

Do Time and Language Matter in IR? : Nishida Kitaro's non-Western discourse of philosophy and politics

Kosuke Shimizu

The Kyoto School of philosophy has recently come to be seen as one of the sources that gave rise to non-Western international relations (IR). Despite the high regard with which this philosophy is held, there is a dark side to the School's history; this is especially important in terms of critically engaging in IR as an academic discipline because it supposedly provides a cautionary tale to the contemporary literature of alternative IR theories, and non-Western IRT in particular. This paper strives to clarify Nishida Kitaro's involvement in the wartime regime with a particular focus on the inherent and contradictory relationship between being and language. I will do so by critically investigating Nishida's experience of involvement in the wartime regime by utilising his very concept of the eternal present. In other words, I will criticise Nishida's politics by employing his philosophy.

Key Words: Kyoto School, non-Western IR, language, time, ontology

While identity is one of the foci of analysis of world affairs, International Relations as an academic discipline (IR) has not paid sufficient attention to the concept of experience as a basis of identity making and its relation to the concept of time. However, once we thoroughly look into the concept of experience, it becomes clear that such concepts as language, time (and inevitably space) and identity are intertwined with the concept of experience, and the way

*Kosuke Shimizu(caatc105@gmail.com) is Professor of International Relations at Ryukoku University. An earlier version of this article was published in the bulletin of Sociology-cultural Research Institute of Ryukoku University. This research was supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (Kiban A 15H01855, C 21530139, C 24530185) and the Afrasian Research Centre at Ryukoku University. This research was previously presented at an international conference, "Glocal IR Knowledge Production and IR Scholarship in/of East Asia Today," which was supported by the Asia Research Fund in the year of 2017. The author would like to thank William Bradley, Navnita Behera, Barry Buzan, Ching-Chan Chen, Young Chul Cho, Linus Hagstrom, Josuke Ikeda, Chih-yu Shih, and anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

they relate with each other profoundly influences how we see and constitute the world.

There was a school of thought that tried to connect experiences and identity with the concept of time to politics in Japan before the World War II. They attempted to intervene the foreign policies of the imperial Japan in order to promote policies for co-existence of different nations by utilising their concepts of experience and identity. However, their attempt ended up with a devastating failure and resulted in providing justification for the aggressive expansion of Japanese imperialism (Shimizu 2011; 2014; Kobayashi 2013). This story tells us how difficult it is to convey non-hegemonic experience and identity into the discourse constructed on the hegemonic language without transforming it into a suitable identity, which is fixed and spatialised.

In this paper, I will argue that non-hegemonic IR theories must take seriously the power of hegemonic language and the concept of time for further development in the age of dynamic change and transformation. This is particularly so in the case of radical alternative based on particular non-hegemonic identities such as recently emerging 'non-Western IR'. I will argue here that non-hegemonic IR discourses may run the risk of reiterating the hegemonic IR in the form of focusing only on, and consequently unintentionally resulted in promoting, confrontational world image. I will take up Nishida Kitaro's involvement in the wartime regime in Japan with a particular focus on the contradictory relationship of experience, time and identity in this paper to draw a cautionary tale for alternative non-hegemonic IR theories. I will do so by critically investigating Nishida's experience of involvement in the wartime regime by utilising his very concept of the 'eternal present' [*Eien no Ima*]. In other words, I will criticise Nishida's politics by employing his philosophy. This attempt is indispensable for understanding the risk non-hegemonic IR involves because it illuminates the difficulty that even scholars with full consciousness of the tension between time/space and non-hegemonic/hegemonic identities easily fall into the pitfalls created by the temptation to spatialise the world on the basis of the essentialising hegemonic language.

PURE EXPERIENCE AND LANGUAGE

The Kyoto School of philosophy has recently come to be seen as one of the sources that inspire contemporary IR literature. Chris Goto-Jones's prominent work on Nishida Kitaro's philosophy (Goto-Jones 2009), and Graham Gerald Ong's application of 'emptiness' to IR theories (Ong 2004) are good examples.

Chih-Yu Shih's examination of Nishida's ideas is also worth noting here, insofar as it attempts to put Nishida's 'place of nothingness' into the context of contemporary IR (Shih 2012; 2017). Both the concepts of 'emptiness' and 'place of nothingness' here refer to a place or field in which what Nishida calls 'pure experience' [*junsui keiken*] takes place. Scholars interested in the Kyoto School philosophy in IR as well as other fields tend to focus on 'pure experience', which Nishida regarded as the core of being.

What is being? This is the question Nishida tried to answer. There have been many philosophers who tackled the same question regardless the regions in the past. Kant's *noumenon*, which 'must be cogitated not as an object of sense, but as a thing in itself', makes a typical example (Kant n.d.), and other influential philosophers include Plato, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Arendt, and most recently, Agamben (Agamben 1999; Arendt 1978; Heidegger, Stambaugh, and Schmidt 2010; Husserl 2008; Plato et al. 2016).

