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A Non-Western Attempt at Hegemony: Lessons from the Second-Generation Kyoto School for International Pluralism and Its Discontents

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In an age of relative Western decline, international relations (IR) scholars and practitioners can learn from Japan's attempt to re-envision world order in an earlier era of relative European decline. In both periods, an apparently pluralistic, relational ontology of IR has been articulated by East Asian thinkers. However, a closer examination of the philosophical underpinnings of these Confucian frames reveals a hierarchical, culturalist reasoning. Under conditions of heightened militarism, this tension can lead to another tension between pluralism in theory and universalism in practice. In the case of 1940s Japan, it informed and legitimized an exceptionalist mission civilisatrice and imperialistic expansion. The takeaway for our current age of "Western" decline and "non-Western" rise is that we must resist any utopian temptation emanating from any ethical system, not least Confucian hierarchical relationality, to say "we will save the world."

Dans une ère de déclin relatif de l'Occident, les chercheurs et professionnels des Relations internationales (RI) ont des leçons à tirer de la tentative japonaise de révision de l'ordre mondial lors d'une ère antérieure de déclin relatif de l'Europe. Au cours de ces deux périodes, une ontologie relationnelle, a priori pluraliste, des RI a été articulée par les penseurs de l'Asie de l'Est. Cependant, une analyse attentive des fondations philosophiques de ces cadres confucéens révèle un raisonnement culturaliste hiérarchique. Dans un contexte de militarisme accentué, cette tension peut en engendrer une autre, entre pluralisme en théorie et universalisme en pratique. Dans le cas du Japon des années 1940, elle a renseigné et légitimé une mission exceptionnaliste d'expansion civilisatrice et impérialiste. La conclusion à tirer de l'ère actuelle de déclin « occidental » et d'essor « non occidental » est que nous devons résister à toute tentation utopique émanant de systèmes éthiques, notamment de la relationalité hiérarchique confucéenne, de dire « nous sauverons le monde ».

En una época de relativo declive de Occidente, los investigadores y profesionales del campo de las RRII pueden aprender del intento de Japón de replantear el orden mundial en una época anterior de relativo declive europeo. En ambos periodos, los pensadores de Asia Oriental han articulado una ontología aparentemente pluralista y relacional de las relaciones internacionales. Sin embargo, un examen más detallado de los fundamentos filosóficos de estos marcos confucianos revela un razonamiento jerárquico y culturalista. En condiciones de intensificación del militarismo, esta tensión puede dar lugar a otra tensión, entre el pluralismo teórico y el universalismo que tiene lugar en la práctica. En el caso del Japón de la década de 1940, este inspiró y legitimó una misión civilizadora excepcionalista y una expansión imperialista. La conclusión que se extrae con respecto a nuestra época actual de declive «occidental» y ascenso «no occidental» es que debemos resistir cualquier tentación utópica que emane de cualquier sistema ético, sobre todo de la relacionalidad jerárquica confuciana, en el sentido de decir «vamos a salvar el mundo».

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing debate about the nature of relationality and morality in East Asian international relations (IR) in response to the decline of the Western hegemony. Among these, the arguments of the Chinese school are particularly noteworthy. As Russia's prestige is seemingly diminished by the conflict in Ukraine, China's presence has become even more prominent and cannot be ignored in terms of a struggle for hegemony. Any of such anti-hegemonic discourses, including non-Western and global IR discourses in the contemporary period, often require the presentation of values different from those accepted in the mainstream IR, such as relationality and morality (Yan 2011, 2019; Zhang 2011; Qin 2016; Zhao 2019). Indeed, relationality and morality appear to be the indispensable keywords in the Chinese school discourse.

The Kyoto School, the leading school of prewar Japanese philosophy, developed a highly sophisticated variety of existentialism that aimed to combine Buddhism and Western philosophy, which is also regarded as one of the responses that gave exclusive focus to relationality and morality. A central figure in this school is Nishida Kitaro, who developed his philosophy on the basis of Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism (Nishida 1948). While Nishida's philosophy had a very strong tendency toward plurality based on fluid and impermanent subjectivity due to Buddhist influences and consequently focusing more on people's concrete lives, the second generation (also known as the "Kyoto School Big Four": Nishitani Keiji, Kosaka Masaaki, Koyama Iwao, and Suzuki Shigetaka) inherited his ideas but, on the contrary, steered in the direction of denying plurality and the fluidity of subjectivity due mainly to their exclusive focus on the West/East confrontation in the age of the decline of Europe (Kosaka et al. 1943; Shimizu and Noro 2021).

