

Modernity and the Idea
Liberalism, Fascism, Materialism in Showa Japan

Jeremy Hurdis

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Department of History
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

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Abstract

After the Meiji Restoration of 1862, Western philosophy was imported and infused into Japanese culture and its intellectual climate. By the early 20th Century, Kyoto School philosophers and romantic authors sought to reaffirm Japanese culture, believed jeopardised by the hastened development of Western capitalist modernity. This movement became politically charged, and is not without fascist allegations. After the Second World War modernism again became a primary intellectual concern, as modernists and Asianists alike attempted to struggle with the idea of fascism in Japan. Works of Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945) and Watsuji Tetsuro (1889-1960), and the prewar contexts within which they were written, will be compared to the postwar thinkers Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) and Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977). The purpose of this thesis is to examine how Japanese thinkers before and after the Second World War understood and responded to the global process of modernity, and how it relates to such political movements as liberalism and fascism.

Introduction

The Kyoto School philosophers have been incessantly toggled in recent historiography between two political alignments – liberalism and fascism. Without a doubt, the Kyoto School philosophers were liberal in their textual labours. The question is this, then: why, in the turbulent decades of the 1930's and 40's, was liberal philosophy so prone to fascism?

On Contended Ground They Thought

In the last two decades there arose a debate centered on the political and ideological intentions of Kyoto School of philosophy. Philosophers of the Kyoto School – those who surrounded Nishida Kitaro¹ (1870-1945) and Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962) at the University of Kyoto – were thrust into academic scrutiny by Najita Tetsuo and Harry Harootunian in a 1988 essay, “Japanese Revolt Against the West,” in which late Kyoto-school philosophy was

¹ Throughout this thesis, Japanese names will be given family-name first.

critically depicted as a “a thinly disguised justification... for Japanese aggression and continuing imperialism,”² for what is known in Japan as the Fifteen-Years War (1931-1945). For fascist ideology, the philosophy of the Kyoto School offered a holistic sense of purpose in which the goal was the sublimation of the active self into an ultimately concrete, ideological space, located in later Kyoto School works in the person of the Emperor. Hence the Emperor became the conceptual fulcrum by which modernity might be removed from Japan and the campaign to control Asia was intellectually linked to overthrowing Western modernity throughout Japan and other Asian nations. It is significant that the project of the Kyoto School began as a criticism of modernity, and sought to escape the confines of subject/object and linear historical time.

Liberalism, the ideology which drove modernisation in Japan, emphasises individualism and freedom, and for the interwar period, “lacked a sense of the whole, the totality.”³ A society that lacked cohesion, as conservatives had seen it, could not be saved by liberalism, which maintained a significant defect for failing to “consider the social completely,” while Tosaka Jun, another left-wing member of the Kyoto School, suggested liberalism had done that only too well.⁴ Cultural theorists in Japan, including the Kyoto philosophers, were producing theories based on community and the primacy of experience and relationships precisely at a time when a fascist state sought to preserve the productive capacity of capitalism while attempting to discard the intrinsic effects of capitalism – class conflict, alienation, and uneven development.⁵ Fascists sought what today Slavoj Žižek

² Tetsuo Najita and H.D. Harootunian, “Japanese Revolt against the West,” in Peter Duus, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press), 1993, pp. 741

³ Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*, Princeton; Princeton University Press (2000), pp. 384

⁴ Ibid. quoting Miki Kiyoshi, pp. 384

⁵ Ibid. pp. xxix

might call a ‘decaffeinated capitalism,’ a society in which the productive forces of capitalism were subordinate to political ideology.⁶ Thus, for Harootunian, the cultural theorists, who “need not wear brown shirts (or be ranking members of the military high command),”⁷ were complicit with fascism by supplying the state with intellectual work sufficient for the state’s ideological needs while not effectively preventing any such appropriation of their work.

In response to the association of Kyoto philosophy to radical politics, opposing scholars attempted to emphasise the liberal or ‘internationalist’ nature of their philosophical works in order to distance Nishida and his students from the fascist label. Christopher Goto-Jones lamented that the Kyoto School was being “dismissed for its putatively ultranationalist leanings.”⁸ Such a label, according to Graham Parkes, has caused the works of these “fascist or imperialist ideologues” to be treated as “philosophically nugatory.”⁹ While scholars such as Harootunian¹⁰ characterise philosophers of the Kyoto School as fascists, scholars on the side of Goto-Jones and Parkes¹¹ have attempted to align these prewar thinkers against fascism variously as defenders of Meiji Period (1868-1912) or Taisho Period (1912-1926) liberalism, or otherwise as thinkers of a universal moral that ultimately transcends any particular nationhood or nationalism. The debate has been rekindled again by Parkes in the recent essay, “Heidegger and Japanese Fascism.” The crux of Parkes’ argument, denouncing

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *They Know Not What They Do*, London; Verso (1991), pp. 186

⁷ Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, pp. xxix

⁸ Christopher S. Jones, “Ethics and Politics in Early Nishida: Reconsidering *Zen no Kenkyū*,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (October 2003), pp. 514

⁹ Graham Parkes, “The Putative Fascism of the Kyoto School and the Political Correctness of the Modern Academy,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (July 1997), pp. 305

¹⁰ Including, but not limited to: Peter Dale, Leslie Pinkus, Christian Uhl, Sakai Naoki, and, cautiously, Kevin Doak.

¹¹ After Goto-Jones and Parkes, this includes Bret Davis, David Dilworth, Iida Yumiko, Yusa Michiko, and others.

the association between the Kyoto School and fascism as merely “Neo-Marxist jargon,”¹² devoid of any real examination of their philosophical texts, suggests a hermeneutic mistreatment of Nishida and his students, as direct quotations in (specifically) Harootunian’s work are often short and sparse. Just as typically, Parkes himself offers no direct quotation from the texts in question in their defense. The burden of proof has been cast upon the Kyoto School critics to provide concrete textual proof of any wilfully fascist statement by a member of the Kyoto School. However, such proof may not exist in so concrete a form, and the connection between romantic philosophical labour and fascist ideology relies on theoretical analysis, a fact which may condemn the debate to be perpetuated as part of a larger academic argument between those who practice theory and those who abhor it.

The significance of the Kyoto School, and why such a debate would matter for those involved, is that it was the first institution of modern philosophy in Japan, founded in the 1910’s. All the more significant, then, is the corpus of anti-modern philosophy produced by its philosophers. Nishida and his students produced a critique of modernity which consisted of an attack on the subject/object dichotomy of modern philosophy. Their critique leveraged concepts from Buddhism to develop a notion of nothingness as a space of primordial consciousness pre-existing time and the self. This philosophy of nothingness utilised a peculiar form of self-negation as a way of exposing the empty being as it exists prior to self-knowledge, the instance at which the subject and object are divided. This philosophy is expanded by Nishida and his students into the realms of politics and history during a time of

¹² Parkes, “Heidegger and Japanese Fascism,” online at [<http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/EJPhilosophy/PDF/EJP6%20Parkes.pdf>], accessed January 2010.

fascist upheaval. Indeed, their thought drew much mixed attention throughout the Showa Period (1926-1989).¹³