Nishida Kitaro, the leading figure of the Kyoto School, developed philosophy of being on the basis of pure experience. Nishida argues that what is essential in existence is experience. However, the concept of experience Nishida developed is not an experience we usually assume in everyday life. Rather it is 'pure' that means before any existence. He contends that it is not a human being that goes through experiences. It is rather experiences, which construct a human being (Nishida 1965b). There is no human beings prior to an experience, and the subject and the object are before the division in the 'pure experience'.

The pure experience does not have context or meanings. It is rather purely an experience without meanings. The experience is given meanings through the interpretation process of which language has importance. The process in which the pure experience is given meanings comes after, thus it becomes possible only retrospectively. While he presumed the existence of this essential element of the world, Nishida was skeptical of language's function to describe it, thus any explanation of it become inaccurate because that practice takes language. In fact, Nishida admits that the pure experience is rather unspeakable.

Whatever it is, a direct fact to us cannot be explained. Even if it is about reason, *Chokkakuteki Genri* [the principle of direct sense] as its foundation, cannot be explained. Explanation is a unified system to encompass everything within it. The centre of the system cannot be explained and we are blind to it (Nishida 1965a, 40).

For Nishida, this unexplainable and unspeakable experience is the most foundational truth of the world, and this unexplainable and unspeakable

truth takes place prior to any attempt to articulate it, and vanished when it is articulated. Thus, it is inherently temporal in its character. Nishida argues that any 'truth' scientific inquiries claim is not the truth. He maintains that the 'truth is personal and real', thus individual and concrete. Therefore, 'the perfect truth cannot be described in language' (Nishida 1965a, 37). In this sense, Nishida's desperate attempt to articulate the unspeakable and unexplainable with philosophical language was destined to fail from the beginning, and he was well aware of it (Kobayashi 2013, 28).

In fact, speaking of an unspeakable in the present tense was not an easy task, and this can be seen in such words in Nishida's philosophical writings as '*koiteki chokkan*' [action tuition], '*mu no basho*' [place of nothingness], '*eien no ima*' [eternal present], and '*zettai mujunteki jiko doitsu*' [self-identity of absolute contradiction], all of which Nishida invented in explaining the pure experience. Nishida's entire works were characterised by the repetition of similar explanations, slightly different from one another, and eventually fails to provide a precise representation. Kobayashi explains that Nishida was searching for a word to capture the essence of the being in the very process of philosophical writing, unlike the organised way of writing. In other words, his writings vividly illustrate his philosophical engagement, in which he was facing the problem of writing the pure experience in language in the very moment of writing (Kobayashi 2013).

PURE EXPERIENCE, ETERNAL PRESENT, AND POWER POLITICS

Despite the high regard with which this philosophy is held, there is a dark side to the Nishida's life; the incorporation with the wartime Japanese imperialism. This fact is especially important in terms of critically engaging in IR as an academic discipline because it supposedly provides a cautionary tale to the contemporary literature of alternative IR theories of non-hegemonic identity, which have been constructed on the basis of peculiar experiences on the margins.

In order for a detailed discussion of Nishida's incorporation of the wartime regime (Shimizu 2011), we need to comprehend his philosophy of time, the concept of eternal present in particular, and its relation to the pure experience. Nishida called the moment in which the pure experience takes place the 'present' [*ima*]. By definition, the present would not get intervened by context or language because it only becomes possible in retrospect. The present in its purist form is independent from the past or future and never gets controlled or influenced by them.

Nishida's concept of the present comes close to Bakhtin's concept of 'chronotope'. Bakhtin gives the name of the concept 'to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships'. It shows 'the inseparability of space and time', which he defines 'the fourth dimension of space' (Bakhtin n.d. loc.1306/6377). Like Bakhtin, Nishida sees the present where time and space are inseparable. However, while Bakhtin developed the 'chronotope' for the purpose of literary criticism thus his concept was deployed to describe the actuality in a particular space and time in order to explain the indescribability of it (Bakhtin n.d. loc.1312/6377), Nishida's '*ima*' was to inquire the meanings of the actuality by which identity is constructed.

The question of identity is precisely the reason why he developed his idea of eternity of *ima*, the present. If human beings are constructed every single moment of pure experience, how could one have an identity, which is presumably continuous? He/she could be a different person from one moment to another if there is no continuity in him/her. However, this continuity, which guarantees durable existence of the container-like existence of experiences must not be pre-given, otherwise the identity becomes fixed and the logic of pure experience would be denied. The pure experience is characterised by unexpectedness. If the container of the experience is pre-set, the experience is not 'pure' any longer. Nishida initially answered to this question with his idea of *mu no basho* [place or field of nothingness]. He argued that the place of nothingness encompasses everything within it but does not exist in a fixed form (Nishida n.d.). It is not a thing but rather a place or field. It is not a container but a place 'on' [*oite*] which pure experiences take place.