The second generation developed a distinctive interpretation of the world, a "philosophy of world history," which presupposes a transcendental existence (transcendental One), similar to *tianxia* often found in Confucian discourse on contemporary IR (Zhao 2019) under which a plurality of actors in IR are supposedly guaranteed. Like the contemporary counterparts, the second generation of the Kyoto School also eagerly promoted, on the surface, a plurality of world politics in their philosophical discourses. While the second generation ostensibly inherited Nishida's pluralist philosophy, they assumed that the transcendental One preceded relationality and argued that this concept of transcendentality, which supposedly encompasses plurality, was

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embodied in the form of Japan as a nation state in their identity politics against the West. However, there was a serious tension in their discourses. In order for this theoretical plurality to be reflected in actual foreign policy, an actor is in need to implement that policy. The second generation assumed that this actor was Japan and forced the rest of the world to see Japan as the leader of the world. For them, it was argued, this leadership role of Japan was nothing but destiny, and this destiny was missioned by the history, the transcendental One.

This study attempts to answer the question of why the second generation abandoned the fluid image of the subject initially posited by Nishida and essentialized it in the context of the West/East dichotomy. It then discusses what this means for contemporary non-Western IR/global IR discourse. Essentializing the subject, whether accompanying such concepts as relationality or morality, inevitably leads us to confrontation and conflict. To avoid this, we need a rigorous study of relationality, morality, and subjectivity. In this study, I will first contrast Confucianism and Buddhism to clarify the difference between fluid and fixed relationalities and their relationship to time. Second, I will explain the difference between Nishida's philosophy and the second generation of the Kyoto School in particular. Third, I will explain in detail the philosophical claims of the second generation and their political applications of their existentialism to the era of the decline of the European hegemony. Fourth, through unpacking this historical attempt at non-Western hegemony, I will address the problem of the inherent tension in "non-Western" and global IR discourses.

The Ambivalent Relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism in Contemporary IR Theory

In recent years, there has been a growing debate about the nature of relationality and morality in IR. Among those, the Chinese School of IR is the main focus in the context of the contemporary hegemonic transition. This trend, represented by Qin Yaqing's theory of relationality, has attracted a great deal of attention worldwide as an alternative to mainstream IR theory (Qin 2016, 2018) and appears to be strongly correlated with the decline in US hegemony. This is because the search for such alternatives began after 2000, when the relative decline in US hegemony became apparent to IR scholars with such phenomena as the failure of US military intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and more recently the conflict in Ukraine, as well as the unexpected speed of "China Rising."

What then are the relational theories that the Chinese School of IR advocates? Relational theories, in contrast to the image of actors with fixed identities assumed by mainstream IR theory, emphasize relationships between actors and argue that actors' identities are constructed according to their relationships with others (Jackson and Nexon 1999; Townsell et al. 2021). When it comes to the hegemonic issue, this type of theories is understood as an alternative to the mainstream IR theory, particularly in the context of the "China Rising" (Yan 2011; Zhao 2012; Qin 2016).

As this study shows, in the critiques of "Western subjectivism"—generally exemplified by the Kantian autonomous individual—a focus on relationality, in the context of the hegemonic decline and the discourse of China Rising in particular, is a strategy that has been deployed by Chinese school scholars to establish a non-Western identity. Despite the growing interest in diverse relational theories including Andean relatedness, indigenous knowledge, Hindu cosmology, South African ubuntu, Daoist dialectics, and Buddhist engi (Behera 2007; Ling 2013; Querejazu 2016; Kavalski 2018; Dikeledi Madise Dadise and Isike 2019; Nordin et al. 2019; Behr and Shani 2021; Reddekop 2021; Shani and Behera 2021; Shimizu 2021; Townsell et al. 2021), the contentions of Chinese school scholars are not overly complicated. In fact, contemporary relational theories of the Chinese school are mainly characterized by the simple fact that they initiated the explicit use of the term "relationality," with a strong emphasis on its entailed morality, and articulated the shift in focus from actors to relations. Nevertheless, the development of relational theory has had a significant impact on IR and may well lead to substantial changes in future theories.

It is important to note that although this modern relational theory naturally emphasizes the importance of relationships, the concept of relationality itself has not been adequately analyzed. Instead, the only point that is actually highlighted in the discourse of relational IR theory is that more attention should be paid to relationality, not to actors (Qin 2020). This type of argument does not adequately explain what is meant by a relationality and what types of relationalities are included that represent core questions of the most recent relational understanding of the contemporary world (Querejazu 2021; Shih 2021; Shimizu and Noro 2021).