Historiography

At no point in the debate have either the Kyoto School apologists or the critics been able to explain the existence of fascist or liberal ideas expressed by Kyoto School philosophers through monographs and speeches, while also explaining the simultaneous existence of the opposite sentiments. Defendants of the Kyoto School have emphasised pacifist tendencies in their philosophical works without explaining the existence of these tendencies alongside or within fascist speeches and essays. Parkes has denied Nishida's nationalism for lack of "any trace of the chauvinism, jingoism, or imperialism to which an internationalist is opposed."¹⁴ Parkes also cites Nishida's impatience with the government committee on the 'Renewal of Education and Scholarship'. Nishida's globalism, however, came to contain language more expected for a time of imperialism – appeals to the Emperor's guidance and an early end to the war were perhaps the most jingoistic Nishida had been in speaking to authority. But his philosophy was formed from the particulars of Buddhist language, an appeal to pre-modern Japanese texts that lent purpose to the critiques of Kyoto Marxist philosopher Tosaka Jun (1900-1945), as we shall see later. The form of Nishida's internationalist philosophy developed the intellectual space for a particular form of Japanese fascism. Goto-Jones, on the other hand, while suggesting Nishida's philosophy was always (ineffectively) political from the beginning, refers to administrative censorship of Nishida during the war years, citing political criticism of Nishida to suggest he was not

¹³ The Japanese historical divisions concerned in this study are as follows: Tokugawa (1603-1868); Meiji (1868-1912); Taisho (1912-1926); and Showa (1926-1989). Modernisation begins with the Meiji Period, and from the Meiji Period onward the period corresponds with the reign of the Emperor.

¹⁴ Graham Parkes, "The Definite Internationalism of the Kyoto School," in Christopher Goto-Jones, ed., *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*, London; Routledge (2008), pp. 171

fascist.¹⁵ However, the political crystallisation of fascist thought should not be taken to accurately represent fascism as a larger ideology with social roots. Goto-Jones admits there were criticisms of Nishida by his own colleague, Tanabe Hajime, that the very abstractness of his philosophy allowed room for its appropriation by nationalists. The same was said by Tosaka, whose criticisms of Nishida condemn this openness in Kyoto philosophy as a weakness against malicious sources which sought to appropriate it. As John Maraldo shows, Goto-Jones's treatment of Nishida as political philosophy depends on a narrow and very mild interpretation on 'political' limited largely to arguments of the use of his terminology.¹⁶

Assailants of the Kyoto School have done the opposite. Harootunian has done little to explain the peculiarity of Nishida's internationalist, liberal, ideas in the fascist, anti-modern context. Harootunian describes the Kyoto philosophical project as not a project of action, but as an "examination of Western culture which invariably sent the seekers to a 'return' to the 'native place of the spirit,'"¹⁷ which indicated not a violent, but an otherwise subversive philosophy which raised Japanese uniqueness to an abstract enough level to conceive of an alternative global relation outside of modernity. Nishida has been quoted elsewhere: "To become global Oriental culture must not stop at its own specificity but rather it must shed a new light on Western culture and a new world culture must be created."¹⁸ The enforcement of a global alternative indexed fundamental problems in Western modernity which philosophers from the Kyoto School addressed. The postcolonial critique of Nishida by Arisaka Yoko focuses on the appropriation of the universal in Western liberalism in creating

¹⁵ Christopher Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan*, London; Routledge (2005), pp.127-130

¹⁶ See John Maraldo, "The War Over the Kyoto School," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Autumn 2006), pp. 380-81

¹⁷ Harry Harootunian, "Japanese revolt against the West," in *The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 6*, edited by Peter Duus, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press (1997), pp. 735

¹⁸ Arisaka Yoko, "Beyond 'East and West': Nishida's Universalism and Postcolonial Critique," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 545

an equally colonial alternative. In the analysis that follows it will be shown that there were material factors ignored by the Kyoto school philosophers that render problematic any alternative colonial project as such. However liberal that global vision sounds, the space exists for a nationalist appropriation that would celebrate national culture as the origin of this new world view. Yet the weakness of Kyoto School criticism is a tendency to rely on citation of prior criticism of the Kyoto School, and sparse citation of the works of the Kyoto philosophers themselves, thus leaving unconvinced those who demand positive proof of guilt.

The post-colonial analysis of Kyoto philosophy – that Western hegemony took root in Eastern philosophy through the language of modern philosophical discourse, through Marx, Hegel, Heidegger, Milton, and others imported during the Meiji period is correct. Before Kyoto philosophy was conceived, it must be noted that a Buddhist revivalism by thinkers such as Kiyozawa Manshi was taking place around the same time as Nishida began his work. The rendition of Buddhism that emerged from this brief period placed Buddhism not only in a position of a globally viable moral good, but also as the only moral good compatible with the natural sciences of modernity. As science asserts that only objective knowledge is true, Kiyozawa attempted to harmonise the objective reality of science with the subjective reality of religion which unites all things in the objective world in a manner not verifiable by scientific methods.¹⁹ Modernisation of Buddhism meant the religion had to be rendered dualistic to suit the new commodity form of modernisation, since it has to be compatible with science as a universal in addition to the particularity of being a Japanese religion.

¹⁹ Alfred Bloom, “Kiyozawa Manshi and the Path to Revitalisation of Buddhism,” available online: [<http://www.shin-ibs.edu/documents/pwj3-5/02Bloom35.pdf>], pp. 28-29

Deficiencies in the debate exemplify the complexity of fascism and, further, fail to sufficiently elucidate its relation to liberalism. The next step in this debate should therefore be to reconsider the relationship between liberalism and fascism, two political forms which have been recognised as mutually antagonistic. If this opposition can be overcome, then the Kyoto School philosophers can remain liberal philosophers who were, whether they knew it or not, contributing to a fascist ideology that thrived by appropriating anything not concretely opposed to it. In this way, Kyoto School philosophy can be criticised within its own political context – fascism – without defacing the philosophical merit of their work. Moreover, liberalism, fascism, and communism can only be discussed together through a careful examination of their more fundamental context – modernity itself. Modernity, and the debate surrounding it, is the core question around which these ideologies are posed. Only through a better understanding of modernity can we better understand the roles of various thinkers in relation to any of these ideologies.

Our Immediate Task

I propose here an analysis of liberalism in which liberalism, unaware of its own modern conditions of possibility, is unable to properly oppose either the left or the right, both defined by the same conditions of possibility. Thus, attempts by liberal philosophers to produce philosophical meaning were unable to prevent their own espousal by ideologues of any radical political alignment. Re-adjusting our understanding of liberalism and fascism does have an implication beyond the debate surrounding the Kyoto School, and indeed beyond the World War II period. If liberalism had a blind spot through which fascism was able to cascade into society, there then remains the lurid possibility that the same blind spot has persisted even after the war. The purpose of this thesis is to first question the supposed

opposition between liberalism and fascism; then, once the relation between the two ideologies is examined, to see whether the reconstitution of liberalism immediately following the war was able to resolve its own past blindness.