While the place of nothingness is a spatial expression, the eternal present is a temporal one. Nishida saw a logical limitation in the spatial expression of 'place' for the concept of pure experience. He tried to add a temporal dimension to it, and devised the concept of the 'eternal present'. By adding the temporal dimension to the 'place of nothingness', he emphasised the changing character of identity. For Nishida, identity will never be the same, but always changing in nature. This is because while the pure experience takes place 'on' what he formerly called the 'place', the experience construct and changes the form and character of the place. Therefore the place cannot be the same as the one a moment ago. This changing character of identity 'on' which a series of experience takes place is the reason Nishida put 'eternal' before the 'present'. It is not a mere present distanced from the past and future, but always continuous. This changing nature of identity is the key in understanding Nishida's political writings. To Nishida, the problem of the world constructed on the basis of hegemonic-language at that time is the fixity of and institutionalisation

of identities. The desire for accumulation of power and capital, which are obviously based on the simple assumption of continuity of the time, formed the imperialism and resulted in the First World War. However, history is not just about continuity, but one of discontinuity. Although each identity looks the same for certain period of time, it is subject to change every moment because of unexpected pure experiences. Nishida contends that imperialism ignores this fact and presumes that its identity never changes and forces other nations to be fixed as well. As a result, 'every nation under colonialist domination has been deprived of its world historical mission' [*sekaishiteki shimei*] to eventually form a peaceful region and world by transcending itself (Nishida 1966c, 429). Here, Nishida expected each nation to have flexible identity and meaning by itself through self-realisation reflecting upon its own experiences.

While Nishida's critique of the world of imperialism on the basis of his concept of time was clear and straightforward, his depiction of Japan as a political subject was rather ambiguous. In fact, Nishida's alleged efforts to change the Japanese government's political direction from the imperialist expansionism to a more harmonious world, with his idea of identity of ever-changing character, failed disastrously, as did attempts by his disciples. An article that Nishida wrote for Prime Minister Tojo's speech on the Great East Asian Co-prosperity Declaration upon request was, while substantially edited without Nishida's permission, used solely to justify the Japanese army's aggression toward the Asian continent. Nishida was extremely disappointed to hear Tojo's speech (Nishida 1966a) and later died in sorrow.

The draft he wrote for Tojo's speech was entitled 'The Principle of the New World Order', and it is well-known that there were three versions of it; the first which was submitted to the government, the second substantially revised by officers and used in the speech, and the third Nishida wrote after the speech in order to clarify his political position. Currently the second and third versions are available, while the first version has been lost and unable to be located (Arisaka 1996, 86).

Among those, the third version is most philosophical naturally. There were full of words he had invented in the process of philosophical engagement such as 'absolute present' or *zetai genzai* (another expression of the eternal present) and 'self-identity of absolute contradiction' in referring to *kokutai* [national polity] and the Emperor system (Nishida 1966c). On the other hand, the second version is overtly coloured with aggressive imperialist language. It states, for example, 'the Great East Asian War (against Britain and US) is a holy war to accomplish our duty of the world history' (Kawanishi 2005). However, there is no such word in the third version as 'Great East Asian War' or 'holy war'. The word he used in

the third version and found in this sentence of the second version is only 'world history' (Nakamura 1988, 42-43).

As mentioned above, Nishida did not simply intend to applaud the policies implemented by the hawkish government; rather, it is said that he wrote the draft 'in the hope that the government officials might learn something' from him (Arisaka 1996, 86) and hoping that they might change the course of action. However, the result was completely opposite. His writing was abused by the imperial regime and substantially changed to justify the aggressive foreign policies of Japan.

This is certainly a tragic story. He felt that he was deceived and betrayed by the government. However, our analysis does not end here. Probably even more intriguing than the abuse by the imperial government is the fact that he had to use even in the third version such words as 'state' and 'nation' in describing 'Japan' and its relation to the prevailing international order. With these words, he plainly states that only actor of the world is 'states' (Nishida 1966c, 427). When he refers to the world, it is always described as the aggregation of states whether they are conflictual or cooperative. For instance, Nishida writes in referring to the mission of the entire humanity in the increasingly globalising world;

I believe, today's world is in the era of global self-realization. Each state must realize its own world-historical mission, and they must constitute the world historical world or global world (Nishida 1966c, 427).¹

Nishida was arguing that the world was becoming one, not fragmented any longer. It was the beginning of a new era, and the imperialist thought together with communist thought as the counter movement to it should be overcome (Nishida 1966c, 427). What is striking here is, however, not about his utopian or romantic hope for the world becoming literally global, but the fact that he saw '*kokka*' [states] to be the only actor to constitute the world even in the case of this new era.

