



From Mysticism to Philosophy: Toshihiko Izutsu and Sufism

Tasavvuftan Felsefeye: Toshihiko Izutsu ve Tasavvuf

Makoto Sawai*

Abstract

In Islāmic studies, Toshihiko Izutsu is well known as a scholar of the Qur'ān and Sufism, thanks to his published works in English. As to his image in Japan, however, he is known as a thinker of Oriental philosophy. After his return from Iran to Japan, he published several publications on Oriental philosophy in Japanese. As such, his final achievement, which was his Oriental philosophy, was veiled from readers who do not know Japanese, while his detailed study on Islāmic studies is not known by Japanese readers. In structuring his Oriental philosophy, he refers mainly to Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy known as *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Before publishing his work in English, he had already considered Ibn 'Arabī and mysticism in his Japanese work in which he emphasizes the essential role of experience in understanding mysticism. Based on the theoretical development from mysticism to mystical philosophy, Izutsu delineates the theoretical development from Sufism to Islāmic philosophy. In studying Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy, *waḥdat al-wujūd* or 'Unity of Existence', Izutsu uses Islāmic philosophy as the framework for his Oriental philosophy.

Keywords: Toshihiko Izutsu, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Sufism, Islāmic philosophy, Oriental philosophy.

Özet

Toshihiko Izutsu, İngilizce yayımlanmış eserleri sayesinde, özellikle Kur'ân ve tasavvuf alanındaki İslâmî çalışmalarıyla bilinen ünlü bir akademisyendir. Ancak onun Japonya'daki bilinirliği, daha ziyade bir Doğu felsefesi düşünürü olduğu yönündedir. İran'dan Japonya'ya döndükten sonra Doğu felsefesi üzerine Japonca çeşitli eserler kaleme almıştır. Fakat nasıl ki Izutsu'nun İslâm üzerine yaptığı çalışmalar Japon okuyucular tarafından bilinmemekteyse, Doğu felsefesi üzerine kaleme aldığı bahsi geçen bu son eserler de Japonca bilmeyen okurlardan gizli kalmıştır. Izutsu, Doğu felsefesini yapılandırırken, temel olarak İbnü'l-'Arabî'nin vahdet-i vücûd olarak bilinen düşüncesine atıfta bulunur. Çalışmasını İngilizce olarak yayımlamadan önce, tasavvufu anlamlandırmada mistik tecrübenin hayatî rolünü vurguladığı Japonca eserinde, İbnü'l-'Arabî ve tasavvufun kapsamlı bir biçimde ele alındığı görülür. Izutsu, mistisizmden mistik felsefeye uzanan nazarî gelişimden yola çıkarak tasavvuftan İslâm felsefesine doğru giden teorik gelişimi tasvir etmektedir. İbnü'l-'Arabî'nin, vahdet-i vücûd ya da varlığın birliği düşüncesini ele alırken İslâm felsefesini, Doğu felsefesi için bir çerçeve olarak kullanır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toshihiko Izutsu, Muḥyiddīn İbn 'Arabī, vahdet-i vücûd, tasavvuf, İslâm felsefesi, Doğu felsefesi.

* Lecturer, Oyasato Institute for the Study of Religion, Tenri University. E-mail: mvsawai@sta.tenri-u.ac.jp.

Introduction: Sufism in Izutsu's Study of Islām

Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993), one of the most accomplished scholars in Islāmic Studies, is known worldwide as a Japanese scholar of the Qur'ān and Sufism. However, the breadth of his work and understanding has not been fully appreciated, especially in terms of how he constructed his views on Oriental philosophy through his deep learning of the Qur'ān, Sufism, and Islāmic philosophy.

His study of the Qur'ān in both *God and Man in the Koran* (1964) and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (1966) continues to draw many Muslim readers, many of whom are highly distinguished and consider his perspective unique. In Japanese academia, he also produced colloquial style Japanese translations of the Qur'ān, since in his opinion, there was an importance in maintaining the literal sense of the Arabic term *Qur'ān* (recitation). In these publications, Izutsu commonly adopts the analytical perspective of “semantic analysis” (*imironteki bunseki*).¹ The semantic perspective is what he used in his linguistic approach of the Qur'ān;² in it, he focused on key concepts in the text that represented the relationship between God and human beings, arranging those passages and comparing them to each other.