Toward this end, a reading of seminal works of Japanese modern philosophy will be undertaken in order to establish the complexity of pinning these texts on the political spectrum. These texts include *An Inquiry into the Good* (善の研究 *Zen no Kenkyu*) by Nishida Kitaro, co-founder of the Kyoto School; *Ethics* (倫理学 *Rinrigaku*) by Watsuji Tetsuro, one of the founders of the Tokyo School.²⁰ Both Nishida and Watsuji were significant in developing ‘Japanese philosophy’ into a modern tradition distinct from the Western counterpart in its use of Buddhist and Confucian concepts. Into the 1940’s both thinkers became embroiled in the formation of fascist ideology through public speeches and works of politicised philosophy. Even their early philosophical works offered a strong foundation for the formation of a fascist ideology, with no real ‘turn’ from liberalism ever having been necessary, yet those early works are the most often cited in defence of the Kyoto School as a liberal mode of thought. But already the tension between liberalism and fascism existed. If one wishes to consider prewar philosophers of the Kyoto School as liberal, then it must be with regard to a concept of liberalism which is *apolitical*, and *transhistorical*, intricately tied to modernity and its capitalist dynamic. Thus, the thinkers of the Kyoto School could yet be considered liberal in terms of their philosophy, that is, in their

²⁰ Watsuji is not an arbitrary selection. He served as a lecturer of ethics at Kyoto University from 1925 and shared with Nishida and Tanabe a background in German philosophy. After a year of study in Germany and work elsewhere, he was appointed professor in Kyoto in 1931, and then served as professor at the Tokyo Imperial University from 1934 until his retirement in 1949. His work *Climate and Culture* (風土 *fuudo*) was a critique and elaboration upon Heidegger’s Being and Time. His comparative studies of East/West thought and his use of ‘nothingness’ as a core concept mark Watsuji as a periphery member of the Kyoto School.

use of a liberal hermeneutic described by another associate of the Kyoto School, Tosaka Jun, as one based on meaning divorced from historical specificity.

In discussing the postwar period, the works of Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) and Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977) present two divergent cases of attempts to understand the violent decades of war and the core question of modernity. Maruyama, like his western counterpart, Hannah Arendt, offered the first sustained attempt after 1945 to understand causally the roots of fascism in Japan. In fitting the fascist phase within the timeline of Japan's capitalist development, Maruyama sought to explain fascism as an aberration born of an incomplete modernisation. Ultimately he produced a reconstitution of liberal values and encouraged under those values a renewal of Japanese nationalism, thereby propagating a stronger individual subjectivity for Japanese citizens as a necessity for democracy. Following the wound liberalism had suffered in its suppression by ultranationalist politics, Maruyama was perhaps the most significant and influential scholar in Japan for restoring liberalism during the years of American occupation. Takeuchi Yoshimi, on the other hand, argued for a re-evaluation of fascism and modernity. By returning to works presented in the 1942 symposium *Overcoming Modernity* (近代の超克 *Kindai no Chokoku*) and by comparing Japanese conceptions of modernity to those of the Chinese writer, Lu Xun, Takeuchi hoped to rescue from the violence of wartime fascism the critique of modernity which was never solved in the resolution of the war. In recapturing the anti-modernist anxieties of the wartime symposium, Takeuchi reconstructs the Asianist potential for Japan as an alternative to the liberal democratic path set by scholars such as Maruyama and by the occupation forces. As we shall see, his approach questions modernist notions of modernity and time using a methodology inspired by the Kyoto School of philosophy.

Throughout the work ahead, modernity, liberalism and fascism will be brought into dialogue by examining them in terms of their conditions of possibility – located within the dynamic of capitalism. This is a significant step in comparing the two ideologies, since capitalist modernity is the requisite precondition for both, as it is also for the third political possibility of the subject context – communism. The framework for the Marxist critique employed here was developed by Moishe Postone, who brought Marx’s critique of capital to perhaps its most abstract rendition thus far.²¹

As a critique of traditional Marxism, and a re-grounding of Frankfurt School Marxism to labour and time, Postone’s reading of Marx posits capitalism as a mode of production rather than a mode of distribution.²² This mode of production is historically specific and defined at its most fundamental by the dualistic commodity form. In capitalist society labour, wealth, and time have taken on the same dualistic form of the commodity.²³ This point is crucial, for this divide between concrete and abstract cascaded through the mode of capitalist production to affect every aspect of society, from the common kimono to the nation-state. The totality of this dynamic as a global dynamic enables us to understand social production around the world as components of a homogenous global system. Establishing labour-time as the core of capitalist motion, Postone is able to move beyond Marxists such as the Frankfurt School thinkers, who dialectically criticised bureaucracy and structure, or Ernest Mandel, who attempted to map the short term and long term cycles of tension between automated labour and human labour. Postone offers an interpretation of Marx’s categories which are capable of unifying the power structures of capitalist modernity

²¹ Moishe Postone, *Time Labour, and Social Domination*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press (1993), pp. 5

²² For a concise look at Postone’s Marxist theory, see Viren Murthy, “Reconfiguring Historical Time: Moishe Postone’s Interpretation of Marx,” in *History and Heteronomy: Critical Essays*, Tokyo; UTCP (2009)

²³ Ibid. pp. 127-29

with technological advances and regressions of human labour as aspects of a singular capitalist dynamic.

Therefore, Japanese romanticism before the Second World War is embedded in the same global system as similar movements in Germany, Italy, Spain, and elsewhere, and these can each be understood as reactions against the antinomies of this monolithic totality. For a school of philosophy concerned with re-establishing the moment of existence preceding the dichotomy of subject and object, the parallel fracture of concrete/abstract being at the material foundation of capitalist modernity was and is as significant as the fracture between mind and body from Descartes in early modern philosophy. Hence, following the industrialisation of Japan from the Meiji Restoration, Nishida's philosophy of nothingness and pure experience was a timely response to the strains of changed power relations in Japanese society brought on by capitalist revolution half a century prior.

Tosaka Jun

Once Nishida's student, Tosaka severed his contacts at Kyoto by his sharp critique of the Kyoto School's 'philosophy of nothingness.' Tosaka's critiques, written in the mid 1930's, offer an opportunity to overcome the opposition of liberalism and fascism in discussing Japan's wartime philosophers. It is fortunate, then, that Harootunian has revived in academic memory the work of Tosaka Jun, who, like his associates in Kyoto, studied in Germany, but unlike his associates, revolted against the idealism which he saw edging ever closer to radical politics. The philosophy of idealism "either consciously or unconsciously support the fascist ideology, or at least their writings do so in net effect."²⁴ Tosaka brought

²⁴ Tosaka Jun, "Is the 'Logic of Nothingness' Logic?: On the Method of Nishida Philosophy," Translated by David Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo, *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy*, Westport, Conn. ; Greenwood Press, 1998, pp. 363

to attention the relationship between liberalism as a mode of philosophy and Japanism, a reaction against liberalism which sought meaning and uniqueness in Japanese culture. To begin with, it is noteworthy that Tosaka's critiques build upon Marx's earlier criticisms against idealism and its reliance on religious consciousness.

“The entire body of German philosophical criticism from Strauss to Stirner is confined to criticism of religious conceptions. The critics started from real religion and actual theology. What religious consciousness and a religious conception really meant was determined variously as they went along. Their advance consisted in subsuming the allegedly dominant metaphysical, political, juridical, moral and other conceptions under the class of religious or theological conceptions; and similarly in pronouncing political, juridical, moral consciousness as religious or theological, and the political, juridical, moral man – “man” in the last resort – as religious. The dominance of religion was taken for granted.”²⁵

Idealism, Marx suggested, was framed by religious language, and so relied on religious consciousness, making religion and theology the hegemonic modes of philosophy in German idealism. Marx lamented that the young Hegelians had only taken religious consciousness as one side of any given dialectic, then subsuming the other side – metaphysical, political, or moral – under the side of religious consciousness. Hence, Marx's materialist project was a response to the young Hegelian misstep which saw man's domination in the realm of consciousness. The result of their idealism was that problems

²⁵ Karl Marx, *On the German Ideology*, Part A [<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm#a1>]

were only reinterpreted in a religious frame and never solved. As Marx lamented, “It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings.”²⁶

According to Tosaka, proponents of philosophic idealism²⁷ quietly substitute ontological categories in their analyses of history with metaphysical categories, which cannot be used to understand history. Tosaka’s advocacy of materialism as the only way to understand history, and the only way to oppose fascism, exhibits his Marxist background, but should be considered carefully. As liberalism is founded on an appeal to abstract equality, abstract freedom, and a claim to universalism rather than a materialist understanding of existence, which will be touched on later, it is afloat, aloof, as a system anchored only in ideas. Liberalism’s universality extends temporally into an idea that is ahistorical, detached from its conditions of possibility in capitalism. “Insofar as [thoughts] are social forces, they have an objective existence, and they are only constituted as thoughts when they are designed to participate in the solution of real social problems.”²⁸ But insofar as objective existence is material, liberalism is non-participatory in social programs.