Interestingly, Nishida criticised the League of Nations for its unquestioned acceptance of the concept of state as the only constituting unit of the organisation. Nishida claimed that the Wilsonian League of Nations was

¹ Arisaka translates this sentence 'each nation [must] realize its world-historical mission; each nation must develop itself, yet at the same time it must negate itself and reach beyond itself to participate in building a global world'. Arisaka translates '*jiko ni sokushite*' into 'develop itself'. However, as *sokushite* in Japanese implies getting back to itself, I employed 'confirming' in this translation instead (Arisaka 1996, 101).

destined to fail from the beginning because of its assumption that world peace would be brought about by simply recognising independence and equality of nations [*minzoku*]. He maintained that each nation has a distinctive way of materialising its historical mission. The fact that the application of abstract idea of equality among independent states to all nations by pre-supposing that all states are the same is in any sense useless in solving the historical problems, and 'this has been proven by today's (Second) World War' (Nishida 1966c, 427-428).

While Nishida was critical of the League of Nation's presumption of peace assuming the standardized and timeless concept of nation-states and its easy application to all nations in constructing the League, Nishida never questioned whether the state should be the exclusive unit constituting the world. In other words, Nishida was well aware of the problem of standardization of the concept of state, he was not of the problem of meaning of presuming states to be the only actor, which inherently results in conceiving the world in terms only of geographical division.

Reflecting his state-centric and geographical understanding of the world, Nishida sees the division of 'West' and 'East' in an essentialised manner as well. This is particularly salient when it comes to the issue of 'culture'. Nishida equalises the expressions of the world to 'becoming one' with the 'integration of the East and West' (Nishida 1966b, 280-281). The 'cultures' of 'East' and 'West' are then connected to a series of dichotomies of 'Buddhist' / 'Christian', 'science' [*gaku*] / 'discipline' [*kyo*], 'material' [*mono*] / 'spiritual' [*kokoro*], while he continuously contends that we have to go beyond these divisions (Nishida 1966b, 281-289). The repeated use of the geographical dichotomies of the world related to the 'East and West' division evidently confirms Nishida's spatialised perception towards the world.

Nishida was in some ways forced to use the language of Westphalia, the language which exists with pre-set presumptions of geographical division, state sovereignty, nation-state as the main actor, autonomy and coherence within each state, and the legitimate use of violence of it. In fact, those who take part in analysing world affairs even today are forced to adopt the presumptions and dichotomies embedded in the state-centric language of Westphalia even if they are critical of current the state of world affairs.

This is a similar problem that Mustapha Pasha explains in the moment of subaltern's speech in IR.

The subaltern climbs to the surface as protest, yet often articulated only in the language of modernity. Marginality acquires speech, but only by adopting the rituals and syntax of hegemony. The subaltern does speak, but speaks in the

idiom of hegemony (Pasha 2013).

In order to get heard, anyone who tries to explicate or develop normative arguments on the basis of his/her identity protesting international relations must adopt the hegemonic language of IR. Nishida also had no choice in accepting the state-centric wording. Nishida slightly showed his resistance against the hegemonic discourse by turning upside down the concept of nation-state into 'state-nations' [*kokka minzoku*] by which he used the concept of 'state' as an adjective in the third, and probably the first too, draft of the Principle article. However, his attempt had been never recognised or understood by the government officials and consequently appeared in such words as *kaku kokka kaku minzoku* [each state and each nation] in the second version (Shimizu 2011, 169-170).

SPATIALISATION OF THE TEMPORAL EXPERIENCE FOR FIXED IDENTITIES

What is wrong with using state as a constituting unit of the world? According to Nishida's philosophy of eternal present, it limits our imagination of the world by spatialising the existence. By using any language, we are destined to spatialise everything. The language in general belongs to the past; this also means that the world is only seen in the form of what is already established materially. Therefore, using the Westphalian language, or any languages, in describing the world forces us to think of the world in terms of space. Henri Bergson makes a case:

We necessarily express ourselves by means of words and we usually think in terms of space. That is to say, language requires us to establish between our ideas the same sharp and precise distinctions, the same discontinuity, as between material objects. This assimilation of thought to things is useful in practical life and necessary in most of the sciences (Bergson 2001 loc.233/3666).

Words fortify the spatialised identities, and language provides a platform for fixation of relationship among them. With a spatialised perception on the basis of hegemonic language, we tend to see everything in a static manner and the relationship among the objects fixed.