1 In *God and Man in the Koran*, Izutsu explains what semantics means: So much so that ‘semantics’, as the study of Meaning, cannot but be a new type of philosophy based on an entirely new conception of being and existence and extending over many different and widely divergent branches of traditional science, which, however, are as yet far from having achieved the ideal of a perfect integration. (Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), 10.)

2 Behind his continuous interest in semantics, Izutsu also believes that semantic analysis leads to an objective understanding of texts. According to him, it is possible to clarify the semantic network of key concepts by considering how a concept relates to other concepts inside texts.

After publishing his Japanese translation, he put aside further studies of the Qur'ān and undertook a study of Sufism, where he continued with his semantic analyses and applied it to his comparative study of religious traditions. His *Sufism and Taoism* (1966) and *The Concept and Reality of Existence* (1965) are regarded as classic books for understanding Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī’s (d. 638/1240) philosophy, generally known as the Unity of Existence or Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).

It is noteworthy that Izutsu considers not only Sufism and Islāmic philosophy, but also Taoism and Buddhism, as shown by his work on comparative perspectives of religious traditions in the East.³ He compares key concepts of Islāmic philosophy to those of other religions and discovers common structures that religious philosophies in the Orient share, which is what Izutsu calls Oriental philosophy.⁴

As Shigeru Kamada points out, Izutsu is mostly regarded as a Qur'ānic scholar in the West, whereas most Japanese readers are mainly familiar with his Oriental philosophy.⁵

3 His intention fully expresses the title of his English publication on Sufism: *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism: Ibn 'Arabī and Lao-tsz, Chuang-tsz* (1966). This book is republished with the title of *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts* from Iwanami-shoten (1983) and from the University of California Press (1984).

4 Izutsu's semantic way of reading texts written in Chinese, Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit would not be accomplished without his extraordinary linguistic ability; his semantic reading of the texts is fully creative, his work is unique. However, his attitude to texts and understanding is objective and philological. Even today, Izutsu's academic dedication to Islāmic Studies is extremely high, and his academic influence extensive.

5 Shigeru Kamada, “‘The Oriental Philosophy’ and Islāmic Studies” (*Tōyō Tetsugaku* to *Isurāmu Kenkyū*) in *Toshihiko Izutsu's Oriental Philosophy: (Toshihiko Izutsu no Tōyō Tetsugaku)*, eds. Yoshitsugu Sawai and Shigeru Kamada (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2018), 12.

In other words, there is a gap in understanding regarding Izutsu's body of work between his English and Japanese readers.

He began drawing up a plan of his Oriental philosophy during his stay in Iran, reifying his vision by referring to Sufism and Islāmic philosophy. After returning to Japan in 1978 due to the Iranian revolution, Izutsu was involved in constructing his Oriental philosophy (*tōyō tetsugaku*). This shows that his academic track of studying Islām to build his Oriental philosophy was a process of the extreme achievement of his thought. However, the extent and significance of Izutsu's study of Sufism and Islāmic philosophy and the role they played in Oriental philosophy is not well known.

As previously stated, choosing Japanese as the language for his undertaking of Oriental philosophy veiled what Izutsu truly thought in later life from foreign scholars. Izutsu's Oriental philosophy embraces Islām, Zen Buddhism, Daoism, Judaism, and Indian philosophy, all of which are expressed in non-Western languages.⁶ In this paper, I would like to fill the gap in the understanding of Izutsu's work by tracing his engagement with Sufism and referring to his works on Sufism in Japanese.

