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How German Philosophy paved the way to overcome modernism

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References :: Max Weber, González Valles, Jörg Fisch, Peter Duus, Leslie Pincus, John C. Maraldo, Yusa Michiko, Harry Harootunian, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Friedrich Nietzsche, Watsuji Tetsurō, Robert Carter, Erin McCarthy, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, Mishima Ken'ichi, Tani Toru, Michiko Yusa, Miles Fletcher, A. Hara & S. Yamazaki, James Q. Whitman, Susan C. Townsend, De Bary, Gluck & Tiedemann, Kaneko Umaji, Karl Löwith, Gino Piovesana, J. W. Heisig, Hans Waldenfels, Nishitani, Keiji, James W. Heisig and John Maraldo, Horio Tsutomu, Tetsuo Najita, G. Parkes & S. Aihara, Roger Eatwell, Chris Goto-Jones, Jason M. Wirth, Richard Calichman, Minamoto Ryōen, Slavoj Žižek, Alan Tansman, Michael F. Marra, Diogo César Porto Da Silva, Alice Kaplan

Translated Title :: 日本の覇権主義的秩序 - ドイツ哲学が近代主義を克服する道を開いたように

Abstract :: 日本の知識人は、ある程度、西洋、特にドイツで哲学的な表現方法を学びました。この経験は、新しい集約的な歴史を作ることによって、日本の記憶の明瞭化を変えました。国家から委託された日本の哲学者たちは、西洋の解釈学の手法を使って、理想化された過去から日本の精神を取り戻し、権力者が容易に操れる擬似的な意味の世界を作り出すことが常識となった。

彼らの留学経験もあって、当時の日本の哲学界は、ドイツの観念論、新カント派が完全に支配していた。それは、ナショナリズムや汎アジア主義の台頭を助け、アジア文明の新しい光明として日本の優位性を示す特別な精神を作り出し、この国の理想主義の伝統と非常によく調和していたのである。京都学派の哲学者たちは、領土拡張の指針として、地政学的な研究を求められた。ドイツが推進した文化という概念は、帝国の様々な階級、地域、民族間の貧富の差を克服するために認識された。

○真珠湾攻撃からわずか8ヶ月後の1942年、日本国民にとって戦争の意味を理解するための説明を構築し、西洋のヘゲモニーを克服することによって新しい世界認識の方法を提案する試みが必要であったことは明らかである。知識人たちは、近代化という分断の芽を抑え、逆に日本の原点への回帰を促し、聖なるものと近代世界との連続性の根拠としようとした。

彼らの主張では、日本は近代の分裂がこれ以上国を傷つけるのを防ぐために戦争に行かざるを得ず、したがって天皇の周りを縫うことになった。

世界的な紛争の一部と見なされ、戦争によって引き起こされた国の暴力と軍事的侵略は、日本を西洋化の病から取り除き、本物の日本文化を再び復活させる機会として理解された。

本文では、三木清、九鬼周造、和辻哲郎、戸坂潤、西谷啓治、そして京都学派の影響を中心に解説しています。

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Japan's Hegemonic Order

How German Philosophy paved the way to overcome modernism

07 2020

*'Increasing intellectualisation and rationalization do not, therefore, indicate an increasing general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives.'*¹

When Japan's Western tendencies, fashions and techniques appeared in the cultural and philosophical realm, they were due to direct contacts that very often enriched both sides. For a brief period, Japanese intellectuals and artists were closely interwoven in the progressive network of Western society, not only as students but also in the exercise of assistant positions with such personalities as Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), Andre Breton (1896-1966), George Grosz (1883-1959), Walter Gropius (1883-1969), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Karl Popper (1902-1994).

The concept of 'culturalism' emerged in Japan in the 1910s as a central school of thought covering diverse contexts ranging from Immanuel Kant to Bertrand Russell. Not only a complex ideology in terms of its cognitive aspects it became an ideology of Japan's modern nation-state and the core of an empire-building ideology, meaning 'self-development' and 'self-cultivation' in reaction to enlightenment thought centred around 'civilization.' From the first decades of the Meiji Restoration, German philosophy was so influential in Japan in comparison with other philosophical schools from the industrialized nations, especially the United States, France, and

Great Britain.² Upfront the beginning of the First World War, Germany and France were confronted by the notion of civilization and culture, two peoples, which differed not in details, but in the basic features of their national identity by a maximum degree of strangeness. Between French intellectuals and their Eurocentric stance guarding the value of 'civilization' versus the nationalist stance of their German counterparts who instead attempted to prove their spiritual superiority, Japanese intellectuals in the 1920s chose the latter.³

2 Although over one hundred and eighty professors were brought from the West to teach in the modern universities, the ideology of Japan's modern nation-state emerged from an underlying criticism of Western civilization centering on Britain and France.

González Valles: Historia de la filosofía japonesa, Madrid: Tecnos, 2000, p.197

3 In French as well as English usage at the time, civilization generally referred to the pride and importance of one's nation regarding the 'progress of the West and of humanity.' The term described a process of political, economic, religious, technical, moral and social facts, referring to the attitude and behaviour of a person, no matter what his achievements. While, in German usage, civilization suggested 'something quite useful, but only a value of the second order, namely, something that encompasses only the outside of man, only the surface of human existence.' The German concept of culture referred to spiritual, physical and religious facts, distancing itself from slogans attributed to civilization, such as politics, economics and society. The concept of culture thus summarizes the products of man, the works of art, books and religious and philosophical systems together and thus describes the peculiarity of a people. Until the beginning of the First World War, the difference in meaning intensified to such an extent that in the conceptual usage the opposition manifested between civilization, as the material, external, useful and culture itself as the spiritual, interior and moral. The culmination of this differentiation finally came at the beginning of the outbreak of war in 1914, in which the opposition was sharpened to a perfect contrast, which allowed no exceptions. Thomas Mann and other German intellectuals praised culture, from the perspective of the conservative educated middle classes, as a replacement for 'civilization' and loaded it with the keywords duty, order and justice. The juxtaposition of Germany and France, through the notion of civilization and culture, underscored the maximum degree of strangeness. Elias, Norbert: Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchung. Erster Band: Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den westlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1976.

Jörg Fisch: Zivilisation, Kultur. In: Zivilisation, Kultur. In: Otto Brunner u. a. eds.: Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland. Bd. 7, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1992, S. 740.

1 Max Weber: Wissenschaft als Beruf (Science as a Vocation), 1919, in Max Weber: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre, Tübingen, 1973, p.594

Regarding Germany as an ideal modern state, without an aristocratic history, their term of 'Culture' emphasized to unify a spirit within the community of a nation *gungmin* rather than a single ethnic group *minjok* and offered a lofty ideal to the Japanese concept of Asia. Moreover, Germany had changed so much between 1914 and 1919 that the Japanese observers felt that they needed to re-learn the facts about Germany. As a result, lectures from the first interwar decade were usually delivered by Japanese who visited Germany or Europe for work. Evidently Weimar Germany, shaken by war and revolution, remained an engrossing topic among the Japanese. Liberal and left-wing ideologies became popular because of this appreciation for German culture and scholars and students alike would read Marxist literature in its German original language, which became very fashionable in the elite universities from the mid-1920s onwards.

Kyoto School of Philosophy

After different political demonstrations took place in Tokyo between 1904-1915, those uncertainties of the Taishō period were also mirrored in the debate on *minponshugi* or 'democracy' (literally government for the people).⁴ Although calling for a society of 'consensus', the liberal intellectuals were never able to provide a suitable solution for the political and social problems Japan underwent in that decade. With the Japanese rightwing movement succeeding largely by permeating the existing power structure from below, the Kyoto School of Philosophy had a major impetus by defining the philosophic contours of Japanese fascism.

The Kyoto School of Philosophy formed itself around its main representative and one of the most fascinating, albeit controversial, figures of this time in relation to the emergence of fascism in Japan, NISHIDA Kitarō (1870-1945). Nishida himself studied at the University of Tokyo when Raphael von Koeber (1848-1923), educated in Russia and Germany, arrived in Japan in 1893, and succeeded Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908) three years after he had left. Surrounded by a flourishing interest in aesthetics among Japanese intellectuals, Koeber took up

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770-1831) philosophy of art and introduced German philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), and the Neo-Kantian, Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915), as he also contributed to the introduction of Medieval and ancient Greek thought to his students.⁵ He credited the methods of philology as the key to the riches contained in the sources of Western tradition.