Spatiality is overwhelming in many disciplines, IR is a typical case. The

subjectivity of the language of Westphalia, a spatializing language which presumes that state is the only unit constituting the world, is ontologically characterised by the strict and fixed geographical boundaries. In turn, this becomes the basis of dichotomies such as 'inside' and 'outside', 'self' and 'other', 'civilised' and 'barbarian', the 'West' and the 'Rest', 'order' and 'chaos', and 'friends' and 'foe'. The word 'Japan' as a state too tends to fix the identity of it, and draw it into relationship with other identities such as 'China' and 'US'. This relationship forces us not to see 'Japan' in its ever-changing contents and meaning, which are supposedly changing in every moment according to the philosophy of eternal present, but in its relationship with other states. The fixed identity of 'Japan' and relationship with other states become timeless, and 'Japan' or 'China' becomes a spatialised concept in terms of 'same sharp and precise distinctions, the same discontinuity' as between material and geographical objects as Bergson states.

Except for a few examples, the state-centric language of spatiality is widely regarded as pre-given in the IR community, and is rarely questioned for its biased view of global affairs (Darian and Shapiro 1989). Hutchings wrote, for instance, that 'Predominant academic modes of analysis and judgement of international politics in the period between 1945 and 1989 were overtly preoccupied with spatial rather than temporal relations' (Hutchings 1998). This is because IR scholarship has focused only on the 'spatial distribution of different power capabilities'. This spatial distribution of power was institutionalised, and thus became static and timeless. As a result, the space of international politics was 'thought of as frozen in time' (Hutchings 1998 loc. 241/4978). In other words, contemporary IR scholars are destined to socialise themselves in the language of spatiality in order to be heard and recognised by others.

Nishida's political narrative was an example of the mistaken belief that the world can be understood in the spatial terms instead of temporal ones, notwithstanding his philosophical engagement with temporality. Nishida's political writings were concentrated too much on the 'West/East' spatial division based on geopolitics, and never devoted enough time to investigating the undecidability of subject and identity in his political writings. In other words, his perception of the world in the political writings lacked the concept of time on the basis of the eternal present. Had he chosen to stick to the idea of the eternal present instead, he may have realised that geographical dichotomies such as 'West/East' and 'U.S./Japan' are themselves modern constructs of the language of spatiality, and are far from essential and pre-given entities. However, these dichotomies had been already unquestionably institutionalised in the society before Nishida's political discourse was developed, and thus closed off the

contingencies that might have changed his political views.

'NON-WESTERN' IR, THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS, AND THE STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN WORLD AFFAIRS

What sort of lessons for contemporary IR can we draw from Nishida's experience? In order to link the Nishida's tragic experience with 'non-Western' IR discourse, 'non-Western' IR should first be clarified. Broadly speaking, there are four possible categories in the discourse of recent developments in 'non-/post-Western' IR: (1) empiricist, (2) standpoint, (3) nationalist, and (4) 'post-Western' (Shimizu 2014). The empiricist outlook only highlights worldviews that are not traditionally 'Western'. This approach is the most basic form of 'non-Western' IR. This approach obviously takes the language of the Westphalian spatiality as pre-given. The second perspective – standpoint – aims to add a new dimension to contemporary IR. It aims to 'enrich' the discipline by including voices that Western mainstream discourses have long disregarded (Acharya 2014; Acharya and Buzan 2010). Again, this approach unquestionably adopts the space-centred language. Thirdly, the nationalist point of view is explicitly against Western domination over IR theory, and strives to replace it with a new vision of world order. National schools such as the Chinese and Korean Schools can be categorised here (Xuetong 2013; Zhao 2006). However, in terms of the analysis on the basis of language, this supposedly radical approach against the mainstream IR theories also seems to be conservative in a sense that it takes the language grounded in the spatialising perception towards the world as pre-given.

Lastly, 'post-Western' IR transcends contemporary IR by surpassing the spatial binary opposition of 'Western' versus 'non-Western'. This approach problematises 'the basic formulation and idiom of our query', and expresses a deep awareness of the problem of the language of Westphalia (Behera 2007, 342). 'Post-Western' approach is not merely meant to provide 'different' perceptions of the world, but also to focus on the intimate links between knowledge and power in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1972). Tickner and Wæver are, for example, very much aware of the power relations embedded in the practise of introducing 'other' views of the world to the audience in the centre. Accordingly, they try to avoid developing another way of 'speaking from the center'. They do so by claiming that it is imperative to 'actually know about the ways in which IR is practiced around the world, and to identify the concrete mechanisms shaping the field in distinct geo-cultural sites, a knowledge effort which must use theories drawn from sociology (and history) of science, post-

colonialism, and several other fields' in order to comprehend 'how the world is understood around the world' (Tickner and Wæver 2009, 1-2).² Similarly, Hamashita Takeshi develops his understanding of the world by focusing on the 'margins'. He argues that the world can be described differently when we see it from the margins where continuous changes in governance, domination, subjectivity, connections with others and social configurations are the norm (Hamashita 1994).