Confucian discourse, as typically represented by Qin, is based on the assumption that actors strive to maintain good relations embedded in a given hierarchy by fulfilling their assigned roles. Therefore, the relationships identified in Confucianism can be defined as those between roles in which they are embedded in a certain hierarchy. It is this moment that produces the idea of morality. Those who uphold and promote the existing hierarchy are regarded as having moral agency. Qin also assumes a relationality before the state, arguing that all states actively seek to maintain good relations with each other. The stability of this order is prioritized over rapid progress and evolution. Therefore, it is argued that each actor in this good relation may sacrifice short-term interests to maintain long-term relationships, and that is regarded as morally right (Qin 2018).

Qin's Confucian theory of IR seems naturally compatible with Zhao's theory of *tianxia* (Zhao 2012). This is because Confucian IR theory presupposes hierarchy, and the theoretical development that relationships are embedded in this hierarchy simultaneously presupposes that the whole is well orchestrated by a transcendental One, *tianxia*. Conversely, if a leader fails to maintain the hierarchy, and thus a satisfactory order, then the mandate of heaven granted to him/her is denied. For the same reason, it makes sense that Yan's humane authority, which is based on morality instead of power and profoundly influenced by Confucianism, emphasizes the moral aspect of governance (Yan 2011, 2019). Thus, the emphasis on the normative aspect in Confucian IR theory implicitly posits that Western IR theory is morally inadequate because of its excessive concentration on the autonomous subjectivity and assumed rationalism. This appears to be similar to the second-generation Kyoto School's emphasis on moral energy and its contention that the Western modernity is facing a dead end because of its lack of focus on the moral aspect of world affairs. As will be discussed, the second generation's contention of the moral superiority was, intentionally or unintentionally based largely on Confucian relationality, and this became one of the reasons for their assumption of fixed subjectivity assumption.

In the same Eastern thought tradition, Buddhism, especially Mahāyāna Buddhism, defines relationality in a more

spontaneous and contingent way. Relations here are not embedded in social structures and inevitably take different forms. This is because Mahāyāna Buddhism is based on the premise of the impermanence of all things, a presumption called "the emptiness," or *Ku*. In Mahāyāna context, human relationships and even social structures are not fixed. In other words, relationships themselves have no purpose. Confucian relationality is aimed at maintaining social order, while Mahāyāna Buddhist relationality is merely the result of chance (Izutsu 1991; Minami 2018).

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the focus is not on maintaining the existing order or explaining what is happening but on liberating people from suffering. The world is full of suffering: fear of death, loss of wealth and power, loss of loved ones, getting old, and becoming sick. Mahāyāna Buddhism tells us that we need to accept that the world is never fixed and is always changing. However, we have a desire to fix and hold things in place. Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches that this ego attachment by which we secure ourselves is the source of suffering. To accept the fact of impermanence and to be free from suffering, we need to eliminate all our attachments (Sueki 2006, 2014, 2020), This is unlike the subjectivity of IR, which from the outset is essentialized and supposed to protect its attachments.

The Mahāyāna teachings say that even our identity is not fixed, and the intuitive belief that we have an identity is ultimately just an illusion. Like all things that are supposed to be impermanent, our identity is impermanent. Rather, the illusion of our self-rule is built up moment by moment and then disappears. Thus, there is no foreseeable future, no remembered past, and only the present (Nishida 1948; Sueki 2006).

Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches us to accept the reality of flux and live with it. The idea that we exist is based on an original Buddhist theory of *engi* relationality, which holds that relationships arise moment by moment. Each moment a relationship arises, a self is born and dies, and it appears as if the self is continuously present. To accept this fact, we must abandon the idea that we have an essence. Rather, we are nothing: *mu*. Understanding and accepting this nothingness is the only way to avoid suffering. Such an understanding of the world inevitably involves respect for plurality. This is because the denial of the self implies respect for the others, and in this sense affirms a diversity of ways of life.

The philosophy of the first generation of the Kyoto School, Nishida Kitaro and Tanabe Hajime, was based on this idea. They saw the world as fluid and impermanent. Their engagement in philosophy was to integrate this ontological claim of Mahāyāna Buddhism into the philosophical tradition of the West. In doing so, they tried to clarify the meaning of consciousness, relationality, and morality. Although, to this day, it remains contentious whether their attempt was successful, it is evidently clear that their philosophical engagement was under the profound influence of the Mahāyāna Buddhist idea of spontaneous relationality and fluid subjectivity. This type of understanding of subjectivity has also attracted some recent attention in the contemporary non-Western IR literature. L.H.M Ling's focus on Daoism, Hagström and Bremberg's Aikido and IR, and Shimizu and Noro's investigation of Buddhist ontology are good examples (Ling 2013; Shimizu and Noro 2020; Hagström and Bremberg 2022).