I. Experience and Its Verbal Expression

Izutsu was interested in languages since his youth. He started learning Russian at 19 years old and multiple languages like Hebrew, Arabic, and Greek in his early 20s. Around

6 After returning to Japan, he published whole books in Japanese. This is another reason why his final part of constructing Oriental philosophy is not veiled by non-Japanese readers. Izutsu's most distinguished book written in Japanese, *Consciousness and Essence: In Search of the Spiritual East (Ishiki to Honshitsu: Seishinteki Tōyō o Motomete)*, 1983, is translated into German. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Bewusstsein und Wesen*, trans. Hans Peter Liederbach (München: Iudicium Verlag, 2006).

the same time, he learned Islām and Arabic from Abdurreshid Ibrāhim (1857-1944) and did Islāmic philosophy and theology from Musa Bigiev (1875-1949), also known as Mūsā Jār Allāh. Through his encounter with both these Tatar Muslim scholars visiting Japan, he improved his linguistic ability and acquired his Islāmic knowledge.

In 1941, he published his first book, *Intellectual History in Arabia: Islāmic Theology and Islāmic Philosophy (Arabia Shisōshi: Kaikyō Shingaku to Kaikyō Tetsugaku)*. In 1949, he later wrote *Mystical Philosophy: The Part of Greek (Shinpi Tetsugaku: Girishia no Bu)*.⁷ As he considered in both works, he was interested in mysticism since his early career. In *Mystical Philosophy*, he rephrases the term "Naturmystik" (natural mysticism, *Shizen-shinpushugi*) as a "kind of distinct experience", "primordial experience", and "absolute experience in an assertive way".⁸ These phrases express the same sentiment as *unio mystica*, albeit using different words.

In his understanding of mysticism, Izutsu emphasizes an aspect of experience and its verbal expression. Izutsu argues that there is theoretical development from expressing mystical experience in words to philosophizing one's experience. At the beginning

7 Though this book firstly had a publishing schedule in 1947, it was cancelled since the original publishing company went bankrupt. Moreover, there is an original plan that this book has three volumes: the first volume of Greek part, the second volume of Hebrew part, and the third volume of Christian part. However, only the first was published since the publication, *Hikari no Shobō*, also went bankrupt before the second volume was done. Later in 1978, he published two volumes of *Mystical Philosophy* by revising the first part.

8 In a sense, "natural mysticism" is equivalent to a "pure experience" in the philosophy of William James (1842-1910) and Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945). William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912(1976)); Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good (Zen no Kenkyū)*, (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1911 (1950)).

of mysticism, however, there is a gross experience that is before or beyond language:

As to them (i.e., sages before Socrates), they had an idea not “In the beginning was the thought” but “In the beginning was the intuition.”⁹ At the beginning of the whole thing, there was an absolute all-encompassing experience. I would like to call this primordial experience “Naturmystik”, following the tradition of the intellectual history of mysticism in the West. The experience of Naturmystik is the human experience as a finite existence, but the experience of “nature” as the absolute existence. It means not that human beings have experience of nature, but that nature has experience of human beings. Nature is the subject of experience.¹⁰

In mysticism, human beings generally have an experience of nature that is absolute. However, Izutsu relates to Naturmystik, that is, the natural style of mysticism in which nature experiences human beings. This is the same structure as Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought of the Unity of Existence.¹¹

As in *unio mystica*, a Sufi has experience of Allāh. However, Ibn ‘Arabī argues that Allāh makes a Sufi witness Himself. This means that the subject in a mystical experience is not human existence but Allāh. In the ontology of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*) is understood as absolute Existence (*al-wujūd*). Moreover, nothing other than absolute Existence has and does exist.

9 Izutsu explains the origin of Greek philosophy by referring to the Bible: “In the beginning was the word (logos).” (John 1:1)

10 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Mystical Philosophy (Shinpi Tetsugaku): The Complete Works of Toshihiko Izutsu II*, (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 1949 (2013)), 30.

11 In other words, Izutsu has a rough structure of mysticism in his early days and gradually sophisticates it by encountering Sufism at a later date.

In self-disclosure (*al-tajallī*) of the Existence, there is a framework in which the absolute Existence manifests Himself to the whole existent (*mawjūd*)¹² through entification (*ta‘ayyun*). In other words, the Real manifests Himself to human beings through self-limitation. The framework of Ibn ‘Arabī’s entification is the same as that of the experience in Naturmystik: that nature has an experience of human beings. That is, nature limits itself in the way of human beings.