Among the newly developed discourses of 'non-/post-Western' IR, the third perspective – sometime referred to as 'national schools' – is most similar to the experience of Nishida. In fact, it seems that Nishida shares some of its features with the nationalist approaches. First, Nishida and nationalist 'non-Western' IR share the constructivist attitude of idealism in that the ideal state of affairs could and should be applied to the international context; this will lead to a stable, enduring, and new global order. Underlying this assertion is the assumption that at the time of Nishida, the world was becoming unstable, largely due to the rapid restructuring of the prevailing order; meanwhile, the Western hegemony was gradually losing its power. In a similar vein, it is said of the contemporary world that relative decline of the US hegemony is gradually becoming visible (Alagappa 2011, 217).

Secondly, Nishida and national schools of IR explicitly maintain an anti-'Western' stance. Nishida contends that the world is dominated and harshly exploited by the 'Western' imperial powers. He also argues that instability of the world can be explained by the limitations of 'Western' modernity and rationalism, which should be challenged by non-hegemonic political thought. Similarly, there is a perception in the discourse of national schools that 'Western' IR, mainly North American, dominates local knowledge of IR and world politics. For instance, there have been numerous conferences and symposiums held to develop distinctive Chinese IR since the 1990s, and 'Chinese scholars who have participated in the conferences in China seem to occupy the same nationalist context as their predecessors, who addressed the intrusion of Western influences' (Wang 2013, 521). It is also important to mention that Korean scholars have long wished to liberate themselves from Western intellectual domination (Cho 2014). The underlying perception which penetrates these arguments is that the limits of Western modernity and rationalism emanate, at least partially, from inherent violent tendencies embedded in the predominant order, as well as a total lack of morality. Scholars in this camp share the view that imperialism supports the prevailing world order, and that excessive competition and conflicts are

² A similar approach was also taken by Robbie Shilliam (Shilliam 2011).

inevitable.

Thirdly, both Nishida and the national schools are supposedly 'history'- and/or 'culture'-centred in the sense that Nishida and the contemporary national schools develop discourses of the world according to a nation-based identity with a distinctive 'history' and 'culture'. Like the philosophy of world history formed by Nishida and his disciples in the Kyoto School, the national schools frequently refer to the identity with 'historical [*rekishiteki*] and cultural [*bubkateki*] uniqueness' of their own countries. Nishida wrote in philosophical writings, for instance, that 'history' [*rekishi*] and 'culture' [*bunka*] are constructed on the basis of experience and the transcending truth, and they together construct the distinctive Japaneseness. 'History' and 'culture' as products of a series of pure experiences form a methodology to come close to the truth. We can only come to understand our identity and to create our perception towards the world by comparing our 'history' and 'culture' with others' (Nishida 1966b). However, Nishida sees 'history' and 'culture' of Japan in his political writings to be fixed and pre-given.

Similarly David Kang contends 'identity is more than merely the sum of domestic politics; it is a set of unifying ideas that focus primarily how a nation perceives the world around it and its place with it (Kang 2007, 9). As noted above, Chinese IR scholars often look at the sources of China's identity in 'China's cultural traditions, foreign policy practices, New China's diplomatic experiences, and Marxist doctrine' (Wang 2013, 21). In a similar vein, Korean scholars have strived to establish a national school based on their alleged 'distinctive' historical experiences. Young Chul Cho contends that there has been a persistent call to establish a distinctive Korean School of IR since the 1950s (Cho 2014). Korean scholars are relying on the historical ontology, by which they supposedly provide an important contribution to the existing knowledge of IR. The Korean School's underlying motivation can be found in the enduring desire for independence from 'Western' dominance in Korea's intellectual sphere. The Korean School of IR 'must be established in order to academically improve South Korean knowledge production for global scholarship, to raise the dignity of IR scholars in South Korea while preventing their intellectual Western dependency (colonialism), and to protect the country's national interest in regional and global politics' (Cho 2014).

That the national school scholars adhere to the difference and distance in spatiality between Western civilisation and non-Western states and regions is closely related to how they use language to understand the world. Since 'non-Western' nations, and Asian countries in particular, purportedly have different 'cultures' and 'histories' from those of the 'West', they presumably have a unique

ontological quality.

However, national schools' identities are solely characterised by a materialistic and spatialised perception and lacks a sufficient attention to the concept of time. The dynamic nature of culture and history on the basis of temporality were missing in the discourses of national schools of IR like Nishida's discourse of political philosophy. As a result, national schools' political contentions are exclusively static and spatial. Their perceptions towards the world are set in the frozen time, thus what they provide us are only snapshots of the world from their standpoints. As a result, their view towards the world only contains materialised form of culture and history instead of the dynamic and ever changing nature of them.