However, when this idea is used specifically in the context of identity politics against the West, it easily becomes essentialized in reverse. In doing so, the second generation chose Confucian hierarchical understanding of the world and strived to provide an alternative international order since Buddhism is essentially anti-order as it denies any existence prior to relationality including a world order. Whereas the first generation, such as Nishida, emphasized Buddhist, or transitory, relationality, the second generation assumed Confucian, or hierarchically embedded, relationality. In the next section, I will focus on the Kyoto School's philosophy to clarify the political significance of these two theories.

The Active Involvement of the Second Generation in the War

The first and second generations, while both taking relationality seriously, differed in their application of it to world politics. How did they differ in their involvement in politics? It is often said that Nishida's thought is a combination of Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism, both of which emphasize nothingness and consider time to be neither linear nor cyclical, but only the present. These Buddhist schools teach that the world does not move in a fixed direction but is made up of relationships that only contingently appear in the present moment. The reason why Nishida adapted Buddhism in his philosophical engagement was his tragic life, having a difficult relationship with his parents and losing his family members early. His philosophy was, thus, mainly to ease the pain and sorrow of people as well as himself. In other words, Nishida's Buddhist philosophy was the product of concrete "life," and it was meaningless if it did not contribute to concrete people. What mattered to him was not the confrontation of such abstract existence as the West/East, but the existence of concrete people in pain. However, the second generation focused on the totality of the world. Here, the idea of wholeness is expressed in the form of history, where the individual is considered to be a manifestation of the whole. In other words, the first generation assumed that everything in the world was contingent, whereas the second generation had a deterministic view of the world in which everything was predetermined by the transcendental One, that is, by history. This is the reason why the second generation's argument approaches the cyclical temporality of Confucianism with its hierarchical assumptions that supposedly guarantee more stable order than that of the Western modernity. The "present" in this context is a self-manifestation of the whole and therefore can only be meaningful as a site at which the existing order is reproduced (Kosaka et al. 1943).

The relevance of Nishida's philosophy to the war has already been discussed by certain scholars (Goto-Jones 2005; Shimizu 2021, 2015, 2018); thus, I will only give a brief account here. Nishida assumes that the subject and the object occur simultaneously, and that spontaneous and contingent relations cause their occurrence, as in Buddhist teaching. Nishida's question was how a temporary subject arising from such a relationship could have a sense of self. Nishida's answer was offered in relation to the concepts of nothingness, such as the place of nothingness, action intuition, eternal present, and self-identity of absolute contradiction, all of which arise from his initial interest in "pure experience." Nishida developed these concepts and ideas in order to get in touch with the absolute truth of human existence, in other words, "being" or nothingness, on the assumption that everything is in flux. It is important to note here that in Nishida's Buddhist philosophy, order was not as important as understanding the reality that ultimately relieves people's pain.

The second generation of the Kyoto School studied at Kyoto Imperial University under the strong influence of

the first generation, Nishida and his colleague Tanabe Hajime, and developed the "philosophy of world history." The most striking feature of the Big Four was that they were more actively involved in politics than Nishida and Tanabe. Nishida's engagement with philosophy was more personal and came about from a series of tragic events. Tanabe was more socially oriented than Nishida but had a certain hesitancy in his engagement with imperialism. However, the philosophy of the second generation had a clear social and political orientation. It involved a thorough and critical analysis of various Western ideas such as liberalism, capitalism, and democracy, and in the end, the impasse presented by Western modernity for further civilization and development was brilliantly critiqued (Kawakami and Kosaka 1979).

It is indisputable that the Big Four justified not only the armed conflict against the United States and China during the Second World War, but also Japan's territorial expansion in Asia, and that they supported the imperialist system. In fact, after the war, they were punished as war criminals for their collaboration with imperialism. The extent to which they intended to cooperate with the government is still hotly debated, but there can be no doubt that they were ardent supporters of the Second World War.

The Political Philosophy of the Second Generation

What, then, is the political philosophy of the second generation? They believed that the greatest problem of Western civilization was moral decay. The result, they argued, was the global crisis of the First World War and the Great Depression. To overcome this crisis, they argued that a new, morally superior world leader, Japan, was needed and that Japan must first become the leader of Asia to confront Western domination and transcend the West. Thus, from early on, the arguments of the second generation were based on the assumption of the fall of the European civilization. Conversely, their arguments were exclusively aimed at transcending the hegemony of the West, and the issue of people's pain, which was the main target of the first generation, rarely came up in their discussions (Kosaka et al. 1943).

When the involvement of the second generation in the war is analyzed, two specific roundtables are usually the main focus: "Overcoming Modernity" and "World Historical Standpoint and Japan." The former was organized in July 1942 by the literary magazine *Bungakukai* in two separate meetings with novelists, artists, and musicians. Nishitani and Suzuki were among the members of the second-generation Kyoto School to take part. "World Historical Standpoint and Japan" was organized by another magazine, *Chuo Koron*, and was held three times between November 1941 and November 1942.