In his approach of teaching history and aesthetics, Koeber set the stage for a virtual explosion of cultural studies and humanism in Japan and prepared the intellectual ground for *kyoyoshugi*.⁶ Translated from the German term *Bildung*, it refers to a philosophical movement of the Taishō period that praised the virtues of self-cultivation, especially with regard to aesthetic, ethical and spiritual achievements.

To see art as a way to overcome cultural decadence, Koeber encouraged his students to go beyond Immanuel Kant's theory of the aesthetic judgment and to see art as a way to overcome cultural decadence. Furthermore he lectured his students, not to emulate European culture, but to investigate their own heritage by applying the hermeneutic method to traditional Japanese concepts.

Strongly influenced by the German philosophical tradition, especially the thought of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Heidegger, with Koeber a genera-

⁵ Koeber had already written two books on the Schopenhauer by the time he arrived in Japan: *Schopenhauers Erlösunglehre* (1881) and *Die Philosophie Arthur Schopenhauers* (1888). His students included Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916), Abe Jirō (1883-1959), Ōnishi Yoshinori (1888-1959), Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960), and Kuki Shūzō (1888-1941), among others.

Gradually, interest in Socrates, Plato and many other philosophers of antiquity grew. Greek history was now as interesting as the Greek tragedy. It was above all the study of German philosophy that had paved the way to Greek antiquity. Several students of Koeber should intensify the further development of the study of antiquity in Japan, even if not all of them, such as Kimura Takatar (1870-1931), who tried to reduce the Greek and Japanese myths to a common source, would enjoy scientific recognition. Such an interpretation of 'historical' studies, the Greek myths in the works of Homer with the representations in the classics of Japanese history, compared to the *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihonshoki* (720), was rejected by the nationalist-minded circles, especially the Japanese historians, who insisted on the incomparability of the 'Japanese peculiarity.'

⁶ During those years the German influence of neo-Kantianism completely dominated the world of Japanese philosophy, as the effects produced by the recently imported idealist philosophy harmonized with the idealist tradition of Japan, developing on one side, the creation of a particular national spirit, and on the other, the stimulation of a native thought.

⁴ Peter Duus: Liberal intellectuals and social conflict in Taisho Japan, in T. Nashita and V. Koschmann eds.: *Conflict in Modern Japanese History*, Princeton, N.J., 1982, pp.412-40

Leslie Pincus: *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shūzō and the Rise of National Aesthetics*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996, p.36

tion of philosophers evolved that increasingly found itself struggling to liberate Japanese philosophy from its Western heritage.

In the years after the publication of his maiden work *Zen no Kenkyū* 'An Inquiry into the Good' in 1911, Nishida was considered by many to be the most influential Japanese intellectual of the twentieth century. Taking up the chair of philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University in 1914, he came to influence a whole subsequent generation of Japanese philosophers that increasingly found itself struggling to liberate Japanese philosophy from its Western heritage. Father of modern Japanese philosophy, Nishida attempted to synthesize both Western and Eastern philosophy in order to overcome what he perceived to be the limits of Western modernity.

With his theory of non-being as the metaphysical point of view that grounds Eastern culture, he fulfilled the desire to build up a new philosophy through an appreciation of his own traditional culture.⁷ His ideas about Japan's role in East Asia 'Principles for a New World Order', which he was commissioned by the Army to write in 1943, represent one of the few statements Nishida made about the war, that he truly disliked. In his writing, Nishida transformed the idea of a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' that was being propagated at the time into a larger context of a global plurality of co-prosperity sphere, that must take care not to become imperialistic itself.

His wider context of 'Principles for a New World Order' formulated a clear critique of the narrow minded Japanists, and he came under heavy attack by proponents of the 'Japanese spirit' who held sway over public opinion.⁸

7 Nishida attempted to synthesize Ernst Mach's (1838–1916) 'analysis of sensations' and William James' (1842–1910) concept of 'pure experience' with the Buddhist ideas of 'selflessness' and 'unity of body and mind.'

John C. Maraldo: Nishida Kitarō, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015

8 Under the name *Genri Nipponsha* the 'Japan Principle Society One' formed in 1925 by ultranationalist thinkers to denounce democracy and Marxism, as enemies of the spirit of the Japanese national polity.

Those who were regarded as liberal, pro-democracy, pro-individualism, and dangerous, in the eyes of the ultranationalists, contained such names as: Nishida Kitarō, Ichiki Kitokurō, Minobe Tatsukichi, Miyazawa Toshiyoshi, Sasaki Sōichi, Kawakami Eijirō, Yanaihara Tadao, Nanbara Shigeru, Iwanami Shigeo, Tsuda Sōkichi, Amano Teiyō, Abe Yoshishige, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Miki Kiyoshi, Tanabe Hajime, Kōyama Iwao, Kōsaka Masaaki, and Watsuji Tetsurō.

Yusa Michiko: Nishida and Totalitarianism in James Heisig & John Maraldo: Rude Awakenings, University of Hawai'i Press, 1994, p.119

Iki no Kōzō

In his approach to revive Japanese culture, KUKI Shūzō (1888–1941), one of Von Koeber's students and later one of Heidegger's, did not so much involve the study of ancient texts in his undertaking, but rather focused on the uniquely Japanese aesthetic style in the pre-capitalist culture found in early nineteenth century Edo.⁹ Using hermeneutical tools, provided by Western philosophy, he searched for the distinctively Japanese in the recent past and formulated his critique of modernity of which he was a part of. In fact, it was his long residence in the West that led him to call for a renewed period of relative isolation in hopes of forestalling the obliteration of the Japanese spirit.

1930, in his work *Iki no Kōzō*, Kuki identified *iki* as a uniquely Japanese aesthetic style that had come to fruition at the end of the late eighteenth century, and which was therefore free from the influence of Western metaphysics. Using Western strategies implicit in hermeneutics he transmuted his setting of Edo aesthetics into referential markers of a distinctive idealistic cultural landscape. In his understanding *iki* could point to authentically ways of being that shelters within itself the form of the Japanese cultural totality, and provide a way to rid society of foreign modernistic influences.¹⁰

By the late 1930's the logic of cultural organicism, to cultivate a devotion for everything purely Japanese, already had become a primary instance of common sense, both in scholarly and official discourse. Mobilizing the Japanese spirit in the service of a repressive and militarist regime, the nation-state became subject to representation as a natural community that authenticated itself both in and as an aesthetic object. In his inquiry into Edo aesthetic style, Kuki advocated with his concept of *iki* for a Japanese version of this national aestheticism, as an enclave of the spirit; timeless, authentic, and essentially different from the West.¹¹

9 Kuki Ryūichi (1852-1931), student of Fukuzawa Yukichi, was his father. His mother Hatsu was said to have a relationship with Okakura Kakuzō.

Leslie Pincus: Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shūzō and the Rise of National Aesthetics, University of California Press, 1996

10 Harry Harootian: Overcome by Modernity. History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan, Princeton University Press, 2000, p.31

11 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: Of the Sublime: Presence in Question, ed. and trans. Jeffrey S. Librett, Albany State University of New York Press, 1993

The Japanese spirit

WATSUJI Tetsura (1889-1960), beside Nishida Kitarō, Kuki Shūzō and MIKI Kiyoshi (1897-1945) one of the most influential cultural philosophers in modern Japan, as many others, 'rediscovered' Japan after WWI and turned against his own former position, criticizing now Western philosophical individualism, attacking its influence on Japanese thought and life.¹² In his early writings, between 1913 and 1915, in a youthful phase of almost unrestricted enthusiasm for Western philosophy, he introduced the work of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) as well as working on Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to Japan.

Inspired by the lectures of OKAKURA Kakuzō (1863-1913) and Ernest Fenollosa, he developed an interest for his own culture, when in the spring of 1917 he made a trip with friends to Nara, the cultural centre of ancient Japan.¹³ With his book *Gūzō saikō* 'The Revival of Idols' in 1918, without abandoning the method of Western philosophical thought, he formulated a substantive shift against Nietzsche, albeit not necessarily an intellectual one. Watsuji processed the pilgrimage to the Old Temples in a book called *Kojijunrei*, 1919, which quickly became popular not least because of his lively prose.