The Chinese School is typical in that it places a special emphasis on such unconventional ontological components as the tributary system (Kang 2007; Kang and Kang 2010), a system of ancient Chinese governance (Zhao 2006), or the Chinese concept of relationality, *guanxi* (Qin 2010; 2011), but never questioned their static perception towards identity and ontology. As a result, all the possible ontological components are frozen in time. In other words, they see the world consisted only of nation-states to be unchangeable.

The scholars of national schools uncritically accept the nation-state as the exclusive agency of international relations; this evidently illustrates that the language they use is on the basis of the language of the Westphalia of spatiality, and thus no different from the mainstream IR theories in terms of static ontology. The national schools spatialise their unique and peculiar experiences into the world of nation-state by focusing on the supposedly appropriate geographical division, and draw a map in which the divided subjectivities maintain strict boundaries. As the language of the Westphalia presupposes the existence of the nation-state prior to investigating the present, perceptions of national schools' scholars are profoundly influenced by the past.

Nishida saw 'Japan' as having a pre-international existence in their political thinking when it comes to his political writings, while the Chinese or Korean Schools viewed identities of 'China' or 'Korea' as being pre-given and essential. All these ontological types of existence supposedly capture the firm ontological status of the countries involved, which enjoy the privilege of that status.

As a result, there is a persistent contradiction in 'non-Western' IR discourses' arguments between the purpose of transcending the Westphalian system and their ontological presumption. The Chinese School's insistence on a Sinocentric formulation of future IR is a typical example. They are understandably enthusiastic in criticising the violent character of Western modernity (which appears to be a rational international order, but is in fact supported by a violent

imperialist system) while they articulate an allegedly new global structure based on *tianxia*, in which they view the China-centred international system of hierarchy as superior to the Westphalian structure. In fact, they give the readers an impression that they implicitly presuppose the China rising as pre-given, which would replace the US hegemony someday in the near future. Here we find the intimate relationship between knowledge and power. In any sense, their version of IR is not very different from the Kyoto School's view of the world (Chen 2012, 477). In fact, the concept of *tianxia* is similar to Nishida's theory of world history, which was after all deployed by Japan's imperialist government to justify its invasion of the Asian continent (Nishida 1966c; Shimizu 2011).

BRING TIME BACK IN

The problem of pre-given and fixed identity and ontology is not limited to the national schools of course. Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics*, for example, has the same problem; Wendt states:

I want to show that states are ontologically prior to the states system. The state is pre-social relative to other states in the same way that the human *body* is pre-social. Both are constituted by self-organizing internal structures, the one social, the other biological (Wendt 1999, 198).

Wendt's explication of pre-given existence of human 'body' prior to society is precisely the case in point. Body is a fixed existence, but it does not necessarily mean that identity is unchangeable. However, when we analyse a nation-state, let's say Japan, in the IR discourse, we are not dealing with Japan as a bodily existence, besides there is not such thing as Japan's physical body as it is in any sense a social construct. When we said 'Japan', we usually refer to the abstract meaning and identity of it. The concept of eternal present tells us that identity and meaning are constructed in every moment through pure experience.

Extracting the abstract meaning of a particular identity out of the fixed bodily existence would close off two different but related possibilities. One is a possibility to see diversity and changes within the identity of a conventional actor. 'Japan', 'US' or 'China' are not unchangeable in contents, but always in the process of construction, which may be affected by unexpected encounter to pure experience domestically and internationally. Thus, 'Japan' in this moment is not Japan with abstract identity and meaning, but a bodily existence which experiences full of unexpected encounters. Nishida's failure in conveying his idea

of pure experience into political discourse precisely lies here. Nishida took 'Japan' with an abstract meaning and identity as pre-given. However, his philosophy tells another that any identities are open to pure experience, and an identity only exists in the form of 'continuity of discontinuity' thus always subject to change.

This is not limited to nation-states. Even if we are to focus on marginalised identities and try to explicate the world from that perspective, the problem of spatialisation stays the same. In fact, Japan before the Russo-Japan War in 1904-5 regarded itself as a marginalised and non-hegemonic nation, and Japanese of the time felt that they were on the margin of the world. It is only after the 'victory' over Russia, Japan started to consciously consider themselves as a part of the international community, and later turned into the aggressive imperialist phase (Hirama 2010). The danger of spatialisation of experience and fixing identity is thus ubiquitous, and could take place whether it is of hegemonic identity or non-hegemonic. What is considered to be important in taking into account temporality is an unceasing practice of reflecting upon pure experience every moment.