Under the strict censorship of the militarist regime, there were only two choices for intellectuals who were not in favor of the war against the West: remaining silent so as not to face interference from the police or the government or presenting a different worldview, hijacking the meaning of propagandistic concepts such as "*Hakko-Ichiu*" (eight corners under one roof) and "*Kokutai*" (national polity). Tanabe chose the silence and Nishida did the hijacking. The choice of the second generation, however, was neither of the silence nor of hijacking. The tone of their political discourse was rather positive and ambitious. There was little hesitation or vacillation in supporting the wartime regime. Koyasu describes the attitude of the second generation at the time as "manic" (Koyasu 2008, 69). For them, Japan, in contrast to the West, was the embodiment of morality, and confronting Western modernity was not only inevitable but also desirable.

If we read the arguments of the second generation in detail, they certainly appear to be manic. Regarding the outbreak of war against the United States, they exult, saying that they had been waiting for this moment. They enthusiastically supported the war, going so far as to say that Japan had finally "achieved what had seemed impossible" (Kosaka et al. 1943, 139). For them, the outbreak of war was not something of concern but something to be celebrated. This was probably because they firmly believed in Japan's "historical mission" to change the world on the basis of "the new moral energy of the East," which supposedly promote the coexistence of different traditions (Kosaka et al. 1943, 138). Was it reasonable, then, for them to believe that Japan was on that "historical mission"?

Certainly, phrases such as "world history" and "historical mission" appear frequently in their discourse. The fervent debate was based on two premises. First, there was an unprecedented crisis around the modernization of Europe; second, Japan was gradually gaining prominence as a world power. In other words, their argument was precisely that which convinced them of the premise of hegemonic transition. The "crisis in Europe" here means that although Europe was the only part of the world recognized as offering universal values, in the first half of the twentieth century, it suffered a relative loss of political and economic power on the global stage. The West, particularly Britain, was in the process of losing its transcendent status as a universal value provider that we can see in the decline of US primacy in the contemporary world. This meant that non-European countries, which seemed to have internalized European values, had to try to break away from their Europeanness (Koyama 2001). Hence, the second generation recognized that the world, which at the beginning of the twentieth century was centered on European hegemony, was moving in a more pluralistic direction.

In a sense, this argument anticipates Chakrabarti's concept of the provincialization of the West and Amitav Acharya's global IR 60 years later (Chakrabarty 2000; Acharya 2014). With the collapse of the West, that is, the decline of the British Empire and the relativization of its values, the West preceded us not as an expression of universality but as a mere province. The decline of its hegemony meant the pluralization of the world and the disappearance of the world order. In a sense, contemporary global IR is a typical discourse that has emerged in conjunction with these developments. In it, diversity is emphasized in response to the fall of the West. The second generation of the Kyoto School was also a response to precisely these developments. It also meant the end of the West's violent domination and that the world had entered a historical phase in which new leaders, eagerly establishing a pluralist world, were needed. This also corresponds with global IR's emphasis on the Chinese school (Acharya and Buzan 2017).

After the Russo-Japanese War, the First World War, the Manchurian Incident, the Sino-Japanese War, and the Second World War, there was a common sentiment among many Japanese intellectuals that modernity, with its focus on the West, was no longer sustainable. The first question to be asked, then, is what this "modernity," whose development Western hegemony had fostered, meant. In the "Overcoming Modernity" roundtable, Suzuki sums it up.

> Nowadays, it is often said that European modernity is wrong, but if you think about the starting point of this wrong modernity, the French Revolution comes to everyone's mind. If we take this as a starting point, we can say that the 19th century was a "modernity"

> that originated in democracy in politics, liberalism in thought, capitalism in the economy, and so on. (Kawakami and Kosaka 1979, 176)

Also conspicuous in the claims of the second generation is the assertion that Japan alone possessed a modernity worthy of supplanting the status of the West. It was taken for granted that the decline of hegemony would be followed by the emergence of pluralism, which would need another hegemony to substantiate it. Pluralism meant the diversification of values, which also meant the collapse of the world order. The second generation of the Kyoto School celebrated the emergence of this pluralism but aimed to materialize it by also overcoming it. For them, an order was something that could not be lost to achieve the pluralist world, and someone had to take on the responsibility of establishing and maintaining it. This is where the characteristics of the second generation come into play. For Nishida and Tanabe, what was important was the pursuit of truth (nothingness), while political order was secondary. The central task of their philosophy was to ease people's pain as well as their own, in the Buddhist sense by pursuing the truth. In the debates of the second generation, however, the establishment and maintenance of a new world order was a priority. The stability of the world order took precedence over the pain of the people of the colonized territories. In doing so, the second generation concentrated on reinforcing the Confucian concept of hierarchy for a world order, while using the Buddhist concepts of Nishida and Tanabe for their peculiar understanding of morality.

