

cannot tell us anything about the silence of those who did not participate in this identity (or even about the actions and voices of those who stood against it). Indeed, a tighter conception of propaganda *relies* on the existence of the unconvinced masses – according to Kushner, it is supposed to be a weapon in an ideological “thought war”.

Finally, the title of the book, *The Thought War (shisōsen)*, is slightly misleading since it suggests that Kushner is interested in the history (and clash) of ideas in imperial Japan. However, Kushner’s thesis is concerned with relative domestic consensus (rather than a *war* of ideas), and is not concerned with the work of the intellectuals, political thinkers or philosophers who struggled to formulate a *Nippon ideogōji*. These were the targets of Tōjō Hideki when he wrote of the *shisōsen* as “thoughts becoming bullets and pens bayonets” (*Asahi shinbun*, 7 March 1943, evening edition).

The chapter that comes closest to matching the title is Chapter 5 (“The Japanese Propaganda Struggle on the Chinese Mainland”), in which Kushner moves away from the domestic scene and presents a fascinating, well-constructed, and more tightly focused argument about the ways in which Japanese imperial propaganda failed to win over the Chinese masses to the cause of Japanese imperialism.

In the final analysis, Barak Kushner has produced a valuable and interesting book which successfully defines some of the contours of the culture of Japanese imperialism. It is provocative and stimulating, and it raises a number of important questions about the parameters of propaganda and its relationship with complicity and dissent during the war years.

Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, The Kyoto School and Co-Prosperity.

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Ever since Takeuchi Yoshimi, in the early 1950s, identified the philosophy of the Kyoto School as one of the principal components of the symposium on overcoming modernity and Kato Shuichi compared one wing of the school with the Japan Romantics, there has been an ongoing effort in and out of Japan to re-situate the role of its philosophical discourse and rehabilitate its members from involvement in the Pacific War. If Takeuchi argued that the Kyoto School went furthest in providing the logic to explain the relationship between total war, eternal warfare and the ideal of nation foundation, Kato’s observations linked the “fascination with words” of Japanese Romantics (*Nihon romanha*), (recalling Kamei Katsuichiro’s resuscitation of the powers of *kotodama*), to Kyoto philosophy’s equal “fascination with theory.” “The Japanese romantics,” he wrote, “worked out a method which reaffirmed the war emotionally,” whereby the “philosophers of Kyoto offered a method that validated the same war theoretically and logically.”¹¹ If the romantics rejected the domination of foreign thought for a zealous nationalism, the philosophers of Kyoto teased out from foreign thought, which itself was separated from life, experience and tradition, a philosophy of world history, which, far from being insufficiently complete, was completely detailed.¹² Since the early postwar years, thinkers as different as Karatani Kojin and Hiromatsu Wataru have frequently revisited the scene of Kyoto philosophy, with the former discerning in it the figuration of fascism and the latter, avoiding such

11 Quoted from Hiromatsu Wataru, *Kindai no chōkokuron*. Tokyo: Asahi shuppansha, 1989, p. 196.

12 Hiromatsu 1989, p. 196.

a confrontation, seeing it rather as part of the broader intellectual project aimed at “overcoming capitalism.” In later years, Hiromatsu would reaffirm Kyoto philosophy’s critique of the conceit of Western universalism. Despite the evident fact that Kyoto stalwarts like Nishitani Keiji, Koyama Iwao and Kosaka Masaaki, and perhaps even Miki Kiyoshi in death, were rehabilitated in the postwar years, there seemed to occur almost punctual and ritualistic repetitions to remind us that the philosophic reflections they produced were never really about the war, even though their meditations were fastened to articulating a “philosophy of total war.” But these repeated visitations to the scene of the crime to attest that no crime took place reflected overheated moments in Japan’s domestic society which managed to call into question the status of the war and the reasons why Japanese have been socialized into forgetting it, until the most recent round of Chinese and Korean complaints and the noisy declarations demanding revision of history text books. Japanese forgetfulness, it needs be said, was authorized by a prior American determination, beginning with the Occupation, to re-narrativize the country’s history in such a way as to airbrush the wartime past and efface its fascist episode in order to show the course of successful peaceful modernization and democratization. In most works on Japan’s postwar written by Americans, the word fascism rarely if ever appears, even though the United States had fought a war against a fascist power. The effort to resuscitate this effaced, “putative” history of fascism has provoked defenders of Kyoto philosophy to denounce any attempt to undo the silencing as irresponsible and incompetent in order to avert assessing the implication of at least one wing of the school in providing the philosophic tropes for the ideologization of imperialism and colonial violence.