Subsequently, many enthusiastic readers set out on their own 'pilgrimage', and quite a few even used the book as a guide to art history on their expedition through Nara.

This search for Japan's heritage, which sought answers not in the realms of religion but, as Watsuji emphasized, in those of art, lacked the later strict systematic concept, which critically followed Heidegger, but already hinted at important motifs of his more thoroughly formulated theory in the writing *Fūdo* 'Climate and Culture.'

The conceptual core of the writing, however, was the ambitious project to connect the two cultural areas of Europe and Asia, ancient art of Greece and Japan. He took up the art-historically recognized theory of explaining the unique prosperity of Buddhist art through contacts with Mediterranean culture in Roman times. Describing the influence in

the sculptures and paintings of the 8th century, Watsuji also emphasized a significant difference that points to the insurmountable difference between the two cultures. To the extent that original Japanese art serves him as a sign of cultural equality, it is the mixing of both cultures that makes it possible to overcome cultural differences, even if initially only in the medium of art. His answer to overcoming Japan's identical crisis was therefore a kind of return to the old, albeit idealized, culture of Japan, embodied in purportedly age-old traditions and classical texts, hosting eternal characteristics of the Japanese people and the roots of Japanese culture and its spirit.

Prior to his change of ideological direction, Watsuji co-founded the legendary magazine *Shinshichō* *Dainiji* 'The Second New Spiritual Current' with his friend TANIZAKI Jun'ichirō (1886-1965) in 1910.

Editor-in-chief was OSANAI Kaoru (1881-1928), the founder of the *Jiyū Gekijō* 'Free Theatre' (1909-1919) and *Tsukiji Shōgekijō* 'Little Theatre Tsukiji' (1924-1928). Tanizaki embodied for the Japanese audience above all with his work 'Lob des Schattens', but also in his private life, the lifestyle strongly oriented towards aesthetics. With Osanai strongly oriented towards European modernism, who had already staged Ibsen's 'John Gabriel Borkmann' in 1909, a personal constellation of artistic modernity arose for Watsuji, where the various approaches such as social criticism, rejection of banality and aesthetic protest coexisted.

Watsuji, who read Bernard Shaw, French novelist, the famous Russians, belonged to the advanced generation which, half a century after the opening of the country, acquired much of the humanist tradition of Europe, but also possessed extensive knowledge of classical Japanese literature.

Beside this, he was a cosmopolitan, liberal, highly literate intellectual, also slightly inclined to aesthetised life, for whom the concept of education in the sense of the German tradition was of decisive importance. Above all, education through the enjoyment of art was a declared goal of Watsuji's life.

In his earlier period, Watsuji was not opposing the implementation of European-style democratic reforms in Japan, and furthermore was stressing the fact that 'educating' the masses could be a valuable

¹² This criticism of the West in the name of one's own culture goes back to the discourse tradition of the Meiji period, which was inaugurated by Okakura Kakuzō. Denunciation of Western universalism, which is convicted of its will to power, coincides with pride in one's own tradition, which does not need to hide ambiguity.

¹³ The term *tenkō*, used by Watsuji in 1918, later often referred to the intellectual turnaround from political opponent to proponent of the nationalist regime.

solution for the imperial family to safeguard the *kokutai* and to prevent a violent revolution. Which indeed represents a characteristic of the Taishō period, when intellectuals were engaging in a debate with the masses over the role of socialism and democratic rights.

From about 1918, Watsuji concentrated on formulating what constituted the Japanese spirit.¹⁴ *Ancient Japanese Culture*, which he wrote in 1920, was an attempt to revitalize Japan's oldest Chronicles the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, by using modern literary techniques as well as newly available archaeological evidence. He treated these collections of ancient stories and myths as literature, rather than as sacred scripture. Following Nietzsche, he criticized the prevailing opinion that Japan's military-political rise would at the same time be a victory for Japanese culture.¹⁵

But unlike Nietzsche, who sought an alternative in pre- and non-European traditions, Watsuji played off his own East against the imported West. He demanded, against superficial imported technical civilization, the creation of a new style in all expressions of the Japanese people. This culture-supported distancing from the military and repressive reality in Japan, carried out in Nietzsche's argumentation, was accompanied by a strong plea for a new Japanese style and the denunciation of the West. When asking about interpretation of Japanese culture, Watsuji received decisive impulses for his thinking from the reading of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* 'Being and Time' in Berlin 1927.¹⁶

Without these reflections on that sojourn in Europe, and his method of understanding Japan's cultural aspects in the manner of Western philosophy, his most famous writing *Fūdo* which has been translated into English as 'Climate and Culture' would have been unthinkable. In this writing, the concept of 'climate' serves as the always present background to the study of Japanese ethics in the ways in which men and women, adults and children, the rulers and those ruled, have come to deal with each other in

14 The German concept of culture was perceived by Japanese intellectuals at the time to overcome the gaps between the various classes, regions, and wealth levels among ethnic groups that were incorporated into mainland Japan.

15 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, Leipzig, 1874

16 He was sent to Germany in 1927 on a three-year scholarship, but in fact, spent only fourteen months in Europe, being forced to return to Japan in the summer of 1928 because of the death of his father.

their specific climatic conditions. He argues that our way of being in the world is an expression of countless people and actions performed in a particular 'climate,' which together have shaped us as we are. Therefore he believed that a human being is not strictly an individual, than rather being criss-crossed in the pattern of proper and effective social interaction.

As a member of many social groupings, it is required that we become selfless, no longer self-centered, open to the communal sense of the whole group and aware of social, public interconnections. His argumentation for the negation of self, that every individuality is seen as a self-determination of the absolute totality of the state, provided clearly ideological support for Japanese nationalism, and raised his popularity with ideological leaders. In their favour, Watsuji argued that the state *kokka* represents the supreme totality, the union of all communities, and is therefore, the necessary condition of all various relations that run throughout the ethical structure that assigns to every particularity its own place.¹⁷ The aesthetisation of Japan's own cultural tradition in the thinking of Watsuji and the entire Kyoto School led to an emptying of the specifically Japanese being, which manifested itself, among other things, as militant selflessness. Not by 'a tiger jump' into the origin, like Benjamin, Watsuji breaks away from modernity, but by a constant principle of absolute passivity.¹⁸

Watsuji, as well as Nishida, insists on an own differences from the West by means of extreme inner mental concentration qua minimalization of the ego, the so-called nothing *mu*. Above all, it was Nishida

17 Watsuji Tetsurō: *Zenshū*, 27 vols., Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1962-1992, p.595 cit in: Chiara Brivio: *The Human Being: When Philosophy Meets History* - Miki Kiyoshi, Watsuji Tetsurō and their Quest for a New Ninge, Universiteit Leiden, 2009, p.200ff

In his writing 'Study of Ethics' the discourse on politics takes a more radical path when the state assumes the role of the absolute totality, in line with what Hegel had prefigured for the Prussian state. His pamphlets published in 1943 and 1944, respectively, about the 'Path of subjects in Japan' *Nihon no shindō* and the 'National character in America' *America no kokuminsei* antagonistically oppose a mentally superior Japan to the materialistic and utilitarian Anglo-Saxon culture, which led him to a fatal misjudgement of the course of the war.

Robert Carter and Erin McCarthy: *Watsuji Tetsurō*, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Spring 2017 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/watsuji-tetsuro/>>

18 Starting from Karl Kraus' dictum 'Origin is the goal' and Robespierre's view of the French Revolution as the return of Rome, Benjamin calls the French Revolution a 'tiger jump into the past', but in an arena dictated by the ruling class, while the dialectical revolution must be the same tiger jump 'under the open skies of history.'