For the second generation, the emergence of pluralism and the provincialization of the West foreshadowed a new Japanese hegemony, and a new hierarchy centered on Japan. In a roundtable discussion in *Chuokoron*, Kosaka argued the following:

> In this turbulent world, where will the center of world history be? Of course, economic and military power are important, but they must be guided by a new worldview and new moral energy. The direction of world history will be determined by the ability to create new worldviews and new moral values. Those who can create them will be the leaders of world history … I feel that Japan bears a world-historical necessity, being pushed from behind, being called upon by world history to find such a principle. (Kosaka et al. 1943, 125–26)

Critical to such world history was the fact that Japan was understood as the only non-white nation to have achieved modernity at the time. The second generation believed that the moral energy that meant knowing the mission of world history existed only in Japan (Kosaka et al. 1943, 157–58). They needed to prove not only that Japan would be a country offering universal values but also that Japanese values would contribute to a superior order than that of the West. It was this sense that the second generation of the Kyoto School needed Nishida's philosophy, to prove the moral superiority of Japan. Relying on Nishida's ontology, they ostensibly postulated the Buddhist world of emptiness and its subjectivity as "nothingness" arguing for the establishment of a new world order centered on Japan. Their mythical discourses were seen as a source of moral energy and as offering a value that surpassed that of the West. Despite their Oriental appearance and use of Buddhist language, their arguments were very modern, actually positing a linear flow of time in which Japan is defined as being ahead of the curve, and the "present" was only used as a concept, not as something they themselves internalized.

Their argument was deterministic in that they presumed that they were called upon to lead the world because of their moral superiority. This determinism is very dangerous, however, because it implies that relationality, the core concept of impermanent subjectivity, is not contingent as Nishida's philosophy posits, but fixed and given mainly due to a presupposed historical mission. This transformation relates to the focus on temporality because determinism is very closely related to the image of linear progressive time, which runs in a straight line toward a given destination. Determinism inevitably produces a "progressed" self and a "stagnating" other and justifies the domination of the former over the latter, thus a hierarchical order. In other words, since the relationship is predetermined by the transcendental One, maintaining good relations becomes the norm to be achieved despite the promised pluralist orientation. It is this norm that made their argument appear more inclined toward Confucianism. However, the members of the second generation argued that in the West, the morality that sustained human relationships had apparently disappeared, while in Japan, this morality constituted the fabric of society. This implied the superiority of Japanese morality, which allegedly promotes plurality, and that it should become the norm for the world. Such was a typical manifestation of non-Western hegemonic orientation that accompanied the decline of Western hegemony, in which relationality and harmony were essentialized, fixed, and consequently abused.

The argument that some countries are more morally advanced than others can also be seen in contemporary China. Qin (2018) argues, for example:

> Morality is … a cornerstone for good governance. If governance is sustained by morality and the governor and the governed are in a constant process of perfecting themselves through practicing virtue, then relations among them will indeed be harmonious. (Qin 2018, 339)

Here, it is emphasized that relationality and virtue are the basis of harmony, and it is assumed that harmony will lead to a peaceful international order. This type of morality, or virtue, is specific to Chinese culture and language. Zhang Weiwei states:

> It is also true that Chinese culture, influenced by Confucianism, is moralistic and humanistic, and this morality and humanism are embedded in the Chinese language. (Zhang 2011, loc. 1070/3556)

This morality is China specific as it is based on Confucianism. Indeed, Confucianism appears to have an extreme influence over the contemporary Chinese School. In this context, it is argued that Confucianism's characterization as respecting harmony places China higher in terms of morality than Western individualism. Again, linear temporality appears to be the fundamental prerequisite for China's moral superiority over the West, and it is this moral contrast that constructs the "self" of China.

It is precisely this sense that the formation of such a "self" negates the image of the fluid self and moves toward the fixation of the subject. In the first generation, fluid subjectivity was the source of morality, whereas in the second generation, that morality was spatialized and reclaimed into a confrontation between the West and East. The arguments of the second generation of the Kyoto School developed in this complex way with three elements: relationality, morality, and harmony. As a result, their claims to subjectivity were transformed into something more Confucian than Buddhist. As we shall see below, however, this construction of the fixed

"self" creates contradictions in an age of declining hegemony that cannot be overlooked.