In the same manner as Greek philosophers, Ibn ‘Arabī’s mystical philosophy is based on his experience of *unio mystica*. Izutsu emphasizes personal experience unified with the absolute, which is essential for philosophizing mysticism. In other words, a philosophical understanding of mysticism does not exist without passing through a level of mystical experience. Thus, concerning the theoretical relationship between mysticism and mystical philosophy, Izutsu argued, as in his early work, that mysticism based on mystical experience theoretically transits to mystical philosophy. Mystical experience, according to him, is equal to the self-consciousness of absolute transcendence. In Greek metaphysics, the “experience of the absolute ‘One’” unceasingly flows from the physics of the Ionian school to Neo-Platonism in Alexandria. As such, the earliest period of Greek philosophy was fully decorated with mystical experiences.

His experience-based understanding of mysticism is adapted in his earliest article entitled “Revelation and Reason in Islām” (*Kaikyō ni okeru Keiji to Risei*, 1944). According to

12 The literal meaning of *mawjūd* which is a passive noun in Arabic is: “thing that is made existent.” With regards to Arabic grammar, this is a derivative form of *wujūd*. At the same time, it demonstrates the relationship between the Real and creatures. Creatures, including human beings, are only a derivative and passive existence of the Real, that is the Existence, in true meaning.

Izutsu, Sufism is a “religious reformation” against a rational understanding of Islām. This means that Sufism “regards revelation not only as the Qur’ān but also as revelation to each individual.”¹³ In other words, divine revelation to human beings indicates the Qur’ānic revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad, as well as personal experience. He sums up that Sufis “emphasize the absolute and mystical experience of each Muslim. It is widely known as Islāmic mysticism or Sufiism.”¹⁴

Before Islāmic mysticism, or Sufism coming into existence as a result of theoretical formation, Sufis had an experience of the beginning. Sufis then verbalize their experience in spite of its ineffable characteristics.

First, those people (i.e., Sufis) try to pursue the way of mortification by single-mindedly chanting the names of God, without getting involved in rational interpretation. As I told you in the section on philosophy, however, neo-platonic thought had a deep impact on such people after it flowed from Greece. Later, an inclination at the time that they longed for salvation in the Hereafter by ascetic practices suddenly changed and they became speculative. At last, the so-called thought of Islāmic mysticism emerged. In the West, [the thought] becoming speculative in this way is called Sufiism.¹⁵

Religious studies has developed by emphasizing the aspect of experience (*taiken* or *keiken* in Japanese) in the academic

13 Toshihiko Izutsu, “Revelation and Reason in Islām” (*Kaikyō ni okeru Keiji to Risei*), *The Complete Works of Toshihiko Izutsu I*, (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 1944 (2013)), 225.

14 Ibid. 225. Izutsu uses the term “Sufiism” consisted of “Sufi” and “ism.” This term is used in the formative period of the study of Sufism.

15 Ibid. 225.

area of mysticism. Although some point out that the study of mysticism puts too much emphasis on the aspect of experience, Izutsu thinks that reading mystics’ texts from the point of personal experience is still useful in deeply understanding the characteristics of Sufism. Moreover, he holds the framework of theoretical development from mysticism to mystical philosophy and adopts the framework of Sufism or *taṣawwuf*, and mystical philosophy in Islām or *ḥikmah*. Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought plays a pivotal role in Izutsu’s structure of Oriental philosophy.

II. Encountering and Reuniting between Izutsu and Ibn ‘Arabī

In the former part of *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism*, Izutsu focuses on considering Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought. Izutsu encountered Ibn ‘Arabī for the first time in Japan and published a small paper in his early academic career in Islāmic Studies.