Throughout this silenced history, the figure of Nishida Kitaro, the powerful originator of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, has remained in the shadows of debate over the wartime complicity that has tailed his followers. Even though the controversy over Kyoto philosophy’s real or imagined complicity in the war effort will invariably summon presumptions of responsibility attributed to Nishida and his thought for the appropriations of his followers, the record of his own involvement is far more vague and intellectually complex than for those associated with his disciples who had developed a philosophic program that often exceeded mere enunciation of “Nishida *tetsugaku*.” As Christopher Goto-Jones proposes in this recent book on Kyoto political philosophy, the figure of Nishida and the relationship of his philosophic reflections to fascism and war derived as much from the contiguity and closeness of his followers’ thinking as from their dependence on his, and whose grasp of the crisis of the present departed significantly in a number of important and widely read symposia texts produced from 1942 on. Owing to this proximity and its presumption of guilt by association, it is imperative to seek an understanding of the function of Nishida’s own thought, if for no other reason than to demonstrate either the implied and imagined connections or their absence.

According to Hiromatsu, any undertaking that seeks to put into question the status of the philosophy of world history infamously identified with Kyoto “touches on the constructions of Nishida Kitaro.”¹³ The complexities of his thinking and its imbrication with the current situation of the 1930s through an engagement of the philosophic problem of “historical reality” shows sufficiently that Nishida’s own intellectual vocation was never far from the political concerns of his day. Yet, behind the move to appraise the relationship of Nishida’s philosophy to fascism and war stands the ghostly figure of Martin Heidegger and the controversy generated by his affiliation with the Nazis and his philosophy. Although Goto-Jones is less interested in connecting and condemning Nishida analogically to the “Heideggerian factor,” it is, nonetheless, his desire to address the question of charges of “passivity” and even “complicity” by examining the politicality of his philosophic program. This project thus entails examining how Nishida put into question the claims of categories associated with philosophical universalism in the West. While there is no disagreement over this

13 Hiromatsu 1989, p. 197.

impulse which undoubtedly opened the way for Nishida to construct a penetratingly prescient critique – a deconstruction before the letter, so to speak, I am less persuaded by Goto-Jones' desire to emphasize the role played by native intellectual resources as a constituent principle informing Nishida's thought. This perspective has often been employed by partisans in the past to prop up a subsequent effort to defend Kyoto from fascist taint by dismissing embarrassing and "dangerous quotations" recruited "out of context" for what passes as a fuller reading and the desire to differentiate philosophy from ideology even when they occupy the same space in the world. With Nishida, there has been an age-old Orientalist gesture to show how his philosophy was at bottom derived from Mahayanist Buddhism in order to spare him from criticisms that ranged from charges of imitation to misunderstanding the object of philosophy. But Nishida, more than anyone in the interwar period, knew that philosophy was an import from the West and that its vocation required stretching its boundaries, not necessarily by adding syncretic elements from Eastern thought but through the operation of rethinking its enabling categories, which he performed more creatively than anybody of his generation. In this connection, Goto-Jones readily lends a sympathetic shoulder to the supporters of Kyoto philosophy by summoning the familiar plaint that passages employed by interpreters of Nishida and the Kyoto school that might be embarrassing and dangerous signify they have been taken out of context. (I see no reasons why the supporters of one wing of Kyoto philosophy assume a necessary relationship to Nishida and the homogeneity of discourse.) But this tactic manages only to betray the failure of a preferred interpretation to actually account for the contradictions that mark all texts, especially under circumstances where the passages in question were produced by the thinker. In most cases, passages discounted for having been lifted out of context are simply bracketed in such a way as to count as the sign of a proper re-contextualization. Here, it seems to me, Goto-Jones' approval of this tactic works to buoy up charges of "irresponsibility" and "incompetent scholarship" leveled at judgments that have condemned one wing of Kyoto philosophy (but rarely Nishida) as fascist. Yet we know that such accusations perform only to call attention to opposing interpretations and ring with a righteous claim that such versions reflect a fantasizing of fascism where none supposedly existed and thus resulted from incompetent and irresponsible scholarship suffering from insufficient attention to the proper context. But what is actually being upheld here is simply the "law" of non-contradiction, as Tosaka Jun might have put it.