Max Horkheimer, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno eds.: *Walter Benjamin zum Gedächtnis*, Los Angeles, 1942 (1940), part XIV

who developed the idea that 'nothingness becomes concrete through space and time in the differences of culture', whereby Japanese culture best embodies this nothingness because, in contrast to European culture, it distinguishes itself above all through the lack of mastery of nature and other cultures.¹⁹

Despite Watsuji repeatedly criticized the simple chauvinism preached and propagated by the military leadership, and sceptical of Japan's expansion policy and military adventure, he became the spokesman of a cultural self-assertion with his holistic thesis, of a politically constructed state whose totality is embodied in the Tennō.²⁰

A thought that Watsuji repeatedly developed in 1943 in the midst of wartime, arguing that the Japanese nation had always been a living totality through blood and language throughout its history, even in the age of the fighting states (1477-1573). Even after the war, when he held the Chair of Ethics at the Imperial University of Tokyo *Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku*, he did not dissociate himself from his view that the Japanese people were an ethical, national community gathered around the Tennō.

Far removed from the idea of the state as an association of equal and free citizens who had come together by social contract, he taught from a Japan born from defeat that freed itself from military villains in politics and regained its own spirit.²¹

At the early time when Watsuji Tetsurō focused on his 'native Japan', his colleague Miki Kiyoshi, on the other hand, showed his early interest in Kantian philosophy and on the relationship between individu-

al freedom and constraint.²² This interest changed soon when Miki Kiyoshi arrived in Heidelberg in 1922 in order to study under Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936).²³ In a time of economical insecurity in Germany, Miki noticed the climate of *Angst* that was pervading society after WWI.

Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy overshadowed the main philosophical school of Neo-Kantianism and in October 1923 Miki decided to move to Marburg, knowing that Heidegger had just been appointed there.²⁴ During his time, Miki studied Greek philosophy and medieval Christian theology in depth, and learned through Heidegger assistants Karl Löwith (1897-1973) and Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) to know about Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Simmel (1858-1918), Troeltsch (1865-1923) together with Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911).²⁵ When Miki approached Heidegger on behalf of KITA Reikichi (1885-1961) to lead for three years a newly established institute on European and Asian culture in Tokyo, Heidegger considered the lucrative offer but finally rejected.²⁶

Through his studies in Germany, Miki appears to have found fertile soil for his deepening interest and development of the concept of the human being and the problem of historical existence. His engagement with such a philosophical theory of history to be analyzed not only as a category for historiography, but,

22 Miki enrolled at Kyoto University in 1917 in order to study philosophy under Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime.

23 Heinrich Rickert was at the time the leading Neo-Kantian thinker at the University of Heidelberg. Rickert's thought was introduced to Japanese scholars in 1911 by Nishida Kitarō and his book *Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* 'Object of Cognition' was translated into Japanese by 1916.

Also Kuki Shūzō who had arrived in November 1922 in Heidelberg, approached Rickert for private tutorials.

Michiko Yusa: *Philosophy and Inflation*. Miki Kiyoshi in Weimar Germany, 1922-1924, Monumenta Nipponica Vol. 53, No. 1 Spring, 1998, pp. 45-71

24 Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962), teacher of Miki in Tokyo had been in Freiburg during 1922-1923 and studied under Edmund Husserl, who was then assisted by Heidegger.

25 With the beginning of Nazi rule in January 1933, Löwith's existence in Germany was threatened because of his Jewish origins. Through Kuki Shūzō, who had studied in Marburg in the 1920s and had since become a professor at the University of Kyōto, Löwith was appointed professor at the Japanese Imperial University Tōhoku in Sendai (today's University Tōhoku) in 1936, where he taught until 1941. During these years he wrote *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*. The book was translated into Italian, Japanese, English and French and became a classic in the history of philosophy.

26 Heidegger was not uninterested in the economical lucrative offer and asked Jaspers in a letter on June 18, 1924 for advice in this matter. Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) started to attend the lecture of the celebrated rebel philosopher Martin Heidegger in October 1924, short after Miki left for Paris in August where he remained until October 1925.

Michiko Yusa: *Philosophy and Inflation*. Miki Kiyoshi in Weimar Germany, 1922-1924, Monumenta Nipponica Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), p.65

19 This famous thesis about the 'self-limitation of absolute nothing in space and time qua place or culture' can be read everywhere in his collected writings. e.g. Nishida Kitarō Complete Works, Iwanami Shoten, 1965

20 Together with colleagues like Nishida, who were intensively involved with the European tradition, he agreed that the desolation and dissolution caused by modern capitalist society (later the word nihilism was used in the Kyōto school for this) could not be overcome with the appeal to the Confucian moral of loyalty to the emperor and patriotism turned into nationalism.

21 In 1943, he published his two volume *Sonnō shisō to sono dentō* 'The Idea of Reverence for the Emperor' and the 'Imperial Tradition.' This latter publication is one of the works for which Watsuji was branded a right-wing, reactionary thinker. In 1944, he published a volume of two essays, *Nihon no shindō* 'The Way of the Japanese Subject', 'The Character of the American People', and in 1948, 'The Symbol of National Unity' *Kokumin tōgō no shōchō*.

Mishima Ken'ichi: *Ästhetisierung zwischen Hegemoniekritik und Selbstbehauptung in Amelung, Koch, Kurtz, Lee, Saaler eds.: Selbstbehauptungsdiskurse in Asien: China - Japan - Korea*, IUDICIUM Verlag, 2003, p.25ff

Tani Toru: *Watsuji Tetsurō: Beyond Individuality, This Side of Totality*, in J.J. Drummond and Lester Embree eds.: *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy*, New York Springer, 2002, pp.497-515

most of all, as the embodiment of the reality of human existence puts him together with other philosophers, both European and Japanese, who were struggling to redefine human existence in the face of the historical crisis of the post-WWI world.

Borrowing the self-critique of European thought and his experience in a restless Germany during the interwar period, Miki expressed the conviction that Western civilization was in the process of self-destruction and could no longer dominate the fate of Asia. In his understanding the over-Westernization of world cultures and the Eurocentric character of the social sciences posed a global political problem.

When back in Tokyo, after his encounter with the writings of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) in Paris, he proceeded to the conclusion that Japan should eliminate Western colonialism, and in the interests of peace and harmony, uphold its own civilizational mission and facilitate Asian unity, as well as enforce liberation and racial equality. Rattled by his recent experience, he believed that Japan was in a state of crisis and also found in the collapse of the Eurocentric world order many disturbing signs of irrational fascism which had to be opposed with an alternative order based on Asian values and political solidarity.²⁷ Observing a worldwide disorder, Miki feared that rational thought might disappear altogether from the political arena.

When he heard that his former tutor, the philosopher Martin Heidegger, had joined the Nazi Party, Miki did not hesitate to rebuke him for succumbing to the emotional appeals of fascist nationalism. Ideologists calling for the restoration of traditional Japanese values, hoping to restore an era of social harmony under benevolent imperial rule that probably never existed, were unscientific, Miki argued. They ignored the strength modern Japan had gained by borrowing from Western industrial and military technology following the Meiji Restoration. He thoroughly believed that this kind of Japanism, or emotional nationalism, was a form of fascism.

Recognizing the strong appeal of nationalistic sentiments to the Japanese character, Miki hoped that the Japanese culture's long history of eclecticism would prevent it from turning completely inward.

As it had always been unparalleled throughout its history in its adaptability to harmonise opposing pos-

itions, absorbing foreign ideas, including Buddhism, Confucianism, and the recently adopted Western governmental, economical and cultural models. Miki's concerns about the potential dangers of the new movements did not prompt him to defend the existing parliamentary system under the Meiji Constitution, however, or to embrace the protection of individual rights. He believed that Japan would be saved from fascism by the unique qualities of the Japanese character, and recommended that the Japanese further adapt Western ideas to create a new kind of culture and play a role on the stage of world history.²⁸

The New Order

Following his return, Miki started to cultivate a close friendship with TOSAKA Jun (1900-1945) and together with NISHITANI Keiji (1900-1990) they founded the Aristotle Society in Kyoto in 1925. Miki and Tosaka were beginning to concentrate on Marxist themes in their publications and became one of the most prominent interpreters of Marxist theory in Japan during the late 1920s.

In the early 1930s, as the government was enforcing increasingly strict thought control policies, both men spent some time in jail, on suspicion of donating money to or participating in the Japan Communist Party JCP.²⁹ Being sacked from his last teaching position at Hosei University in 1934 because of his political views, Miki still managed to remain in the mainstream discussions, conducting roundtable on themes such as religion, philosophy, and culture. Miki argued that Japan's unique ability to install a cooperative body in East Asia, rested on its history of assimilating foreign culture.