This is the root of the problem. One aspect of liberal ‘freedom’ is what Tosaka termed ‘freedom from socio-political ideas,’²⁹ rendered in his time as the embrace by liberal philosophers of religious consciousness. More specifically the liberal philosophers used

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tosaka Jun not only refers to German Idealists such as Heidegger, but also specifically the works of the Kyoto School, naming “Nishida Kitaro, Tanabe Hajime, Miki Kiyoshi, et al.” In a note at the end of his essay: “History and Dialectics: Metaphysical Categories are not Philosophical Categories” translated and edited by David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo, *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy*, Westport, Conn. ; Greenwood Press, 1998 pp. 330-338 (note on 338).

²⁸ Tosaka, “Preface to Intellectual Problems of Contemporary Japan: Japanism, Liberalism, Materialism,” in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy* (henceforth *Sourcebook*), pp. 339.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 340.

religious consciousness in responding to social problems, which are the abstractions of the individual in modern society, or in other words the contradictions within capitalism – the abstraction of the individual subject from objectivised labour. But since the liberal application of the religious consciousness cannot find the material source of the social problems (since liberalism does not recognise its conditions of possibility in capitalism), the contradictions are merely hidden, shrouded, ‘overcome’ by religious means. The solution, then, could only conceal the fundamental problem since the conditions generating the problem are allowed to endure, even if, or especially if, concealed by a layer of concrete ‘overcoming’. Instead of an overcoming, it becomes an escape. “In place of an actual solution to society’s contradictions,” Tosaka had written, “this escape comes to be an intellectual solution to contradiction – that is to say, an intellectual neglect or elimination of the contradiction.”³⁰ The neglect of the contradiction Tosaka identified was the very refusal to ground solutions in material concerns. Capitalism presented the conditions of possibility for both Marxism and fascism as romantic, anti-modern (anti-capital) movements, and also for liberalism as a progressive movement for abstract equality. That abstract equality is rooted very deeply in the abstraction of human labour – which itself was an integral feature of capitalism. Human equality was possible only after labour equality. It is unique to capitalism that “[e]ach subject is an exchanger; i.e. each has the same social relation towards the other that the other has towards him. As subject of exchange, their relation is therefore that of *equality*.*[sic]*”³¹

The contribution by Tosaka Jun to our understanding of fascism is that one precondition for fascism’s flourishing is the vacuous loss of meaning that occurs in the

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 340

³¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, translated by Martin Nicolaus, Penguin Classic, 1993, pp. 241

fracturing of society under modernity. Alan Tansman, in his latest work described modernity as, using Schiller's words, a "disenchantment of the world."³² But this fall from a mythic identity opened the possibility of a re-enchantment. The universal abstract equality of liberalism, when applied to philosophy, meant the freedom and equality of ideas not limited only spatially, but applied transhistorically as well. Hence liberal philosophy was able to fill the vacuum of meaning with pre-modern ideas and concepts. "This is the type of project that looks for the solution of today's labor problems by discoursing on Buddhist texts," lamented Tosaka.³³ The inability of liberalism to oppose fascism has an epicentre on this temporal equality of meaning. If the answers for current social problems existed in pre-modern thought, then the analysis of classical texts in search of solutions was unthinkingly producing nostalgia for that reified past. That liberal philosophy could be so easily appropriated by fascist ideologues should come as no surprise. Fascism promised, after all, a glorified return to a reified past. However, the sense of longing for the past was not unique to fascism, but was common to all forms of romanticism, including Marxism. Romanticism was rendered in either reactionary (fascism) or revolutionary (Marxism); "[f]or revolutionary Romanticism the aim is not a *return* to the past, but a *detour* through the past on the way to a utopian future."³⁴[sic]

Fascist Moments

While Tosaka has produced significant groundwork to resolve the conflict between liberal and fascist, a recent work has built upon it to enrich our understanding of fascism as an anti-modern movement. Alan Tansman's book, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*,

³² Quoted in Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, August 2009, pp. 14; at this time, I quote from the manuscript of the book.

³³ Tosaka, Preface, pp. 343

³⁴ Michael Lowy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*, New York, NY; Verso, 2005, pp. 5

illustrates how “fascist moments” appeared in various romantic works of prose, film, visual art and song, collectively creating a “fascist aesthetic” of vehement nostalgia. Fascist moments were images of “self-obliteration, evoked through the beauty of violence, often in the name of an idealised Japan.”³⁵ The ‘fascist moment’ is a concept that has great potential for illustrating how romantic writers and thinkers could elide with fascism, even unwittingly. Philosophers too, if considered liberal, could have possessed ‘fascist moments’ of romantic nostalgia, moments of violence, in the case of the Kyoto School, violence against the self. In the works of Nishida and Watsuji, the transcendence of the individual into the absolute, whether religious or otherwise moralistic, presents a romantic return to the concrete which preceded social abstraction (by capitalist modernity). Two problems existed in Tansman’s work, which are to be addressed here.

First, since Tansman hinted toward a capital-centered definition of modernity only in his notes, it should be brought to the fore to strengthen the significance of the moment. Grounding the fascist moment in the context of capitalist modernity reinforces the romantic aspect of the literary fascist moments he investigated. Furthermore, the moments themselves – the crossing of a bridge as the escape from urban society (and into a pre-modern countryside), blood on snow as the beauty of violence – each fit together in a monad of fascistic aesthetics. It is important, then, that Tansman explicitly denies that any of those romantic authors were fascists, as though the works once detached took on an independent character. That is to say, once published, the works were read in a society drifting toward radical politics, and once read alongside radical ideas, were inseparable from that context. This renders more important the second weakness in Tansman’s book:

³⁵ Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, pp. 27

“That writers can aesthetically sow the seeds of a fascist atmosphere without intending to do so is one contention of this study. Another, perhaps paradoxical, argument is that this atmosphere was produced by a fascist aesthetic whose language was often complex and carried within it the seeds of its own undoing.”³⁶

Since this contention was not sufficiently explained away in his work, it remains an open sore, threatening the undoing of Tansman’s own thesis. The sore pains most in the final chapter of the work, in which he analyses the fascist moment of post-war singer, Hibari Misora. Conceptualising the fascist moment as a romantic moment of violence can account for post-war occurrences of the moment, but the seeds of undoing are luridly present even in the post-war context. The concern that perhaps the moments were not fascist is not unfounded, and since the nostalgia and longing have remained without the violence of Tansman’s pre-war subjects, they seem to be all the more problematic. The undoing of those fascist moments would have to be based on a liberal reading of the moments themselves. As romantic moments, they could be easily swept up in the totalising force of a larger romanticism, national fascism. In light of Tosaka Jun’s criticism of liberalism, the fascist moment was a romantic moment, ungrounded in the materialist causes of abstraction, and therefore susceptible to a perilous fascist reading and usurpation. The violence of the moments was not essential to the aesthetic of the ideology, but valuable in wartime. Thus, in the post-war, fascist moments could endure without the violence and invade liberal consciousness as the other side of the moment, the uncharged liberal reading, neither fascist nor opposed to fascism, but carrying latently the nostalgic longing. If this moment has

³⁶ Tansman, *Aesthetics*, pp. 6

endured in philosophy as it has in literary media, then the problems of an ungrounded liberalism have remained intact.