While such an approach reveals the moves of an hermeneutics of empathic entry, curiously recuperating the informing principle of Kyoto philosophy identified by Tosaka Jun, it also disregards the important presumption that thinkers like Nishida were more than capable of committing lapses, slips, contradictions which would need explaining in terms of his texts and their historical placement rather than by appealing to the "authority" of some putatively normative context devoted to bracketing embarrassing passages in the interest of smoothing out his thinking for its coherence as the sign of "taking him seriously," as if others have not. It is precisely because of the impossibility of fixing a context, as if it were an insect trapped in amber for all time to come, that there is the inevitability of plural interpretations based on diverse contexts. In this regard, there can never be any real difference between accusations denouncing selectivity and shoddy contextualization in the interpretations of others from those who are making the charges in the name of a more proper grasp of context, apart from the choices of passages employed to make an argument. Acquiring a knowledge of the past has usually meant grasping a specific context to which even its actors could not have had complete accessibility. Hence the context the participants of a past time lived and experienced, especially if filled with forces and constraints they could not have known, could never be the same context constructed by the historian from the perspective of a distant present directed to specifically understanding a temporally remote history. The actors would never have known what later historians were able to uncover and figure as a context for them that purports to portray a domain of experience they never experienced. Hegel once famously described the afterlife of an

historical event to which meaning is later attributed as the “cunning of reason,” whereby the intention of acts invariably exceed their particularity for the “general or universal idea,” “which remains in the background, untouched and uninjured.” But what I am suggesting is that the context of the historian presumes a superiority over the context known or understood by the actors and thus must be different from it. Yet this difference is rarely recognized by historians who continue to appeal to a calling that demands an understanding of the past in and on its own terms. Recognizing this difference or doubling of contexts would require acknowledging the identity of the historian’s context with the present rather than the past, which it is made to stand for. Moreover, the apparent doubling of contexts underscores the centrality of construction in the operation rather than the claim of reconstruction, whereby the historian is seen to be actually committed to providing a crucial supplement, a filling in, of what was once lived and immediately experienced, even though it would probably not have been recognizable as such by the inhabitants of this distant and foreign country called the past. The supplement derives from a perception of the present that something in the past is lacking and needs to be filled in and completed. With Nishida and the Kyoto School, we have a prime example of the ceaseless process of trying to supply a supplement for what is believed to be missing. This over-determined activity seeking to supplement the historical record tells us as much about our relationship to a specific past and its actors as it does about the moment in question. The difference is produced over what one believes to be missing.

Once Goto-Jones has moved beyond the residues of earlier historiographical practices that had sought to save Kyoto philosophy for philosophy and religion at the expense of history and turns to explaining the relationship of Nishida philosophy to political values, he manages to elaborate, with skilful authority, just how philosophical reflection occupied the space of political philosophy. This consideration constitutes his principal argument and the intellectual strength of the book. While Goto-Jones early warns that Nishida was no liberal, even though prevailing Japanese interpreters have tried to make this argument, the force of this proposition depends very much upon how he – Goto-Jones – wishes to understand liberalism in Japan. Nishida’s philosophy was formulated in a capitalist society founded on the primacy of private property and the pursuit of individual and divided material interests. This was precisely how Tosaka Jun understood Japan’s liberal endowment since the Meiji period and why he was prompted to criticize his teacher’s theory of hermeneutics as quintessentially bourgeois. But what seems to be at the heart of Goto-Jones’ account is the desire to show how Nishida’s early philosophy already disclosed a political vocation which was fully consistent with later, explicit political responses to the ideological idioms of state discourse and his famous or infamous lectures to the emperor. If, as Goto-Jones believes, Nishida’s later philosophical texts, produced in an environment choking from propaganda directed to staging total mobilization, sparked by slogans and ideological demands of the state, appear as more directly explicit political expressions and articulations, they were already prefigured in earlier writings which had even disclosed the political silhouette of his thinking. This relationship was recognized earlier by Hiromatsu Wataru, who saw in Nishida’s writings a politicality in the “narrow sense,” which undoubtedly referred to the later texts, as well as in a broader sense which was already implicit in the *Zen no kenkyū*.¹⁴ What Goto-Jones thus seeks to carry out is a re-situating of Nishida’s political intention to the forefront of his philosophy in order to show that no real turn took place at a later time. Whatever discernable changes that happened to occur were manifest only in the use of different terms and concepts derived from the circumstances of the 1930s, yet his thought still conveyed the force of earlier meanings to register dissent within the approved categories. Hence, the principal thrust of this account aims to provide an analysis of the early and paradigmatic *Zen no kenkyū*, whose purpose was to place philosophy in Japan on a footing with philosophic reflection in Europe.

14 *Zen no Kenkyū* 1921. Translated as *An Enquiry into the Good*, by Masao Abe and Christopher Ives. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.