Second, it also closes off a possibility of IR discourse to look at unconventional actors and elements which possibly affect the process of constructing the state as well as the world. If we only look at the world in terms of space that it is constituted only of nation-states as Nishida's political writings did, we eliminate the possibility of taking into account the meaning of the present, thus experiences of non-conventional actors altogether. Again, this is also a reason why Nishida's political writings were coloured by Westphalian expressions of geographical division. While Nishida's philosophical enterprise was explained with religious, artistic, literary, and poetic expressions, his political works are filled with such words as nation, state, national polity, and the imperial household.

If we are to transcend the hegemonic 'Western' IR, alternative theories should be based on a concept of inclusiveness, an open system for all countries and cultures, and therefore open to the 'others'. For the sake of inclusiveness, we must continuously question the language of the Westphalian system we are using. However, this inclusiveness cannot be materialised only by criticising 'Western' theories of exclusiveness, or emphasising the 'non-Western' nations' different identities from the 'Western'. Rather it should be done by directly approaching to the present and pure experiences.

Pure experience is, as noted above, unspeakable in Nishida's philosophy of being, therefore we cannot grasp the pure experience as it is in words. However, we can search for expressions coming close to it. What are they in IR? As the investigation becomes even more philosophical and well beyond the scope of this

article, it would not be possible to provide a concrete research programme here. However, there are some suggestions with which we can develop our analysis of time in IR.

First, interestingly, Nishida sees poetry as the closest expression to the pure experience (Nishida 1965a, 86). Similar understanding of poetry approaching to reality can be found in Aristotle, Heidegger and Arendt too (Arendt 1978, 8). It seems that poetry has some potentialities in reformulating the study. This is because poetry is supposedly directly connected to the sense. Nishida states that ‘poet directly recognise’ [*Chokkaku*] the ‘source of phenomena’ [*hongenteki gensho*] (Nishida 1965a, 86), thus comes close to a thing in itself. This is also the case in IR. We often disregarded the experiences of non-IR scholars, which are expressed in the form of arts, poetry, novels, songs and the like, despite their approximations to pure experience. Therefore, an analysis to take into account the unconventional dimensions to the world such as arts should be welcomed.

Second, as Nishida’s philosophy is substantially influenced by Buddhism, we can learn something from it. In fact, recently some interesting attempts started in the IR community to bring Buddhist thought into IR theorisation (Ling 2016). Among those interesting and suggestive ideas in Buddhism, *koan* would be most relevant in our investigation of identity and time. *Koan* is a Zen-Buddhist practice of dialogue. It sometimes appears in the form of ‘an absurdity, paradox, or *non sequitur*’ (Ling 2016, 2). This unconventional style of dialogue disturbs the conventional use of language, and reminds the practitioners the fragility and unfixedness of identity. Thus, *koan* seems to have some potentiality in approaching to pure experience. In IR, this means to stop disregarding discourses, which appears to be irrational, and take them into our analysis of the world sincerely as they may show the most approximate expressions of the eternal present.

In any case, if we were to transcend the hegemonic theories of IR, we must start our enterprise by seriously considering spatiality and temporality and looking into unconventional discourses and narratives even if they do not look rational. In doing so, the concept of eternal present would become a substantial help.

CONCLUSION

What can we say about non-Western IR literature on the basis of our understanding of the experience of Nishida and the Kyoto School? First, inclusivity and openness are definitely goals worth pursuing. However, it is

certainly too naïve to say that simply introducing different non-hegemonic identities and ideas at the abstract level into the IR discourse will automatically solve the problems, which emanate from the hegemonic perception towards the world. As Nishida's experience and that of his disciples suggests, knowledge and intellect are always in danger of being abused by the prevailing power structures and the spatializing power of language. This especially seems to be the case when dynamic ideas of peace and inclusiveness on the basis of the concept of time are forced to be articulated in the state-centric language of Westphalia. Nevertheless, we are obliged to articulate what we see and what it should be even if our perception is based on a non-hegemonic identity. We need to consciously and critically engage with IR with regard to such inherently spatialising geopolitical concepts as Japan, China, and the West.

Second, the concepts of time, language, and identity should be taken seriously in understanding the contemporary world. Involving concept of time in our analysis makes our perception towards the world more dynamic and ever-changing, the new generation of IR theories on the basis of time would benefit those who have been regarded as residing outside of IR or simply irrational 'others' to the IR 'self'. This is because the introduction of the concept of time would allow us to reconfigure the world by breaking away from the past institutions and establishments. This in turn leads us to question the pre-given identity of the privileged 'self', and contribute to critical engagement with IR. However, again we must remain conscious that even the identities of the current 'others' may easily turn into another future 'self' if it lacks the concept of the eternal present. In any case, an engagement with IR without a thorough understanding of time would run the risk of getting abused by the hegemonic discourse.

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