Due the assimilation of Western technology it gained the necessary power to expel the West from China, to establish an Asian alternative to socialism and liberalism on the principles of cooperativism.

Although he never fully accepted Marxism, Miki underwent in 1938 an abrupt conversion when he publicly abandoned Marxism, and became one of the most politically active philosophers as leading member of the 'Shōwa Research Association' *Shōwa*

²⁷ Actually he resembled the ideas of Okakura Tenshin and Ōkawa Shūmei in their basic tenet.

²⁸ Miles Fletcher: Intellectuals and Fascism in Early Showa Japan, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, November 1979, p.49

²⁹ Tosaka joined an artillery regiment in Chiba, 1927, and Nishida arranged for Miki to be offered a teaching position in Hosei University, Tokyo. Tosaka even took over from Miki at Hosei University in 1931, when Miki was arrested.

Kenkyūkai, a government think-tank led by the then Prime Minister Prince KONOE Fumimaro (1891-1945).³⁰

The Shōwa Research Association was informally set up in 1933 by GOTŌ Ryūnosuke (1888-1984) and was officially recognized in 1936 with the main objective of advising Konoe on matters of foreign policy and economic planning. It brought together people from different backgrounds and activities, who were supposed to provide a strong economical and theoretical underpinning to Konoe's policies. Miki was invited to form a Cultural Problems Research Group to devise a philosophical rationale with which to formulate Japan's goals in China and achieve internal reforms.³¹

Much of Miki's report appeared in Konoe's proclamation of the New Order in East Asia on 3 November 1938, and revealed changes in Miki's attitudes toward Fascism and nationalism. He now aimed at merging 'rationality' and 'irrationality', combined in an appeal to sentiment with a rational program of reform. Miki's new philosophy of 'Cooperativism' *kyōdōshugi*, would blend the best elements of fascism, communism, and liberalism in a distinctly new pattern, that would guide domestic reform as well as the creation of a new East Asian bloc led by Japan.

His basic assumption in the pamphlet was that Cooperativism had to be a new type of Totalitarianism, which he defined as 'planning based on the whole and controlling individual freedom.'³² Putting society first and individuality second, he apparently echoed Alfredo Rocco (1875-1935), economist-minded politician who developed the early concept of the

economic and political theory of corporatism, which was officially embraced in 1926 by the National Fascist Party in Italy.³³

Convinced of Japan's mission to build a new Asian culture, Miki attacked classical European liberalism, in order to eliminate individualism and class conflict, and advocated the creation of a fascistic corporate state. Intrigued by European fascist attempts and by the creatural power latent in nationalism, he now embraced the same emotional worship of the nation which he had found so despicable in the rantings of 'Japanists' two or three years before.

There may be little doubt that Miki had been crushed by governmental repressions, when he was serving in the Imperial Army's propaganda department *Sen-denbu* in Manila in the Philippines from January to December 1942, to report on the situation in the Philippines for *Minami Jūjisei* 'Southern Cross' a newspaper for Japanese soldiers.³⁴

Being designated as liberal leftist, he was drafted to the islands without any option to decline that invitation to serve as a *bunkajin* 'men of culture.' The late years of the war claimed the deaths of his brother, his sister and his second wife KOBAYASHI Itiko (dates unknown), and when communist and writer TAKAKURA Teru (1891-1986) turned up at his house in 1944, he gave shelter and food.

On March 28, Miki was arrested because of harbouring a fugitive (who fled already) from the police in violation of the 1925 Peace Preservation Law. After the end of war, still in custody he died sick at Toyotama Detention Center on 26 September 1945.³⁵

In 1935, when the government fell to a military coup by far-right nationalists, Tosaka Jun published a book *Nihon Ideogiron* 'Japanese Ideology' (a title inspired by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Die Deutsche Ideologie*), with a critique on Japanism, liberalism, and the Kyoto School thought and their use of hermeneutics.³⁶

30 Miki worked closely with Shimizu Ikutarō, with the Marxist philosopher Funayama Shin'ichi, the historians of science Sugai Jun'ichi and Saigusa Hiroto and the two journalists from the Asahi Shinbun Ryū Shintarō and Sasa Hirō. Other important members of the association were the professor of economics and chief strategist of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere Rōyama Masamichi, the expert on China and Manchuria Taira Teizō, the sinologist Ozaki Hotsumi, the professor of economics Yabe Teiji, and Kazami Akira.

31 Strongly influenced by the economic policies of Nazi Germany, Ryū Shintarō, who worked closely with Miki in the Culture Research Group, began to devise a plan for the reorganization of Japanese capitalism. As head of a Study Group for the Reorganization of the Japanese Economy *Nihon keizai no saihensei kenkyūkai* in 1939, he used the policies of 'managed economies' in Russia, Italy, and Germany as an example to create a model for a tight economic control without nationalizing industry. Adopting the models of Germany and Italy, which he studied intense, his plan reflected Miki's belief that structural reforms were useless unless Japanese citizens divorce their pursuit of individual profit in favour of a cooperative ethic for the common good of the nation as a whole.

A.Hara & S.Yamazaki eds.: *Senji Nihon no Keizai Saihensei*, Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Hyōronsha, 2006

32 Miles Fletcher: *Intellectuals and Fascism in Early Showa Japan*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, November 1979, p.51

33 James Q. Whitman: *Of Corporatism, Fascism and the First New Deal*, Faculty Scholarship Series, Paper 660, Yale Law School, 1991, p.756

34 'The Oriental Characteristics of the Filipinos' appeared from July to October 1942 in eight parts and was later published in *Kaizo* in February 1943.

Susan C. Townsend: *Miki Kiyoshi, 1897-1945: Japan's Itinerant Philosopher*, BRILL, 2009, p.241

35 Susan C. Townsend: *Miki Kiyoshi, 1897-1945: Japan's Itinerant Philosopher*, BRILL, 2009, p.243

36 Battling militarism and irrationalism, he was perceived to be a

For him the Japanese spirit is nothing other than a method and a principle employed in explaining everything rather arbitrarily. Despite its single geographical, historical, and social existence in the universe, all characteristics with which hermeneuticians used to describe Japan, can be conjured up to any culture anywhere, anytime, and therefore describe nothing unique. To constitute Japanism as an abstract universe of meaning of its own, has nothing to do with daily reality, which is to Tosaka, the site where history unfolds itself.

The Kyoto School philosophers represent in his model the elite, and effectively ignore the potential that is hidden in the current, neglecting the everydayness in favour of a metaphysical binding to an essential past. Making use of Western hermeneutical tools to search in the past for the cultural essence of the Japanese people implies a tacit acceptance of Western philosophical approaches to history.

Tosaka criticized the German influence of idealism and neo-Kantianism which completely dominated the world of Japanese philosophy, and harmonized so well with the idealist tradition of the country as it helped to create a particular national spirit to show Japanese superiority over other peoples.³⁷

In his mind, those nationalistic intellectuals were ill-equipped to address current issues. He argued that they were mistaken in their assumptions that liberalism was related to materialism simply because they both originated in the West. Not only that, he reasoned that liberalism, as an ideology that permits cultural expression, would inevitably have led to the expression of the 'Japanese spirit' in Japan.

Following Heidegger, they reduced philosophy to a mere play with words without a history or textual basis. An educated intelligentsia, losing itself to a

caricature of hermeneutics, as he refers to as 'philologism', shaped by fascism that was taking over common sense, went wrong in both the case of Germany and Japan.³⁸

Tosaka criticized Kyoto School philosophers for using Western methods of hermeneutics to recover the Japanese spirit from an idealized past and creating a pseudo-world of meaning easily manipulated by those in power. When he deemed hermeneutics as completely unable to assist in solving actual problems and to recover the Japanese spirit, Tosaka used a very traditional understanding.³⁹ He falls victim to a view of history by strictly separating what is Western from what is Japanese. Therefore he fails to see how oppositions, past and present, self and other, the elite and the masses are constantly intertwined and therefore become an essential part of Japanese identity as a process. From his position, all the Kyoto School philosophers have done is, in fact, thoroughly Western; a bourgeois philosophy.