Although the text has been often seen as a blending between Western philosophy and Eastern thought, its strategy derives from a deep reading and grasp of contemporary philosophic exposition in Europe and resembles most in form Husserl's *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inner Zeitbewusstseins* (1905), even though it is also possible to discern the figure of Bergson and others. Goto-Jones' decision to concentrate on this early and seminal Nishida text is both correct and provocative: correct because the text set the terms of philosophic discourse at Kyoto; provocative because Goto-Jones strives to show a continuity between the politicality enunciated in *Zen no kenkyū* and Nishida's later, conjunctural engagement with the political idiom of state ideology. The account is marked by the goal to demonstrate simultaneously an originary political vocation in the text and to illustrate how philosophic articulation was limned by Mahayanist/Zen sentiments. The former task seems essential if a convincing case is to be made for exonerating Nishida's later involvements in the political discourse of the state, whereas the latter derives its force from an older impulse to claim Nishida philosophy for the East and the Japanese tradition. But there is as much Kant on practice and conduct in the text as there are Zen-tinged reminders whose presence, at least for me, always presented the appearance of cosmetic references in a rigidly philosophic exposition. As for Nishida's later attempts to typologize Eastern and Western thought and differentiate them (Nothing and Being), this pointed to an earlier formulation that showed, rightly, an intellectual universe more plural than universal.

It should be recalled that Nishida, from a later perspective (on the occasion of a new publication of the text in 1936), described the initial impulse informing *Zen no kenkyū* as a "work" that sought to address the "position of consciousness," (and thus sealing its kinship with Husserl's tract on time-consciousness) and could be considered as a "psychologism," even though its intention is mainly critical and not methodological. In addition, he explained, "those who today say that this book speaks to the world of direct experience or the world of pure experience come to consider it as the world of historical reality. In truth, it is the world of active intuition, the world of poiesis, indeed the world of pure experience."¹⁵ Not a world hemmed in by Buddhist residues, but one derived from contemporary philosophic speculation and its preoccupation with unmediated formation and production – the domain of pure experience – and the source of active intuition and the ultimate making of politics. Nishida, like Husserl and even Bergson and Heidegger, bracketed (and thus aligned with the politics of phenomenological reduction) the external historical and sociological world as a condition to securing access to a realm of primordial "pure experience" before it had been submitted to mediation by subsequent reflection and the construction of categories. For all, the operation required the identification of an unavoidably primordial everydayness as the site of an unmediated and unadorned state of consciousness. In this respect, Goto-Jones rightly shows how the *Zen no kenkyū* endeavored to root pure experience in an unmediated everyday which thus opens on a scene that existed in a pre-categorical temporality whereby everyday practice and conduct might be identified before its descent into ego and history. Goto-Jones points out how Nishida envisaged the highest good expressed in the form of self-actualization and the cultivation of abilities. In this sense, the good manifests true reality since it marks the moment of unity of the self as it is disclosed in the performance of conduct toward the realization of this end. At the heart of this observation was the concern for determining what constituted "good conduct" in the everyday, and the proper ethical map directing it. At the same time Nishida delegated "pure experience" to lead the self to a realization of morally founded conduct; the imperative informing this demand recognizes the freedom of others, thus confirming along the way an early penchant for pluralism, as the achievement of good behavior discovers its true vocation in the "negation" of all opposites. In this construction, Nishida managed to clear the path to envisioning the relationship of self and others, society as such, which represented the unity of will with action. Yet, he seemed obliged to link self-actualization and its consequences

15 Hiromatsu 1989, pp. 198–99.

for others to the order of the state. Refracting the ideals of late Meiji liberalism, it seems to me he was here convinced that the responsibility of the state required the safeguarding of individual freedoms. Ultimately, this belief referred to “supporting individuals in their quest for self-actualization.” (p. 61) Goto-Jones stops short of connecting this move to the primacy of interest in liberal theory but there can be little doubt that self actualization also carried the association of pursuing self-interest, even though Nishida was concerned with differentiating true from false values. It is also important to notice how Tosaka Jun later reappropriated this conceptualization of self-actualization to redefine the meaning of political practice in the present. Yet this consideration of values, with its powerful consequences for authorizing a discourse on enduring culture as an alternative contemporary history in the 1920s, reflected a worry over how to overcome conflict.