Fascism and Modernity

Before examining the texts of Nishida and Watsuji, there are two things that must be made clear; the nature of Japanese fascism and what it means for an intellectual to be complicit with or explicitly fascist in the Japanese context, and the methods by which some scholars have attempted to associate or disassociate Kyoto School intellectuals with or from Japanese fascism.

Maruyama Masao was perhaps the first Japanese scholar to account for fascism in Japan. When discussing the development of fascism in Japan in a 1947 lecture in Tokyo, Maruyama made the distinction between “fascism as a State structure and fascism as a movement.”³⁷ But Maruyama avoided defining the term beyond that, instead offering a thorough background of fascist political clubs, in the positivist method of definition by history. Two surveys of definitions for Japanese fascism have been offered by Miles Fletcher and George Macklin Wilson, from which a few examples will be given here. Ouchi Tsutomu claimed Japan’s fascism was similar to the cases in Germany and Italy because, like its European counterparts, Japan experienced an increase in political oppression in the 1930’s, accompanied by monopoly capitalism, and a sense of economic crisis.³⁸ But, he conceded, Japanese fascists strangely coexisted with the Emperor. Hayashi Kentaro, on the other hand,

³⁷ Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 25

³⁸ Ibid. Pp. 39

argued that Japan was not fascist precisely because it did not share the same institutional structure as Nazi Germany and it did not galvanise under a singular fascist ideology.³⁹

Wilson divides the uses of the term 'fascism' for Japan into two modes, Marxist and what he refers to as the "authoritarian modernization" approach.⁴⁰ The former has contended that the development of Japanese fascist movements into a fascist regime was a desperate defence against socio-economic revolution to protect Japanese capitalism. This is a definition that allows Japanese fascism to be compared with the European forms because regardless of the local rhetoric, the regimes each rose to power as a result of the same objective class conditions. Interestingly, some of these Marxists also define the particularities of Japanese fascism, as in Inoue Kiyoshi's label, "emperor-system fascism," which emphasises the military's role as the Emperors political retinue.⁴¹ However, to describe fascism as an emergency protection of Japanese capital neglects the anti-capitalist campaigns run by fascist political groups, and fails to locate liberalism within the opposition between communist and fascist entities.

Wilson's second group, the authoritarian modernization theorists, amongst whom he includes Maruyama, claims that fascism in Japan had to be from the top, since Japan had not yet completed the process of bourgeois revolution that would empower the population for further political motion. Nakamura Kikuo, like Hayashi argued that Japan should not be considered fascist because there was no takeover of political power from below, and that no

³⁹ Ibid. Pp. 39-40

⁴⁰ George Macklin Wilson, "A New Look at the Problem of 'Japanese Fascism'," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (July 1968), pp. 401

⁴¹ Ibid. Pp. 403, Wilson gives this as a typical *neo-Koza* description of Japanese fascism, *Koza* being the faction of Japanese writers who regarded the rise of fascism as symptomatic of an incomplete bourgeois revolution.

formal change in Japan's constitution occurred.⁴² Of course, this collection of top-down theories cannot account for the fascist aesthetic in romantic literature and philosophy, and the large print culture of romantic nationalists in universities and literary circles preceding the political rise of fascism.

Fletcher advocated maintaining the term 'fascism' for Japan for two reasons: first for the sake of comparative study with Europe, since the term has remained in use for German and Italian studies. Referring to Japan as fascist, even if it does require a continuous clarification of meaning, allows for a conceptualisation of fascism as a broader reaction to the effects of modernity on society. The second is that prewar Japanese media had used the term 'fascism' to discuss those movements in Europe, and also the possibility of such a movement in Japan.⁴³ 'Fascism' should be considered a valid term as long as its particularities are considered, and the term's validity has been affirmed by contemporary use rather than merely ascribed by later scholars without cause. Nishida and Watsuji both responded to the same social problems of the 1920's and 30's – the problems of rapid industrialisation and social atomisation resulting from capitalist modernity. Germany and Italy formed their own particular responses to modernity's ills, and the use of the fascist label on all three cases can be justified by the three countries sharing the same problems, and responding in similar ways.

Maruyama's 'fascism as a movement' is especially worth noting. His analysis of fascism as a social movement, especially in the 'period of maturity,' was a lengthy stride in understanding the capacity for fascism to enthrall a society without ubiquitous and open

⁴² Ibid. Pp. 405

⁴³ Fletcher, p. 41

coercion. The limit on his analysis is that Maruyama focused narrowly on politically oriented social groups – The Imperial Way Principles Association (1918), The Great Japan National Essence Association (1922), the Anti-Red Corps (1922) to name only three – and later political factions such as the New National Socialist Party (1932).⁴⁴ The social dimension of the fascist movement is left absent, but has been a recent subject of study. Tansman's work has already been mentioned, and already has hinted to a larger, social fascist movement. Tansman presented a web of unintended contributions to fascism from literary sources to an aesthetic which reverberated with the tensions of capitalist antinomies. Those who label Kyoto School philosophers as complicit fascists, argue for a similar pattern in the intellectual sphere.⁴⁵ Kyoto philosophers, concerned with the authentic being through Heidegger's via Heidegger or Japan's role in the world via Hegel, developed a web of intellectual returns to authenticity, nostalgia for pre-modern simplicity, a mode of life unaffected by the abstraction by capitalist modernity.

If Japan can be safely labelled 'Fascist' given these conditions, then how can intellectuals be justifiably related to this trend? It is generally regarded that the February 26 Incident (1936) marks the moment at which fascism came to dominate Japan, politically and intellectually, but fascism as a movement existed much earlier as a loosely coherent set of sentiments and critiques against modernity. Limiting complicity to possession of an official

⁴⁴ Maruyama, pp. 27-31

⁴⁵ See as examples, the first such article by Harootunian and Najita cited earlier or Leslie Pincus, "In a Labyrinth of Western Desire: Kuki Shuzo and the discovery of Japanese Being," *Boundary 2*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Autumn 1991), pp. 142-156 ; or Christian Uhl, "What Does it Mean to 'Speak Truth to Power?'," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (July 2006), pp. 469-482; each shows how Kyoto School philosophy lent itself to state ideology by placing Japan on a higher plane of authenticity than the west, whether by appealing to uniquely Japanese categories (Kuki Shuzo) or by impelling the individual toward communal subjectivity. A more direct example of intellectual interaction with state fascist is found in Christian Uhl's analysis of the *Chuo Koron* debate on Japan's World Historical Standpoint, found in "What was the Japanese Philosophy of History?," *Re-politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*, edited by Christopher Goto-Jones, New York, NY; Routledge (2008), pp. 113-134; Uhl there exhibits as attempt by Japanese philosophers to overcome Western philosophy (Kant and Hegel) and the problems of the 20th Century by their own historical standpoint.

political position is too narrow, but it is enough to suggest that taking part in constructing the national ideology is complicity even if not explicitly fascist. Having a liberal philosophy absorbed into state ideology without resistance, with instead the continued production of that integrated philosophy, suggests such complicity. Nishida and Watsuji both took part in the 1935 Committee for the Reform of Education, and separately wrote a number of nationalistic texts. Their commissioned work for Japanese fascists is certainly enough to relate these philosophers to their fascist context, but not necessarily enough to label them fascists. From the moment an intellectual justifies the actions of the fascist regime, they can be called fascist, but not without delving into the molten core of the debate surrounding prewar intellectuals in Japan.