But, as Harootunian points out, however much Tosaka condemned the contemporary practice of hermeneutics, his own approach to the modern experience was just as philosophic and interpretative.⁴⁰

However, in the atmosphere of the 1930s, after the promulgation of the Peace Preservation Law in 1925, a serious commitment was needed to maintain the validity of 'Western' reason over 'Eastern' intuition, and such an attitude had been deeply politicized. In such oppressive times, even thinkers as cultured and independent as Miki Kiyoshi bowed under the pressure of the state, becoming an ideologue, and selling Nishida's philosophic concept to the military regime. Instead, Tosaka did not obey and remained vocal and critical, and therefore spent the entire wartime moving in and out of jail, hidden from the public view and withdrawn from intellectual discourse, before finally dying in his cell.

threat to national unity and was eventually arrested under the Peace Preservation Law in 1938. Tosaka died in Nagano Prison in 1945, on the day the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki. De Bary, Gluck & Tiedemann: Sources of Japanese Tradition, Columbia University Press, 1964, p. 251

37 Kaneko Umaji: Western Influences in Modern Japan: A Survey of Philosophy in Japan 1870-1929, Tokyo: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1929

German philosopher Karl Löwith (1897-1973), who taught in Japan from 1936 to 1941, criticized in 1941 the naivety and speed with which Japanese adopted without critique Western philosophy, which he saw already in decline in contrast to the Russians of the nineteenth century.

See Karl Löwith: Martin Heidegger and European nihilism, first published in 1941, Columbia University Press, 1995, Afterword to the Japanese Reader, p. 228

Gino Piovesana: Main Trends of Contemporary Japanese Philosophy, in Monumenta Nipponica, Vol. 11, No. 2, Jul. 1955, Sophia University, pp. 170-184

38 J. W. Heisig: Tanabe's Logic of the Specific and the Spirit of Nationalism. In J.W. Heisig & J.C. Maraldo (Eds.), Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994, pp. 255-288

39 This completely changed later with Hans-Georg Gadamer's 1960 work *Wahrheit und Methode*. With Gadamer hermeneutics does not only concern that which has already been done, it is rather constantly happening and no final understanding can ever be obtained.

Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Wahrheit und Methode*. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik, Tübingen Mohr, 1960

40 Harry Harootunian: *Overcome by Modernity*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p.XVIII

NISHITANI Keiji (1900-1990) graduated from Kyoto University in 1924 with a thesis titled 'Das Ideale and das Reale bei Schelling und Henri Bergson', received a scholarship from the Ministry of Education in 1937, which he had originally planned to use to study with Henri Bergson (1859-1941) in Paris.

This, however, turned out to be impossible due to Bergson's ill health, and instead Nishitani studied with Heidegger in Freiburg from 1937-39, listened to lectures on Nietzsche and had many informal conversations with him at his home.⁴¹ Influenced no doubt in part by this contact, Nishitani, impressed by the existential nihilism that mutated into a historical event in modern Europe, developed in his own manner aspects of the topology of absolute nothingness. Primarily from his study of the German mystics and the history of Western philosophy of religion in general, his own philosophical standpoint focused on an experience of the 'nothingness' at the bottom of the self which brings about the birth of a new subjectivity. Deprived of its ethical and religious connections, he understood the historical phenomenon of nihilism as an empty nothing affecting the modern world.

In order to finally free man from his selfish obsessions and manipulative objectifications in the dualism of being and consciousness, Nishitani argued for the necessity to first courageously return to the 'field of nihility.'

In the period when the state demanded allegiance, Nishitani did not lament the modernization and Westernization of Japan, nor did he nostalgically plea for a return to a pre-modern age.⁴² In his wartime political writings he called for a 'nation of non-ego' rather than a self-centered aggressive empire.

In his views of the nation and the world, they must be unified into a single standpoint in order to avoid the extremes of national totalitarianism and colonial expansionism. At the same time as he criticizes absolute individualism, he also resists the appeal of German National Socialism to *Blut und Boden* as a way to justify a 'national community' swallowing up individual rights. In his writings he demanded for a

'new world order', not issued from the political will of any particular country, or from an economic clash nor from any intellectual ground, but as an historical necessity, serving a multitude of centers around the globe.

Co-Prosperity Sphere

In the quest of a Japanese identity as part of the construction of a Co-Prosperity Sphere, Nishitani called for a general revival of the living spirit of Tokugawa *bushidō*, molded into a single working unity that 'can move the nation and the world.'⁴³ The lasting infamy of his contributions to the *Chūōkōron* discussions 1942/43, on the other hand, can be found not only in their idealistic political naïveté, but also in their idealization and even 'whitewashing' of political realities. There he reveals from his belief to encourage the superiority of the Japanese culture in order to institute the 'Co-Prosperity Sphere.'

Drawing on Nietzsche's idea of a 'good war,' he advocated for a notion of *Gesamtkrieg* that involves the whole of the nation, both in its economic, political, cultural, and military aspects, and in the consciousness of each member of society. In post-war reflections many utterances of Nishitani have crossed certain boundaries, such as regarding the Filipinos, when he invoked the idea that the Japanese play the role of a *Herrenvolk* 'master race', because of their possession of higher moral energy, an idea from Leopold Von Ranke.⁴⁴ Conceding the ostensible blood-shedding and human sufferings of both nations, Nishitani insisted that the war with China an inevitable historical necessity, as Japan had to lead East Asia against Western imperialism.

In his philosophy of history, as Nishitani declared, the fact that belonging to the modern age was equivalent to belonging to Europe, with no precedent to challenge it, the world became the European world, set up as an objective fact. He identifies modernity as a concept of the West, evolving since the middle ages but today is approaching its end and therefore

41 In 1938 he presented Heidegger with a copy of the first volume of D.T.Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, only to find that he had already read the book and was eager to discuss it.

Hans Waldenfels: *Absolute Nothingness*, translated by J.W. Heisig, New York, 1980

42 For Nishitani modernity was conditioned by three different directions introduced by the Reformation, Renaissance and the rise of science.

43 Nishitani, Keiji: *The World-historical standpoint and Japan*, Tokyo Chūōkōronsha, 1943, p.360ff cit. in James W. Heisig: *Nishitani Keiji and the Overcoming of Modernity (1940-1945)*, p.314 in Raquel Bouso & James W. Heisig eds.: *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 6: Confluences and Cross-Currents*, Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2009, pp. 297-329

44 Nishitani, Keiji: *The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan*, 25 March 1943, trans. by James W. Heisig

James W. Heisig and John Maraldo eds.: *Rude Awakenings, Zen, the Kyoto School & the Question of Nationalism*, University of Hawaii Press, 1994

Japan has to find a way to inherit the original spirit and develop it further in order to overcome the crisis it has recently inherited from the West.

In his essay on 'Modern European Civilization and Japan,' he dedicates a critique to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and clearly refers to the 'raw instincts' behind his totalitarian approach to nationality and against the neglect of the ideal of world citizenship. Although he calls Hitler a 'political genius,' he reduces it to little more than a distorted sensitivity to the intellectual poverty of modern Europe after the First World War.⁴⁵

Nishitani saw of all the nations of Asia at the time, only Japan as the one that had successfully modernized and achieved equality with the powers of the West and kept its possession of a East Asian cultural tradition alive. At the intersection of this great encounter between the cultures of East and West, Japan, despite its inner cultural chaos managing this dualism, had an obligation to open the uniqueness of its culture up to the horizon of globality.⁴⁶

For his position on what he called a 'philosophy of world history' that could both account for Japan's current position and disclose the course of future action, Nishitani was in contemporary analysis often accused of hiding Japanese aggression and continuing imperialism under the language of Hegelian metaphysics. Assaulted by their enemies on the two opposite ends of the political and ideological spectrum, Nishitani and other members of the Kyoto School were often generalized as the spearhead of defence, that helped the state consistently and enthusiastically to define the philosophic contours of Japanese fascism.⁴⁷

45 James W. Heisig: Nishitani Keiji and the Overcoming of Modernity (1940–1945), in Raquel Bouso & James W. Heisig eds.: *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 6: Confluences and Cross-Currents*, Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2009, p.316

46 One can certainly criticize his remarks for being nationalistic and promoting a kind of imperialism, but the context in which they were made was one in which Japan, as the only major East-Asian country that had not been invaded by the imperialist powers of the West. In their example, Japan was trying to obtain an overseas empire on behalf of its own, longer-standing emperor.