Mainly referring to Ibn ‘Arabī’s *The Formation of the Circles (Inshā’ al-dawā’ir)*,¹⁶ Izutsu considers the philosophical and ontological aspects of his thought, not the mystical ones. Although he mentions the names of Ibn ‘Arabī’s greatest masterpieces, *The Makkan Revelations (al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah)* and *The Bezels of Wisdom (Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam)*, he does not consider them at all. Concerning the academic study of Ibn ‘Arabī, Abū al-‘Ilā ‘Afīfī (1897-1966) published *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-Ibnul ‘Arabī* (1939), which is a classical work on Ibn ‘Arabī and later published his edited volume of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* in 1946. However, due to World War II, it was difficult for him to purchase ‘Afīfī’s

16 This book edited by Henrik Samuel Nyberg (1889-1974) is the only text of Ibn ‘Arabī’s published in the West. Henrik Samuel Nyberg, *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-Arabī*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1919).

works during and after the war.

With this academic history in the background, he published a paper entitled “Mystical Philosopher of Islām: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Ontology” (*Kaikyō Shinpishugi Tetsugakusha: Ibbun-ru-Arabī no Sonzai-ron*, 1944). He introduced Ibn ‘Arabī as the first thinker who philosophized “Islāmic mysticism or Sufism (original term, *al-taṣawwuf*)” which is “neither a doctrine nor an ism.”

The Islāmic world has produced extinguished mystical devotees everywhere: Ḥallāj who was famous for being cruelly crucified for the crime of heresy, and other mystical poets in Persia who immortalized the Enduring Name in world literature by putting deep thought into a profound poem. However, no one worthy of being called a mystical *philosopher* existed before him.

Because of this, Ibn ‘Arabī’s place in Islāmic thought is extremely special; he is the only exception; that is, he is a mystic as well as a philosopher. He descends from the tradition of Aristotelian philosophy. Moreover, he was a mystic who tried to systematize his deep experience with the help of this brilliant Aristotelian philosophy and was an unprecedented philosopher who tried to devote his life to this great enterprise.¹⁷

Izutsu recognizes that Abū al-Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), a Sufī as well as a theologian before Ibn ‘Arabī, is a “great theologian-philosopher” as well as an influential “mystic”. However, Izutsu believes that the Sufī thinker who has philosophically system-

17 Toshihiko Izutsu, “Mystical Philosopher of Islām: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Ontology” (*Kaikyō Shinpishugi Tetsugakusha: Ibbun-ru-Arabī no Sonzai-ron*), *The Complete Works of Toshihiko Izutsu I*, (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 1943 (2013)), 173-174.

atized “deep experience” in mysticism is Ibn ‘Arabī. Such is the place that Ibn ‘Arabī has maintained in Izutsu’s perspective of Sufism. Yet, Izutsu had not considered Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought until he went abroad and researched at McGill University.

From November 1960 to April 1961, Izutsu conducted research at the Institute of Islāmic Studies at McGill University with a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1962, Izutsu was appointed as a visiting scholar at McGill University. From the next year, he spent half a year at Keio University and the other half at McGill until moving to Iran. According to Seyyid Hossein Nasr, “from that time on he was going to put aside his study of Qur’ānic semantics and devote himself to later Islāmic philosophy.”¹⁸

Before he met with Nasr at McGill University, Izutsu published the first Japanese translation of the Qur’ān, which he directly translated from Arabic to Japanese, and published the aforementioned works related to the Qur’ān. Pausing his study of the Qur’ān, he shifted his academic subject to mystical philosophy in Islām.

Progressively, year by year, he gradually shifted his research institution from Japan (Keio University) to Canada (McGill University) and finally to Iran (Tehran Branch of McGill University and Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy),¹⁹ where he started to tackle Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought in earnest. As clearly shown in the publishing plan of the “Wisdom of Persia Series”,²⁰ he seriously engaged with

18 Seyyid Hossein Nasr, “Some Recollections: Toshihiko Izutsu” (*Izutsu Toshihiko no Omoide*), trans. Makoto Sawai, *Monthly Newsletter* (Supplement of The Complete Works of Toshihiko Izutsu 11), (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2015), 1.

19 In 1975, Izutsu moved to Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy as a professor. He had researched there until the occurrence of the Iranian Revolution in February 1979.

20 Under the “Series” name, the Institute of Islāmic

the philosophized development of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought and considered the metaphysical philosophy of Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631) and Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī (d. 1289/1872).