Pierre Lavelle, who seems to be against using the term ‘fascism’ for Japan, divides the term into two aspects: nationalism, which is secular, and theocratic traditionalism.⁴⁶ Both Nishida and Watsuji, despite the latter’s focus on morality rather than religion, would fall under the theocratic side of Japanese fascism for their support of the Imperial tradition, and in the latter case, Confucian values. But this fascist dualism ignores the role of religion under the secular state. In the secular state, what Karl Marx called “its completely developed form” religion is limited to the private sphere of life, but regardless becomes refreshed by secularism, as he noted regarding the United States.⁴⁷ The secular state only exists upon the division of man into the religious, civil self and the public self as ‘citizen’. Since religion was relegated to civil society, the private being, it became the essence of difference rather

⁴⁶ Pierre Lavelle, “The Political Thought of Nishida Kitaro,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 1994), pp. 140

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” online: [<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>]

than community (where it was replaced by politics).⁴⁸ It was precisely to this fragmentation that Nishida and Watsuji responded. Nonetheless, the point here is to show that these intellectuals had responded to the same social situation to which fascism responded, and they did so invoking traditions that were not threatened by the Japanese form of fascism. If liberalism was an embrace of the abstract secular state which imparted individual equality as citizens, then the reaction against this abstraction could not have been politically liberal, but could have been of liberal philosophy.

None of the Kyoto associates have been defended as steadfastly as Nishida, who is said to have had a “turn” sometime in the 1930’s, after which his writings exhibited more overt political messages. Valdo Viglielmo has suggested that the only turn in Nishida’s thought was a linguistic one; in other words, Nishida’s thought remained unchanged, and the seeds of his later, more political writings already existed in his earliest works.⁴⁹ Goto-Jones responsively emphasises Nishida’s *Zen no Kenkyu* to exonerate the philosopher from the context of his later life and works, on the grounds that *Zen no Kenkyu* was written before fascism appeared in Japan and was written as a defence of Late Meiji liberalism.⁵⁰

This defence has arisen in contrast to scholars such as Viglielmo or Pierre Lavelle, who have attempted to situate Kyoto School thought with official imperial doctrine.⁵¹ Lavelle, however, focuses only on later works by Nishida. Imperial doctrine serves as an empirical link, but does not effectively explain fascism as a social movement, or fascism as a global historical phenomenon. It is entirely possible that one could be a fascist of a sort not enshrined by official doctrine. Still more defenders of Nishida include James W. Heisig,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Jones, pp. 515

⁵⁰ Ibid. Pp. 518

⁵¹ Lavelle, pp. 139-140

who, like Goto-Jones, has argued Nishida's thought was already mature in his early works.⁵² Attempts by other Nishida-apologists, Ueda Shizuteru, Yusa Michiko, and Augustin Jacinto Zavala, to contextualise Nishida as a liberal opponent to radical Fascism have ignored Nishida's early works entirely.⁵³

Those who align the Kyoto School with fascism, most notably Harry D. Harootunian and Najita Tetsuo, have also ignored the early works of the Kyoto School in favour of wartime texts, and especially, in Harootunian's case, the two symposia, *The World Historical Standpoint and Japan* (世界史的立場と日本 *Sekaishi-teki Tachiba to Nihon*) and *Overcoming Modernity*.⁵⁴ Nishida's *Inquiry* should not be dismissed because it predated fascism in Japan, nor should it be dismissed for any relation its author might have had with fascism in Japan. The very use of the term 'fascism,' as discussed above implies a certain global trend. If fascism can be considered a response to modernisation, then the problems of modernisation should not be considered only when fascism begins. Nishida, whether overtly fascist or not, should be seen as responding to those same social challenges.

Watsuji has not enjoyed the same multitude of defenders as has Nishida or any other member of the Kyoto School – indeed Watsuji is not considered a core member of the group. Graham Parkes hinted at a turn in Watsuji's thought as coinciding with a similar turn taking place in the inner circle of the Kyoto School – a turn toward explicitly nationalistic

⁵² Christian Uhl, "What Does it Mean to 'Speak Truth to Power'?" *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (July 2006), pp. 473

⁵³ These three authors are compiled in James W. Heisig & John C. Maraldo (eds.) *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995)

⁵⁴ H.D. Harootunian and Najita Tetsuro, "Japanese Revolt against the West: Political and Cultural Criticisms in the Twentieth Century," in Peter Duus (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

thought.⁵⁵ Parkes' goal, however, was to exonerate Nishitani Keiji from the Fascist label, not Watsuji. Yusa Michiko's defence of Nishida made use of written correspondences between Nishida and his peers, amongst whom Watsuji was named. From Yusa's evidence it is clear that Nishida's complaints against radical fascists were shared with Watsuji,⁵⁶ and she states that Watsuji even outwardly supported Nishida's criticisms on the Ministry of Education.⁵⁷ Another of Nishida's defenders, Andrew Feenberg, lists Watsuji as one of the major thinkers who supported Japan's imperialism.⁵⁸ Robert Bellah offers an abortive defence of Watsuji: "He remained aloof from both Shinto and Confucian brands of nationalism and always explained the position of the emperor in very abstract philosophical language," later pointing out that "Watsuji...made no effective resistance to the tendencies leading Japan to disaster. Indeed, the position which he had worked out did not give any basis for individual or social resistance."⁵⁹

In passing, Robert E. Carter would have us apply Heisig's conclusion – that any wartime guilt felt by the Kyoto School philosophers does not belong to their original inspirations – to Watsuji's prewar works, though he admits that his is a more difficult case, noting Bellah's remarks. Yet Carter seems also to want to separate the early Watsuji, up to and including *Rinrigaku*, from the wartime Watsuji, who is too easily characterised by his 1943 lecture "The Way of the Subject in Japan." As with the case of Nishida, Watsuji's earlier works continued to identify social problems brought about by modernity, a problem

⁵⁵ Parkes, pp. 306

⁵⁶ Heisig and Maraldo, pp. 118, 124

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 116

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 181

⁵⁹ Both quote are found in Robert Bellah, "Japan's Cultural Identity," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (August 1965), pp. 589

toward which Watsuji and fascism can easily be elided. A discussion of this will follow the examination of Nishida.

Finally, in the 1942 conference entitled “Overcoming Modernity” scholars from the Kyoto University departments of history and philosophy met with members of the Japan Romantic Group (*Nihon Romanha*) and the Literary Society (*Bungakkai*) to discuss the meaning of the war against the West and Japan’s role in the modern world. There the philosophy of nothingness is more directly brought into discourse with the political climate. Rather than suggesting a hijacking of Nishida’s thought for political ends, the conference exemplified the easy appropriation of it in a changed context. That Kyoto scholars took part in a conference organised by the Literary Society indeed emphasises the romantic nature of Kyoto School philosophy. As romantic philosophy, as with romantic literature, nothingness was the key for escaping modernity (capitalism) and returning to an immediate existence. The anti-modern nature of the philosophy was present in Nishida, but the symposium participants, having witnessed six months of triumph in war against the West, revealed how the philosophy of the Kyoto School had never opposed fascism, but had quietly become enveloped by it.