Mori Tetsurō: Nishitani Keiji and the Question of Nationalism, in James W. Heisig & John C. Maraldo eds.: *Rude Awakenings, Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1994

47 Years later Nishitani Keiji remarked, 'During the war we were struck on the cheek from the right; after the war we were struck on the cheek from the left.'

Horio Tsutomu: The Chuokoron discussions, Their Background and Meaning, in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, ed.: *The Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1994, p.291

Tetsuo Najita and H. D. Harootunian: *Japanese Revolt against the*

Because of their refusal to conform to the state ideology, at the time of their original publication, the *Chūōkōron* discussions were extremely popular with young intellectuals facing military service.

The published transcripts of the three discussions, compiled under the title *The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan* sold out almost immediately in 1943.⁴⁸ The ideas expressed, were seen as seditious and attacked by nationalist philosophers as reducing the Japanese Empire to simply one more category of world history. In the heat of the debate a Japanese military officer named Kimura demanded that the Kyoto School philosophers should, together with Koreans, American and British war prisoners, be rounded up and bayoneted. In June 1943, due the pressure by the Army on the government, the activities of the 'Kyoto school' had to be discontinued and subsequent printings of the book were forbidden.

In 1949, Nishitani Keiji, gave a course on nihilism at Kyoto University, with the goal to rewrite the 1942 Tokyo colloquium on 'Overcoming Modernity' and carry out the thought more detailed. In his speech Nishitani did not intend to correct or justify what he wrote in 1942. His answer was to accept and deepen nihilism, not to deny or reject it, as it is meaningless to oppose it.⁴⁹

Overcoming Modernity

By the mid-1930s, the atmosphere of free thought began to erode and the impact of the Marxists had diminished. Along with the prolonged war with China that seemed to have the country trapped in a swamp and the harassment by the Higher Special Police, the Japanese military and its sympathizers started advocating the slogan 'the promotion of the Japanese spirit.' Given the many contradictions that persisted in Japanese society, large numbers of liberal intellectuals, with common base of an open-mindedness to the world, like the members of the Kyoto School, remained despite their differences united in their stance against the common enemy, the narrow-minded nationalists.

West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century, in Peter Duus, ed.: *The Cambridge History of Japan*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp.711-774

48 Horio Tsutomu: The Chuokoron discussions, Their Background and Meaning, in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, ed.: *The Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1994, p.289

49 G. Parkes, S.Aihara ed. and trans.: Nishitani Keiji, *The self-overcoming of nihilism* (1949), Albany State University of New York Press, 1990

In an ambiguous period, extreme political and economic constraints had given birth to an overwhelming deep disenchantment with modernization's effects, along with individual anxiety and collective confusion. In this ideological crisis, the Western-rationalist-liberal model of modernity and the process of modernization, was argued as an radical replacement of traditional society and Japanese values.

Eight months after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour, intellectuals tried to make sense of their nation's place in the world and history. Different symposiums were held, modelled on a number of similar conferences sponsored in Europe by the League of Nations Committee for Intellectual Cooperation. When the state subsequently imposed tight censorship on mass media, the participants argued that Japan's modernization brought problematic thoughts and lifestyles, like individualism, liberalism, and consumerism that were embedded in Western Enlightenment tradition and capitalism.

Echoing the ideology of 'Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan' *Kokutai no hongī*, in the participants' understanding the development of Western-inspired commercial industry, commodity culture, like cafés, bars, department stores, movie theatres, and lifestyle in general, happened to pursue individual interests and desires at the expense of traditional values by destroying Japan's spiritual connection with the gods.⁵⁰ Seen as part of a global conflict, the country's violence and military aggression triggered by the war was understood as an opportunity to rid Japan of the sickness of Westernisation in order to reinstitute authentic Japanese culture again.

The process 'overcoming modernity' started in the 1930s and receded by the late 1940s when wartime devastation reconstruction was superseding under American occupation. The term expressed a deep disenchantment with modernization effects, deep individual anxiety, collective confusion and even despair. In Germany a similar ambiguous experience was absorbed in the 1930s by the Nazi ideology and a French type of fascism quite similar to the 'overcoming modernity' syndrome in Japan, did not vanish. A collective experience of 'overcoming modern-

ity' took shape as an overwhelming social, cultural and political issue, that in the case of Japan was both a collective experience of being overcome by modernity and the urge to overcome modernity as a response to this collective anxiety.⁵¹

The main theme of the first session of a series of round-table discussions held at Kyoto University in 1941 and 1942 and sponsored by *Chūō Kōron*, a well-known literary journal in November 1941, was originally to be 'How to avoid war (with the United States).'⁵² But under pressure from government propagandists after the attack on Pearl Harbor it had to be changed in a way rationally acceptable to the Army.⁵³ Although the editor carefully curbed the sharp criticism of the army and general TŌJŌ Hideki (1884-1948), which was in the original protocols, the published version was immediately attacked by ultra-nationalist and fascist elements in the government as too tame, 'inflammatory and anti-war.'

The army reacted by ordering the suppression of public activities by the 'Kyoto faction' and forbidding any further print-runs of the book or mention of their ideas in the press.⁵⁴

Less than a year after Japan's full immersion in World War II, in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of hostilities between Japan and the United States and already at war with its neighbours in East Asia since the 1931 Manchurian incident, a group of thirteen intellectuals from a wide range of fields from literature, musicology, theology, philosophy to physics, decided to meet in Tokyo in order to interpret Japanese imperialism's Asian mission in

51 Harry Harootunian: *Overcome by Modernity, History, Culture and Community in Interwar Japan*, Princeton University Press, 2000.

52 The journal published the discussions in 1943, titled 'World-Historical Standpoint of Japan' *Sekai-shiteki tachiba to nihon*. All authors, Nishitani Keiji, Kōsaka Masaaki, Suzuki Shigetaka and Kōyama Iwao, were members of the Kyōto School.

Chris Goto-Jones: *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School, and Co-Prosperity*, London Routledge, 2005

Christian Uhl: 'What was the "Japanese Philosophy of History"? An Inquiry into the dynamics of the "World-Historical Standpoint" of the Kyōto-School', in: *Re-Politicizing the Kyōto School as Philosophy*, edited by Christopher S. Goto-Jones, London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 112-134

53 The transcripts of which were later published under the title *Japan from a World-Historical Standpoint 1943*.

The topics of this series of discussions were 'The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan,' 'The Ethics and Historicity of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere,' and finally 'The Philosophy of All-Out War.' Graham Parkes: 'Heidegger and Japanese Fascism: An Unsubstantiated Connection', in Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth: *Japanese and Continental Philosophy*, Indiana University Press, 2011, p.249

54 Horio Tsutomu: 'The *Chūōkōron* Discussions, Their Background and Meaning', in James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995, p.297f

50 Harry Harootunian: *Overcome by Modernity*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p.35f

Roger Eatwell: 'On defining the "Fascist Minimum". The centrality of ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1(3) October 1996, p.303-320

a positive historical light. Trying to restore 'authentic' Japanese culture, the 'Overcoming Modernity' *kindai no chōkoku* symposium, took place in Tokyo on 23-24 July 1942, with members from literature, musicology, theology, philosophy to physics of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, the Literary Society, and the Japan Romantic Group.⁵⁵ Proceedings were published in a literary magazine, Bungakukai 'Literary World' in its September and October 1942 issues together with supplementary essays by some of the participants of the symposium. The theme 'overcoming modernity' was therefore systemically explored and debated from different perspectives and its edited proceedings were published in the magazine in its September and October 1942 issues together with supplementary essays by some of the participants of the symposium.⁵⁶

Similar debates were many at the time, but the slogan 'overcoming modernity' expresses more than other the state of mind of the Japanese people in a precise historical moment in the long-term evolution of modernization.⁵⁷