Inspiring Izutsu, Ibn ‘Arabī plays an essential role in his construction of his Oriental philosophy. Indeed, the more deeply Izutsu studied Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, the more intensely he was convinced that his thought was useful in constructing his understanding of Oriental philosophy. In “An Analysis of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*”: Toward a Metaphilosophy of Oriental Philosophies”, he clearly stated that the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* was valuable in his endeavor:

I am interested in this particular aspect of this particular problem out of all the interesting problems offered by the history of Iranian Islām, not necessarily because of my own personal philosophical attitude, but rather, and primarily, because of my conviction that the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is something which, if structurally analyzed and elaborated in a proper way, will provide a theoretical framework of thinking which characterizes Oriental philosophy in general — not only Islāmic philosophy, but most of the major historical forms of Oriental thought.²¹

In *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism*, Izutsu considers Ibn ‘Arabī in the former part and Taoism in the latter part and compares each other in the conclusion. Moreover, after his move to Iran, he deeply studied Ibn ‘Arabī’s *waḥdat al-wujūd* and later development. Izutsu came to recognize that Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought should be placed at

Studies, Tehran Branch of McGill University, had pre-planned the publishment plan of twenty volumes. According to the list, Izutsu has engaged with four out of twenty volumes.

21 Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 1971), 35.

the center of his Oriental philosophy. Hence, his study of *waḥdat al-wujūd* gradually transitioned from mere Islāmic studies to the theoretical framework of Oriental philosophy.

III. Theoretical Development from Mysticism to Mystical Philosophy

In the *Archetypal Image of Islāmic Philosophy* (*Isurāmu Tetsugaku no Genzō*, 1980) and *Consciousness and Essence* (*Ishiki to Honshitsu*, 1984), he argued for a theoretical development from mysticism to mystical philosophy. However, he academically reconsidered how to deal with the phenomenon known as “Sufism” or “Islāmic mysticism” and pointed out the difficulty of researching Sufism.

Insomuch as [Sufism] is already a subjective understanding, it goes without saying that it is extremely personal. If there were a general idea that being objective was a fundamental condition for academic knowledge, such a kind of subjective depiction may not be academic. As far as mysticism is concerned, however, I wonder if being thoroughly subjective is paradoxically and truly objective. A so-called objective attitude does not bring us anything here. When we observe a mystical experience from the outside and comprehend it objectively, we will not find anything there other than a dead figure because the anima of mysticism has already disappeared. As to our purely objective attitude toward mystical experience, it is as if a car is on the surface of ice: the more we push the car to go forward, the more it runs idle and does not proceed. If we still wish to go forward despite this situation, there is no way to get us out of our car and move forward by turning ourselves to the ice itself. Likewise, concerning mys-

tical experience, there is only one true way to stop turning our “objective” condition needlessly, dive into a vortex of our experience, and identify ourselves with it from the inside subjectively. Here, mysticism opens its subtle secret to us. That is, to be truly subjective is to be objective.²²

Izutsu demonstrates a paradoxical answer to the question of who on earth truly understands the phenomena called mysticism. It is sure for an academic scholar that the study of mysticism is an academic field, but for those who have had a mystical experience, they are constantly searching for the word to describe an ineffable experience. In the study of mysticism, scholars try to consider that verbal expression of experience. Since fully verbal expression is impossible, however, an objective study of mysticism is almost impossible. According to Izutsu, taking a subjective attitude in the study of mysticism is the best way to understand mysticism. Thus, an immanent approach is the most objective rather than subjective one. Although Izutsu did not personally practice Sufism, he stressed the subjective approach to Sufism, as if he were himself a practitioner of Sufism.²³

He analyzed the phenomena of mysticism as a fine balance in terms of “experience”, which is a concept formulated in modernism. A comparative perspective that has fully expressed the way for spiritual training is “*tao* (way), that is *ṭarīqa* in Islām”.²⁴ The conceptual formation of mysticism contains a comparative view of religions around the

22 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Shinpi Tetsugaku*, 31-32.

23 Izutsu practiced Zen in his childhood because his father gave him rigorous Zen practice. In other words, he kept a subjective attitude to Zen Buddhism in which he regards mysticism in Buddhism.