It is known that members of the Kyoto School, including Tanabe Hajime, met with officials from the navy and that both the School and the navy held tense relations with the army. The Kyoto School members involved had engaged in research for the Navy on such matters as logically persuading the army to negotiate peace, and preparing for a postwar Japan should defeat occur.⁶⁰ However, Kimoto Takeshi has shown how the presentation of the Kyoto School in reports of their dealings with the navy have been hagiographic and so

⁶⁰ Kimoto Takeshi, “Antinomies of Total War,” *Positions*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2009), pp. 100-01

must be re-examined critically. Further, Kimoto suggests that the Kyoto School's dialogues with the navy do not uncover what form the philosophers desired for their government (as it was possible they simply preferred naval control over the army faction led by Tojo Hideki), and their ideas presented during the war remain highly contentious.

The goal of the first chapter, dealing with the Kyoto School, presents an analysis of fascism and liberalism in early modern Japanese philosophy. As a historical argument, it concerns what happened historically in Kyoto School philosophy and not what logically must follow from it. The argument is that because a fascist outcome was a possible reading of the Kyoto liberal philosophy, and taking into consideration the critiques by Tosaka Jun, liberal philosophy more generally lacked the materialist reference points required to prevent any sort of resistance to its own radical hijacking. The second chapter, concerning Maruyama's work after the war, first renders problematic Maruyama's understanding of fascism as historical deviation, and then criticises the renewal of liberal values in his work. By attempting to trace Japan's aptitude for modernity and liberal-democratic values to pre-modern thinkers, Maruyama risked repeating mistakes that had earned for Nishida before the war harsh criticism from Tosaka. The third and final chapter will focus on the work of Takeuchi Yoshimi, whose attempt to recapture the critical components of anti-modern scholarship in the 1940's should be discussed in order to reiterate the value of romantic philosophers' assessments of capitalist society.

Chapter 1

In his *Inquiry Into the Good* Nishida developed a concept of ‘pure experience’ – a universal locus of nothingness which precedes individual knowledge and forms an ontological space which unites all beings. In that space, the individual is not distinct from the world, and cannot even be considered an individual distinct from any other. Nothingness is the space of Nishida’s pure experience – the experience of unity preceding and transcending identity as subject and object. The role of religion is of utmost importance for his thought. For Nishida, religion is the true goal of the human being, since it is in religion that one can transcend knowledge, which distinguishes the individual from pure experience. This concept of transcendence held significant potential for nationalist ideas of individual sacrifice and solidarity. More than twenty years later, Watsuji’s *Rinrigaku* developed the concept *ningen* (human) to include simultaneously the society. Similar to ‘pure experience,’ Watsuji’s ethics involved pre-existing relationships which formed individual identity. Unlike Nishida, however, Watsuji grounded his ethics in moralistic, not religious, terms, preferring instead to use Confucian categories of relationships. The ‘good’ for Watsuji was the sacrifice of individuality for the greater community. This had very clear parallels with imperialist

thought in wartime Japan, specifically with regard to the Emperor as the cultural and communal center. In content the two works appear apolitical, with the abstract notions of being and nothingness used to describe the interaction between human and world. What the content lacked was an understanding of the deterministic nature of capitalism and its effects on modern society – precisely what Tosaka Jun had criticised them for. By grounding their philosophies in materialism, they might have been able to recognise the historical specificity of their social laments and in turn their own philosophical projects. Without such recognition, the philosophy of the Kyoto School was unable, from the materialist standpoint, to escape idealism and address ontology. The contextual aloofness of their work enabled an easy intellectual purchase by political ideologues and later members of the Kyoto School involved in the summer conferences of 1941-42, *The World Historical Standpoint and Japan*, and *Overcoming Modernity*.

During the Meiji Restoration in the latter third of the nineteenth century Japan embraced a policy of industrialisation and modernisation. In the early years of the Restoration traditional occupations suffered the burden of funding the immense social change. The population increased by ten million from 1880 to 1900, accompanied by urbanising migration of labour from agriculture to manufacturing and commerce, while land taxes continued to account for eighty percent of government income through the 80's.⁶¹ More telling, however, is the increase of agricultural output which was capable of sustaining the growing population, despite the decrease in proportional agricultural labour. There exists the effect of capitalism on Japanese society. Import of new seeds and fertilisers along with western farming techniques allowed agriculture to appropriate more space while enabling

⁶¹ Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 93

more output per labour hour. The same increase in output was technologically enabled in manufacturing over the next twenty years. By the First World War, three quarters of silk thread production was mechanised, and cotton thread followed closely.⁶² Human labour was forced into abstraction as labour was assimilated into a system of wages and measured production. That the labour force was organised by *zaibatsu*'s was an inflection not central to the change in the mode of production, although common to late-industrialised nations (German, Italy, and Russia). The individual produced for exchange value and not for use value, and even more fundamentally: the individual exchanged his or her own labour for use by another.

Returning to the analysis of the Kyoto School now, the place of cultural reproduction was opened by the loss of concrete identity within the modern mode of production. Only in this modern context could Okakura Tenshin and Ernest Fenellosa have catalogued and 'saved' Japan's national artefacts;⁶³ before modernity Japan was not a nation. The process of modernisation since the arrival of Perry's black ships held firmly the subtext of Westernisation. As mechanised labour spread through Japanese industries, and Western forms of art and prose were put to use by many Japanese, the question of what constituted the Japanese cultural identity was a natural consequence. The philosophy of the Kyoto School was the most sophisticated response to the question in the pre-war period, and represented philosophy's contribution to cultural production alongside contributions by art and literature. What the participants of the query failed to recognise, however, was the necessarily modern frame in which the question was posed. The use of pre-modern cultural

⁶² Ibid. pp. 95

⁶³ For an analysis of the 1884 commission led by Okakura and Fenellosa, and an analysis of culture as national history, see Stefan Tanaka, "Imaging History: Inscribing Belief in the Nation," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (February 1994), pp. 24-44.

artefacts would never have needed such collection and interpretation, since the use would have been known or believed already, at least locally. The collection of the past was a reifying process, which attempted to make newly present the fact that the nation had always existed. The same occurred in the expression of Japanese culture by philosophy.

Nishida Kitaro – Religious Transcendence

Nishida's *Zen no Kenkyu* is divided into four parts: Pure Experience, Reality, The Good, and Religion. Perhaps the closest reading of this text to date is that of David Dilworth,⁶⁴ who elucidated many influences on Nishida's thought leading to the publication of his *Inquiry into the Good*. While his analysis outlines, quite effectively, the philosophical contours of the text, the historical context of the work is left wanting. The crisis of the subject-object dichotomy as an abstraction of a pure, ultimately concrete experience was synchronous to the climate of social abstraction by the process of capitalist modernisation, begun in Japan even just before the 1968 launch of the Meiji Restoration.

Nishida concluded the first part by saying that the realisation of the "profound unity at the base of knowledge and the will" constitutes a religious awakening, which is an intellectual intuition.⁶⁵ Here he began to set up religion as the ultimate goal of the human being. 'Pure experience' is the unifying experience that precedes contemplation. At the moment of pure experience, "there is not yet a subject or an object" and so the being is unified with his or her surroundings until separated by wilful contemplation of the event, manifested as knowledge of the world, awareness of an object separated from the subject.