The Tensions in the Discourses of the Second Generation

A major tension in the discourses of the second generation of the Kyoto School provides us some insights regarding the emergence of the Confucian IR. While Japan maintained its position as the provider of universal value, the source of these values was said to be secured by Japan's particularity. This is also the case in the Chinese School with Confucianism. The assertion of one's particularity, which differentiates itself from the West, naturally means that universality does not exist at that stage. For particularity to be secured, an extrinsic universality is necessary. Thus, the assertion of one's unique value can only exist if a different, external universality is assumed. In the second generation's case, a tension was presented in that Japan's peculiar values, which were supposed to lead to another universality, could not maintain their meaningfulness without external universality.

However, with the outbreak of the Pacific War, this tension was relegated to the background. Many intellectuals greeted the beginning of the new war with enthusiasm. Why were the intellectuals excited by the news of the war? Certainly, Japan, which had challenged the violent rule of the West, was also colonizing Korea and Taiwan. The contradiction that Japan was following in the footsteps of the evils of European imperialism caused considerable guilt among many Japanese intellectuals (Koyasu 2008). In a roundtable discussion in the theme of the "World Historical Standpoint," Nishitani candidly confessed his guilt as a Japanese intellectual: "It must be admitted that Japan's behavior toward China up to today has been regarded as imperialism" (Kosaka et al. 1943, 170).

However, 1941 will go down in history as the day when the guilt of the Japanese intelligentsia disappeared. The outbreak of the war against the United States was characterized as an incident that revealed Japan's "world-historical mission" linked to the overcoming of European imperialism in the form of the "construction of Greater East Asia" (Kosaka et al. 1943, 171). For Japanese intellectuals who had tacitly approved of Japan's aggression against Asian countries, the direct fight against the West provided an opportunity to forget any remaining guilt. As a result, their tone became very eloquent, forceful, and nationalistic. The importance of the ideas of the second generation of the Kyoto School was further enhanced when university students began to be drafted into the army. Indeed, many soldiers went off to the battlefields after reading the second generation's views on war and history. Their philosophical declaration of Japan's moral hegemony, that "moral energy can only be found in Japan," gave university students who had been questioning the very purpose of war, a new purpose: the reconstruction of a new world order based on Japan's superior morality.

Another tension behind the second generation's "world-historical mission" was related to Tanabe's logic of the species [*shu*], where nation state is assumed to be the only agency in world politics. Tanabe argued that Nishida's philosophy consisted only of the whole and the individual, saying that this dichotomous structure was too abstract. To give concreteness to Nishida's philosophy, Tanabe thought that some form of mediation between the whole [*rui*: class] and the individual was necessary. This became the "species" (Tanabe 2010). Such process of concretization was in fact the catalyst for the transformation of philosophy into geopolitics. The second generation of the Kyoto School brought Tanabe's "logic of species" into their political philosophy, wherein the nation of Japan was seen as a mediator between universality and individuals. Japan, it was argued, was the only country in the world that recognized its historical mission of moral superiority and therefore had to become the leader of Asia. To proceed with this argument, the second generation had to deny Japanese imperialism. They tried to show that Japan's attitude toward China was not imperialistic, using moral rather than economic or political reasons. According to them, the Chinese people did not know the importance of morality, which had supposedly been handed down from generation to generation in the Japanese tradition. Therefore, the Chinese people misunderstood and condemned Japan's actions as imperialism (Kosaka et al. 1943, 170–71). However, this argument was a bold denial of pluralism as the assumption that there is only one correct answer to the interpretation of Japanese imperialism denies anyone who challenges it. The "correct" interpretation requires denying the existence of those with other interpretations and "correcting" them. The second generation of the Kyoto School, which was supposed to have advocated pluralism in the context of a critique of Western hegemony, rejected pluralism in this way.

The third tension is related to their assumption of agency. In the second generation's discourse, that agency was assumed to be the nation state, as discussed above. Meanwhile, the superiority of that subject was assumed to lie in its distinctive morality. It seems that an unignorable tension resides here. Morality in this context was "virtue," as assumed by many East Asian schools of thought. Virtue, as the contemporary Chinese school eloquently puts it, is about cultivation, which is not defined by laws or explicit codes, but is cultivated through human development. Thus, a question arises. What does it mean for a nation state to be virtuous? How is it possible to say that one nation state is superior to another in terms of virtue? If it refers to the nature of the leader, it is more plausible. Indeed, Yan states, "Confucius believes that the stability of the world order is wholly determined by the moral cultivation of the political leader" (Yan 2011, loc. 520/6131). Similarly, Qin argues,

> The backbone of society is junzi or virtuous person, who differs from an economic man in that she, fully realizing the importance of coexistence and shared interest, practices the zhongshu (loyalty and forbearance) principle, and who differs from a mere social being in that she lives a moral life, refraining from being purely self-calculating. Such people follow moral values and norms conscientiously through education and self-cultivation, thus being reliable and trustworthy. (Qin 2018, 337)

Again, this argument is about the disposition of the leader. We then face a question. Does a nation state equal the leader? Is the nature of a nation state solely and predominantly determined by the characteristics of the leader? In the case of the Kyoto School, the place of virtue was not clear. It sometimes resided in the Imperial Household, sometimes in the emperor himself. What about in contemporary non-Western and global IR?