Obvious in 1942, it was necessary to construct an explanation making sense of the war for the people of Japan, and creating an attempt to propose a new way of understanding the world by overcoming western hegemony. Intellectuals were eager to suppress the dividing seeds of modernization, and promote on the contrary a restoration. A return to Japan's origin in order to ground continuity between the sacred and the modern world. The intellectuals gathered in the 'Overcoming Modernity' symposium were unanimous in their description that modernity was invariably European or Western originating and foreign in its

55 The Kyoto School philosophers, such as Nishitani Keiji and Suzuki Shigetaka; members of the Romantic School (*nihon rōman ha*), such as Hayashi Fusao, Moroi Saburō, Kikuchi Masachi, Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko, Tsumura Hideo; and members of the Literary World Group, such as Kobayashi Hideo. Kawakami Tetsutarō, Kamei Katsuichirō, Nakamura Mitsuo, Miyoshi Tatsuji, Hayashi Fusao

Richard Calichman: *Overcoming Modernity. Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan*, New York, Columbia University Press, XII, 2008

56 In 1943 the transcripts of the symposium were republished as a book, together with the conference papers, in which the discussants had expressed their viewpoints concerning modernity. This corpus of texts, which Carol Gluck calls 'the defining cultural text of wartime Japan,' is interpreted and translated by Richard F. Calichman: *Overcoming Modernity. Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan*, New York, Columbia University Press, XII, 2008

57 It was, in fact, one of several symposia that were held around the same time with a similar set of participants, mainly made up of members of the Japanese Romantic School and the Kyoto School of philosophy. The four symposia took place over a thirteen-month period, starting in November 1941, Kyoto: The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan symposium; March 1942, Kyoto: The Ethical and Historical Nature of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere symposium; July 1942, Tokyo: The Overcoming Modernity symposium; November 1942, Kyoto: The Philosophy of Total War symposium

origin. Within their argument, Japan was forced to go to war in order to prevent the modern divide from further damaging the nation, and therefore sew up around the emperor. The tacit of the 'overcoming modernity' metaphysics was to neutralize history and suspend historical knowledge, by substituting European modern history for Japan's modernization and reducing Europe to its multiple revolutions, crises, wars, and loss of ideology. In order of this new framework, Japan's culture was supposed to be the living proof of its trans-historical existence.

While the participants did not invent the slogan, 'overcoming modernization,' rather than explore its different aspects, in the aspiring militarism, the symposium was largely seen as an attempt to legitimise the war and fascism.⁵⁸ In the dawn of the moment Kyoto philosophers seized their occasion for redefining Japan's world-historical mission to liberate Asia's various societies for independent nationhood under a new regional arrangement of hegemonic authority called the East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.

The idea of the East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, how Miki Kiyoshi, who studied with Heidegger, and his colleagues expressed it, borrowed rather shamelessly from those ideas of Pan-Germanism under the Nazi dictatorship, which relied heavily on their hatred of Anglo-American 'Western' hegemony, which increasingly was called 'Americanism.' Recuperating the fascist paradox, under Japanese supervision as the new regional authority. A new form of regional capitalism with its own temporality for its productive operations, would bypass Western colonialism, and put those under the prospering ideological umbrella on an equal footing with the West.

In a second seminar held in July 1942 by members of that group, called 'The World-Historical Position

58 Minamoto Ryōen: The Symposium on 'Overcoming Modernity', in James Heisig and John Maraldo eds.: *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School and the Question of Nationalism*, Honolulu University of Hawai'i Press, 1994

There are ample of discussions to argue whatever Japan developed in the 1930s, fascism or rather something close to militarism. Scholars argued if fascism is even possible outside Europe and how to draw a distinction between the terms. Nevertheless, a form of communal capitalism appeared with the claims of a social order free from uncertainty of an alienated society. Harootunian cites Kawamuro Nozumo: 'fascism is the politics of Mussolini in Italy, the imperial polity is the correct adaptation of this theory of fascism [in Japan].' Kawamuro Nozumo: *Nihon shakaigakuushi kenkyū*, Tokyo Ningen no Kagakusha, 173, vol.2, p.231 in Harry Harootunian: *Overcome by Modernity, History, Culture and Community in Interwar Japan*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p.xxvii

Slavoj Žižek: *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Durham Duke University Press, 1993

and Japan' *Sekaishiteki tachiba to Nihon*, the alliance with Italy and Germany was further analysed to explain the commonalities with the axis partners.

Philosophers such as Kosaka Masaaki, Nishitani Keiji, Koyama Iwao, and Suzuki Shigetaka, argued that there was a clear linkage between Japan, Italy, and Germany, as leading countries to push the world into a new order. Animated by an idea from Leopold Von Ranke, that of 'moral energy', Japan was driven by its consciousness of world history to organize a bond of common history, as an alternative spatial restricted Asian modernism.

The projects effort of overcoming was not to restore a vanishing traditional society, but to reinforce both a common memory and subjective experience, generated as an organized bond of common history. This form of organised memory was aimed as an alternative spatial restricted Asian modernism at the deep disenchantment with Western modernization's effects and sequels, deep individual anxiety, collective confusion and even despair.

Most of Japanese society struggled with both, the collective experience of being overcome by modernity and the urge to overcome modernity as a response to this collective anxiety. By all the social disorder, intrusive foreigners, the civil wars, the restoration of the Emperor, the invention of a Nation-state and its institutions; the evolving economy and the working conditions, new mentalities, cultures and increased political control, depression and earthquake, the collective memory holding this community together was fractured and this fracture was repressed.

The social and cultural response to that modernization processes that transformed in depth economies, societies, belief systems and cultures within one generation, was a search of other attractors.

And Japan's ultra-nationalism of the late 1930s and 1940s, greatly influenced by German philosophy, was such palingenetic commitment. Promising to satisfy the fascist obsession for rebirth and regeneration at the national as well as the personal level.

In the gradually shift of Japanese society into a totalitarian system, it lacked especially in the beginning some grand gestures, iconic figures, and ideological guidance to transform the physical space or the arts as it happened in Italy and Germany.

Nevertheless, Japan's fascism was a local variant of a global phenomenon articulated in response to a modernity born in the West. Being part of the international discourse, Japanese intellectuals, like Kuki Shūzō, would secure the linguistic aid to stack the array of arguments for the uniqueness of Japan's national polity, within this philosophical framework. Therefore, Kuki's concept of aesthetics for healing the fracture of a world emptied out of meaning by modernity and leaned on descriptions by Western philosophy.⁵⁹

The writings of Heidegger, Nietzsche pointed him the way to *iki*, an aesthetic concept linked to the idea of non-essence and located in the eighteenth century of Edo Japan.⁶⁰ *Iki* became determined as a truly unteachable Japanese sensibility kind of utmost aesthetic style, in which every decision, arrangement, activity has an aesthetic impact on objects, spaces, values, and produces aesthetic experience. Through a resignation of fate, out of a 'World of Suffering', incorporated in the idealised cultural framework of *Bushidō*.⁶¹

Mourning melancholy for lost myths, including that of cultural priority, the fascist 'form' was taking charge of the imaginary, filled with native, pathetic traditional content, creating new and false myths. The producers of this images, the narrators and creators, neglected as individual by fascism, betrayed their convictions, including liberalism, modernism, Marxism, that had dominated their work for decades.

Not claiming that *iki* was a fascist concept per se, it paralleled with the definition that fascism can be characterized formally as an use of aesthetic criteria within the political and economic realms.⁶² Recreating ideological unity by offering its own new fictional myth of wholeness and authenticity potent enough to forge an individual's imaginary relations to society.⁶³

59 Alan Tansman: *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, University of California Press, 2009, p.13ff

60 Prior to the Japanese discovery of German philosophers in the Meiji period (1868–1911), nothing comparable to this strict usage of the philosophical term 'aesthetic' was known in Japan.

Michael F. Marra: *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2001

61 Diogo César Porto Da Silva: *Kuki Shūzō's Temporal Aesthetics: Finding Japanese Identity in Art and Literature*, *The IAFOR Academic Review* Volume 1 Issue 2, *The International Academic Forum*, Japan, 2015, pp.3-7

62 In the quest for an idealized culture, the concept of *iki* internalizes fascist art by projecting a positive utopian aesthetics of staged physical perfection.

63 Alice Kaplan: *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.26