Goto-Jones maintains that *Zen no kenkyū*, at bottom, constituted a theorization of the political. But during the 1930s, while Nishida embarked upon the task to reiterate his earlier understanding of ethical conduct, he was constrained into using the political language of the day for a number of reasons rather than rely on the idiom of his earlier philosophic exposition. For Goto-Jones this restraint meant that Nishida had no choice but to communicate dissent only through the wording of these ideologically freighted terms, which had to be read philosophically. At this juncture, Goto-Jones steps into the long-running controversy over whether or not Nishida was actually complicit in the political ideology of state fascism, owing either to his being held hostage to the prevailing tropes of discourse, or to maneuvers which successfully avoided charges of involvement. In Goto-Jones’ reckoning, Nishida sustained a consistent fidelity with his prior view on politics and managed to uphold the pluralist cosmopolitanism of earlier philosophic writings. However, it is not always clear to me that arguments presupposing a process of continuity, linking a foundational poesis to specific political enactments, can be made of Nishida (or indeed any thinker), a conceit rigorously contested by William Haver who has questioned the “essential continuity of Nishida philosophy,” including statements, positions and concepts and “insights,” as “quite possibly entirely untenable.”¹⁶ But it is certain that the late Nishida was clearly on record for criticizing the rampant racism of official pronouncements, the “assumption of unproblematic continuity and essential identity” among the “biologically grounded ... house or family, the Volk and the corporate state.”¹⁷ It is here, I believe, that Nishida was positioned to rearticulate an earlier pluralism and to authorize the claim of East Asian peoples to “awaken” to their own world historical mission and create a particular world of their own (G-J, p. 92). Driven by a sharp awareness of the conceits of Western universalism (epitomized earlier by Husserl’s declaration that only the West knew philosophy), Nishida recognized how cultures are always particularistic manifestations destined to betray their specific situatedness. While this conception was amplified by Nishida’s followers during the war, Goto-Jones quickly reminds readers that for Nishida this appeal called only for the “awakening” of the peoples of East Asia, not their coercion. To this end, Nishida unleashed a powerful critique against the unquestioned and untamed claims of a universalistic morality steeped in the specific cultural endowment of Europe and its historical exclusion of the self-determination of peoples outside of Euro-America which, not surprisingly, necessitated ignoring and devaluing their own cultural and religious accomplishments. Clearly committed to some sort of trans-national arrangement of self-determined nations, rather than the hegemony of a single, particular culture speaking in a universal voice, Nishida redefined the idea of “co-prosperity” to mean historical formation instead of arbitrariness masked as universalism. Despite his criticism of the League of Nations, Nishida seemed bent on retaining a Wilsonian-type ideal of self-determination in the hothouse of world politics on the eve of the Pacific War. According to

16 William Haver, *The Body of This Death, Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 29.

17 Haver 1996, p. 30.

Goto-Jones, what Nishida hoped for most was a formulation authorizing a “universal particularism,” recalling the heady liberal cosmopolitanism of the 1920s, which might be based on the experiences of a national formation all people must live, derived from a “world of world formationism” capable of avoiding in the present the plunge into ethnic or Volkish nationalism. (p. 95) By rearticulating an early cosmopolitanism, Nishida wished to dampen the racist associations of Volkish nationalism and its pledge to replace one set of “universalistic” claims with another equally specious particularistic mission. Goto-Jones, quite correctly, wants to distinguish Nishida from the work of his “school” of followers, who were already committed to intensifying the drum beat announcing the ambition of Japan’s world historical mission to support an Asian “awakening,” even though their own thinking failed to cloak a real violence of abstraction employed to camouflage a confident conviction in Japan’s natural leadership and indifference to other Asians. Under these circumstances, it seems natural to see Nishida as a dissenter. Yet we must also recognize in this evaluation of his purpose the fact that Nishida lived to see how his notion of a universal particular had already become a particularized universalism, marching with the Japanese army in East and Southeast Asia under the banner of a world historical mission whose achievement was momentarily concretized in the colonizing program of the Co-Prosperity Sphere. It is not so much that Nishida was put in an awkward position of assuming the “symbolic responsibility” for the acts of his followers and appropriators, as Goto-Jones suggests, but rather Nishida’s own incapacity to recognize the context of an imperializing and colonizing present that supplied empirical and existential reality to his theorizations and the very “logic of integration” the state was deputized to achieve by overriding all conflicts and contradictions “through a reading of ‘absolute contradictory self-identity’.”¹⁸ But having said that means only that we are immensely indebted to Goto-Jones for bringing us back to the historical aporias Japan faced as it modernized in the interwar period and for guiding us through the intricacies of how philosophy and its most gifted practitioner in Japan sought to make sense of the spectacle taking place.

18 Haver 1996, p. 35.