24 Toshihiko Izutsu, “Sufism and Linguistic Philosophy” (*Sūfizumu to Gengo Tetsugaku*), *The Complete Works of Toshihiko Izutsu VIII*, (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 1984 (2014)), 223.

world. It is, therefore, in the name of mysticism that Izutsu also juxtaposes spiritual phenomena in religious traditions and finds the same structure in each of them.

Concerning his usage of “philosophy”, Izutsu again defines “philosophizing” as “theorizing” and “systematizing”. Thus, philosophy based on mystical experience is equal to theorizing one’s own mystical experience. In a theoretical transition from mysticism to mystical philosophy, one passes through mystical experience and metaphysics. In Sufism, this level of mystical consciousness corresponds to *baṣīrah* meaning “spiritual eyesight” or “inner vision”, its primary meaning being “eyesight”.

Mysticism is an experience of getting a glimpse of the truth (i.e., depth) of the Real through *baṣīrah* [inner vision]. Incorporating it with today’s idea on semiotic semantics, what is called *baṣīrah* is as if “nothingness” (*mu*) or “emptiness” (*kū*) that is not still articulated (*bunset-suka*) at all. Or *baṣīrah* is a capability of newly articulating non-articulated and ontological chaos in the new form, and newly re-articulating in the level of consciousness differing from the ordinary experience.²⁵

For Izutsu, mysticism offers a new vision of the world. One newly recognizes the world through articulating the “world”. In the theory of self-disclosure in *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the absolute Existence articulates Itself into each existent (*mawjūd*) in the world. Through such limitation of the absolute Existence, an existent comes into existence with a thing (*shay’*) represented by the name of existence. When Sufis gaze at the world with an ordinary eye and a spiritual one, they know the ontological roots behind the world.

25 Ibid. 224.

As a result of acquiring new insight, Sufis argue a worldview or *Weltanschauung* based on mystical experience. However, it is well known that there is no Arabic terminology that means “experience”. In his or her mystical experience, transformation of one’s consciousness occurs; moreover, language is a tool for expressing such transformation. Concerning such verbalization of the experience, each language constructs a worldview reflecting its linguistic recognition of the world. Verbal expression in Sufism also demonstrates how Sufis articulate the world in words:

Mysticism means that one realizes directly oneself, that is, the true self or the true reality, and next comprehends the ultimate existence which manifests a special horizon of recognition of consciousness breaking the ground of self-consciousness.²⁶

Concerning the special horizon that Sufis acquire, there is a term, *dhū al-‘aynayn* meaning “one who has dual visions”. With one’s two eyes, one reaches the level of *dhū al-‘aynayn* by gazing at the visible world with one eye and the invisible world with the other eye. The perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) who obtains such insights knows how the world ontologically comes into existence.

Conclusion

After returning to Japan, Izutsu tries to construct his Oriental philosophy and argue its characteristics by referring to Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought. In his far-reaching plan of Oriental philosophy, he intended to construct the philosophy of the “world” called the Orient. Moreover, his Oriental philosophy indicated how he understood the characteristics of the Oriental way of articulating the world.

²⁶ Ibid. 223.

In the name of “synchronical structuralization” (*kyōjiteki kōzōka*), he tried to clarify a common structure of the existentialization of the world seen among philosophers in the Orient.

Izutsu’s idea of synchronical structuralization took on the characteristics of mysticism, as it was one of the reasons that led to his interest in mysticism and mystical philosophy throughout his life. However, he discovered the philosophical framework of Oriental philosophy from Ibn ‘Arabī’s *wahdat al-wujūd*, the mystical philosophy in Islām. In absorbing that philosophical framework, he started referring to the term “experience” in his study of mysticism and delineated the theoretical development from mysticism to mystical philosophy.

Most of all, Izutsu’s investigation of Sufism has led him to construct his Oriental philosophy through contemplating a transitive development from verbalizing mystical experience to theorizing it in the name of philosophy. Without encountering Sufism and thoroughly researching Ibn ‘Arabī, he would not have systematized the structure of his Oriental philosophy as we know it today.

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