the state before the appearance of the *yu ming* (the Named), the *wu* (Nothingness) of Zen Buddhism, and so on. In the state of ultimate non-differentiation, he says, consciousness and reality are primordially united. Izutsu calls this unarticulated state the "zero-point of consciousness" from which all forms of "consciousness" come out, and at the same time, the "zero-point of Being" from which all forms of Being come out.²⁶ In Śaṅkara's philosophy, for example, *nirguṇa-brahman* as the "zero-point of Being" is, needless to say, the culminating point of amorphous, unarticulated reality, but it primordially contains the possibility of the appearance of all forms of reality or of all forms of consciousness in the world. In this sense, *nirguṇa-brahman* is the "zero-point of Being," that is, the "zero-point of consciousness," and at the same time, constitutes the original point of the "ontological articulation," that is, the "semantic articulation."

Conclusion

On the basis of the above-mentioned discussion, the essential characteristic of Izutsu's "Oriental Philosophy" is that the articulated state of Being, which we see in the empirical world, is only the superficial appearance of the absolute, unarticulated state of Being, whether it is "the Chaos," "the Nameless," or "Nothingness." According to Izutsu's view of "semantic articulation," the absolute,

unarticulated state of Being is the reality of Being itself in the state of primordial non-articulation, preceding every semantic articulation of Being. Thus, it is exactly the “zero-point of Being,” that is, the “zero-point of consciousness” to which Izutsu refers. Moreover, a more important characteristic of his “Oriental Philosophy” is that after the recognition of the unarticulated state of Being at the depth of human consciousness, it would conversely reconsider the “zero-point of Being,” that is, the “zero-point of consciousness,” as the new original point toward the construction of multi-dimensional philosophy. In this sense, one can say that Izutsu’s “Oriental Philosophy” is a grand edifice of semantics to develop a new Oriental philosophical perspective, which may make possible the construction of a flexible cosmos, starting from such Oriental key-concepts as “Nameless,” “Nothingness,” and “Void.”

By his creative “reading” of traditional Oriental thoughts, Izutsu undertook the “synchronical structuralisation” of varieties of Oriental thought and then attempted to create “an organic space of thought,” which could structurally include these philosophical traditions. In his “Oriental Philosophy,” the surface structure of reality seems to be very much like naïve realism; the physical world is real, and all things and events in the world constitute a reality. But the theoretical ground on which Izutsu’s “Oriental Philosophy” is constructed is completely different from that of naïve realism. From his semantic perspective of “Oriental Philosophy,” all the ontological boundary lines are merely apparent divisions, which are semantically articulated by language; at the depth of ontological experiences, they lose their superficial fixation of semantic articulation. Thus, Izutsu regards all things and events in the ordinary world as merely meaningful units of being, which are constructed through the “semantic articulation” by language.

In Izutsu’s “Oriental Philosophy,” there exists a one-to-one correspondence of objective reality with subjective consciousness. The structure of his “Oriental philosophy” is characterised by the so-called “compound eyes” of seeing all things and events both at the dimensions determined by ontological boundaries and at a dimension completely free from all determination. In this way, Izutsu attempted to elucidate the essential structure of reality or consciousness, underlying the traditions of Oriental philosophical

thoughts and to develop his “Oriental Philosophy” as the foundation of a new philosophical reflection.

Notes

1. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Islam Tetsugaku no Genzō* [A Fountainhead of Islamic Philosophy] (Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten, 1980), iii.
2. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ishiki to Honshitsu* [Consciousness and Essence] (Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten, 1983), 429.
3. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
4. Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy: Collected Papers of the Eranos Conference*, 2 vols., the Izutsu Library Series on Oriental Philosophy 4 (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2008). Moreover, in regard to the development of Izutsu’s attempt to construct Oriental Philosophy, see “Editor’s Essay,” i.e., Yoshitsugu Sawai, “Izutsu’s Creative ‘Reading’ of Oriental Thought and Its Development,” in *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy*, vol. 2, 215-223. In regard to the origin of the Eranos Conference, see Rudolf Ritsema, “The Origins and Opus of Eranos: Reflections at the 55th Conference,” *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 56 (1987).
5. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Kosumosu to Anchikosumosu—Tōyō-Tetsugaku no tameni* [Cosmos and Anti-cosmos: Toward an Oriental Philosophy] (Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten, 1989), 3.
6. In regard to the detailed discussion of Izutsu’s emphasis on Zen Buddhist thought in his Eranos lectures, see the author’s “Editor’s Essay,” i.e., Yoshitsugu Sawai, “Izutsu’s Creative ‘Reading’ of Oriental Thought and Its Development,” vol. 2, 217-219.
7. *Ibid.*, 221.
8. Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy*, vol. 2, 124-125.
9. Toshihiko Izutsu, “Cosmos and Anti-Cosmos: From the Standpoint of Oriental Philosophy,” in *Cosmos-Life-Religion: Beyond Humanism*, Tenri International Symposium ’86 (Nara: Tenri University Press, 1988), 109.
10. *Ibid.*, 116.
11. *Ibid.*, 117.
12. Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy*, vol. 1, 88.

13. Ibid., vol. 2, 1-5.
14. Ibid., vol. 2, 174-177.
15. Ibid., vol. 2, 178.
16. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 479.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 486.
20. Ibid., 487. In regard to Izutsu's interpretation of Lao-tzū's thought, see his English translation of Lao-tzū. Toshihiko Izutsu, trans., *Lao-tzū: The Way and Its Virtue*, the Izutsu Library Series on Oriental Philosophy 1 (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2001).
21. Ibid.
22. Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy*, vol. 2, 17.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 18.
25. In regard to Śaṅkara's advaita Vedānta philosophy, see Yoshitsugu Sawai, "Rāmānuja's Hermeneutics of the *Upaniṣads* in Comparison with Śaṅkara's Interpretation," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 19 (1991).
26. Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of Oriental Philosophy*, vol. 2, 147.