Fourth, in the universal-species–individual scheme that Tanabe advocates, various nations were encompassed in this structure as nation states and also assumed to be equal by being linked to universality. It is important to note that the nation state, as the self-manifestation of the "whole," was also positioned as the embodiment of universality, so that each state was assumed to have essentially the same characteristics. Thus, the nation state was seen as an intermediary

between the individual and the universal, while also possessing universal values. The second generation argued the converse of this point: that a nation state that did not embody universality was an inferior state. China, which frequently figured in their discussions, was a typical example. Here, the difference between China and Japan was defined not so much in terms of their respective particularities but by the presence or absence of an understanding of their historical mission in the world based on universal values, which they claimed to have (Kosaka et al. 1943). The second generation of philosophers took for granted the universal applicability of the "self-manifestation" logic of the "whole" embedded in history and ultimately dived into linear temporality based on a deterministic theory of civilization typical of the Western imperialism they supposedly criticized.

Finally, the second generation of Kyoto School philosophers did not seem to be fully aware that they themselves were contextual—that is, the embodiment of modernity—and that their mode of thinking constituted the project of modernity they were criticizing. It should certainly be noted that the Kyoto School philosophers argued at the "Overcoming Modernity" roundtable that the crisis of modernity should be understood not as a matter on the other side of the world. Indeed, modernity exists in different parts of the world and takes different forms. Each country is modern in some way. In other words, there is no singular modernity, but rather "modernities" in the plural form. However, the Kyoto School philosophers understood Western modernity as a unifying, monolithic entity that they believed could be "overcome." They were unaware that their own self-perceptions were created from a similar perspective. To overcome this problem requires integrating the object to be overcome. It would have been impossible to "overcome" Western modernity if it had taken a variety of forms. Likewise, the subjects who "overcome" the West must be unified, for if they are disparate, the "we" that is supposed to "overcome" the West cannot be fixed. This is a problem that inevitably arises when we think of "transcending" modernity, and all such attempts have a utopian character at the moment at which the "destination" of the process of transcendence has not yet been realized. Utopia must have universality and purity in character, and this universality and purity are the sources of violence against the other.

After all, they unintentionally proved the tensions of pluralism, tensions inevitably ingrained in the normative discourse that posits a utopia—a pluralist world—toward which we should move. Any pluralist utopia, if it is to be achieved univocally, will always deny pluralism. If pluralism is to be a utopia, it should not be achieved univocally, that is, only by certain actors. However, the second generation of the Kyoto School, when confronted with this tension of pluralist utopia, essentialized Japan, albeit strategically. This is what made the second generation's involvement in the war possible.

Conclusion

What can twenty-first-century IR researchers learn from the experience of the Kyoto School's second generation? While criticizing the legitimization of imperialism by the second generation, Hiromatsu Wataru, a well-known Marxist philosopher of postwar Japan, argued that the problems the second generation tried to tackle, namely, the violence implicit in Western hegemony and realizing a pluralistic society, remained issues in the contemporary world (Hiromatsu 1989). Certainly, the problems presented by the second generation are relevant even today. However, I do not think that the tension of pluralism left by them has been fully investigated yet. It is particularly imperative to note that the discourses of the second generation were heavily influenced by the international structural change of hegemonic transition, and consequently, they missed the most important point made by the first generation, that is, the question of subjectivity. This point becomes salient when we compare the political discourses of the first and second generations. Sufficient attention has not been given to the fluidity and transformability of the subjects in their discourses except for some recently presented arguments that specifically focus on the issue of subjectivity in IR. This point is extremely critical to contemporary IR discourse because, although attempts to overcome the Western/Eastern dichotomy have already been extensively made in the form of a more sophisticated non-Western and global IR discourse of global politics (Chen 2011; Hurrell 2016), sufficient attention has yet to be given to the nature of subjectivity. In other words, given the decline of Western dominance, we must be cautious to prevent our imagination of the future world from being dragged down by the fixed West/East framework. In this sense, some radical articulations of non/post-Western discourses, specifically focus on the question of subjectivity, are worth visiting. Regardless, before jumping into the engagement of "us" as non-Westerns to "change the world," we need to stop at the question of who "we" really are, whether the "West" and the "East" are really divided, and, moreover, whether there really is a "West" or an "East."

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