⁶⁴ See David Dilworth, "The Range of Nishida's Early Religious Thought: Zen no Kenkyu," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (October 1969), pp 409-421. Included in Nishida's early academic development was "Meiji liberalism" (pp. 412).

⁶⁵ Nishida Kitaro, *And Inquiry into the Good*, trans. by Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 33-34

The refinement of this term is the purpose of the first section, but as mentioned, the end of this section directs the term to its destination, that is a religious overcoming of experience. The religious overcoming itself appears to be the quest for Buddhist *nirvana*, oneness with the world, but as a philosophy expressed in terms integral to modern philosophy (subject, object, abstract, concrete, etc.) suggests an overcoming of more than simply names for a world of ten thousand things, but a simultaneous escape from a historically specific social framework, as though the meta-language used to interpret the world served only to further ostracise it.

The second section of Nishida's work develops a notion of reality in terms of 'spirit,' based on categories borrowed from idealists Hegel and Berkeley.⁶⁶ Here Nishida brought pure experience into the ontological realm, conceptualising a 'sole reality' which unifies all things through the phenomena of consciousness. According to Nishida, the act of thinking cannot exceed the scope of conscious phenomena, and so can only conceive of reality as abstracted from experiences.⁶⁷ As Nishida clarified the unity in his own words: "That consciousness must be someone's consciousness simply means that consciousness must have a unity. The idea that there must be a possessor of consciousness above and beyond this unity is an arbitrary assumption."⁶⁸ Consciousness is a unity from which one can be identified only as an abstraction from this unity. The sole reality then, is the unity of consciousness through pure experience. Or, in other words, in the place of pure experience, no individual has yet been abstracted from the universal consciousness, and so each is part of a greater one. With pure experience as the basis for consciousness, a mode of consciousness

⁶⁶ David A. Dilworth, pp. 420

⁶⁷ Nishida, pp. 42

⁶⁸ Ibid. 44

can appear and reappear at different instances in time with the same content, and be considered the same consciousness. This is because pure experience is a foundation that exists prior to time. Furthermore, Nishida stated that time is only possible as a concept because multiple instances of the same consciousness allow for knowledge of sequence.⁶⁹ If these were reversed, and time was considered the basis for consciousness, then a concept of time could not arise, since instances of consciousness would have no way to become linked sequentially through understanding. Since pure experience exists independently of time, it is here that Nishida can construct transcendence. This second section again ends with a religious dimension, in a chapter entitled ‘God as Reality’. Here Nishida established God as the foundation of reality (not transcendent of reality).⁷⁰ God is given as the unifier of subject and object in each direct experience. It is perhaps important to point out that Nishida disclaims that ‘God’ is used as a universal to represent any conception of divinity that suits each culture or historical era.⁷¹ Nishida characterises God as “absolute Nothingness,” the font from which reality flows and unifies experience. Because He is nothing, He can be in everything. This section of the *Inquiry* best exemplifies the openness of the work. The Absolute could have been virtually anything. During the war years Nishida’s students would appropriate the absolute and apply it to the Emperor, but for Nishida this transcendence over the subject-object dichotomy was merely a ‘fascist moment’ or ‘romantic moment,’ a presentation of something pre-existing the subject-as-individual and the object.

Nishida’s use of time in the second section warrants intervention. As time is not the basis of consciousness, but the other way around, time is only possible by abstracting from

⁶⁹ Ibid. Pp. 60-61

⁷⁰ Ibid. Pp. 79-80

⁷¹ Ibid. Pp. 82

consciousness in order to establish a sequence. Through Postone's work on abstract labour time as the defining feature of capitalist modernity,⁷² we should return to the comments of Tosaka Jun. In order to satisfy Tosaka's materialist definition of ontology, time is precisely where Nishida could have grounded his work in the reality of materialism. Indeed, time seems to be the point at which Nishida was most capable of addressing the specificity of modern abstraction. It might have resembled Derrida's notion of the calculable and incalculable (systemic and cognitive) aspects of modern society. But Tosaka demanded more in his critique, that is was not enough to simply interpret the reality of modern Japan – the aim ought to have been to change it. In a particularly polemic essay, Tosaka wrote of Nishida's philosophy:

“[W]e need always to distinguish real existence from the consciousness of existence. Thus it is necessary to distinguish between the dialectic itself and consciousness of it (that is, self-consciousness). What is thematized in Nishida philosophy is only self-consciousness, or consciousness, and not the dialectic [in reality] itself. That is to say, only the question of how one becomes conscious of the dialectic – how one is able to think of it – becomes a problem; the dialectic itself is not thematized.”⁷³

The specificity of his modern context is not that time had been abstracted, but that abstract time had become the mediator of the social mode of production, hence abstract time had become the basis on which the individual had become further abstracted; society had abstracted socially necessary labour from each individual, thus alienating each from

⁷² See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2003 Reprint)

⁷³ Tosaka Jun, “Is the ‘Logic of nothingness’ Logic?,” pp. 368

production. Without understanding the source of social abstraction in capitalism, Nishida was trapped within an idealistic interpretation of human experience incapable of opposing the socially reified domination hidden in labour time. As Tosaka's quote above indicates, Nishida could not grasp the (capitalist) dialectic at work in modern society, and so could only engage with the visage worn by that dialectic. That is, Nishida could only criticise the reified ideas of modernity within the realm of idealist philosophy.

The final two sections comprise the heart of Nishida's inquiry, where he affixes his terminology to an ethical purpose. Here we may begin to find utility in his thought for nationalism. Ultimately, a return to pure experience is Nishida's 'good' and this parallels the ethical good found in Watsuji, as we shall see. True reality (the sole reality) is the place of pure experience. "The good, conceived of as the development and completion of the self, amounts to our obeying the laws of the reality called the self. That is, to unite with the true reality of the self is the highest good."⁷⁴ In these terms, seeking a return to the sole reality, a place in which the ego does not exist, constitutes the highest good in ethical behaviour and requires the sacrifice of individuality. Upon returning to pure experience, morality is natural and every individual is already inclined to reach it.⁷⁵

Goto-Jones elaborated on the Buddhist categories used in this ethical study: the absolute nothingness which results from self-negation is the *sunyata* of Mahayana Buddhism.⁷⁶ That the form of Nishida's ethical work is Buddhist must have resonated with those who during his time were striving to answer what it meant to be Japanese after

⁷⁴ Nishida, *Inquiry*. Pp. 126

⁷⁵ Robert E. Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment: A Study of Japanese Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 200

⁷⁶ Jones, pp. 519

undergoing years of Westernising modernisation.⁷⁷ That Nishida's aim was a universal understanding of ethical intuition leaves open the implication that the true universal ideal already existed in Asian pre-modern values. Such an appeal to the pre-modern exacerbated *temporally* the nostalgia for pre-modern Japanese values (and therefore pre-modern Japan as a context), and created *spatially* an elevation of Japanese values above Western values. Both were effects of the liberal hermeneutic decried by Tosaka before his imprisonment. The latter implication in particular was at the epicentre of an ideological shift to the right in Japanese politics two decades later.

The negation of individual desires held implications for nationalism if one considers the nation itself the transcendent whole from which the individual is defined, and certainly this moral goal would have had uses in a fascist regime dedicated to ending the social atomisation of Japanese society. Goto-Jones suggested that there is infinite number of possible negations between the egotistical self and absolute negation, and the nation exists as one stratum of negation. But since absolute negation is possible individually, Goto-Jones argued that the nation is de-emphasised in favour of “radical individualism.”⁷⁸ Since Nishida's ethic was to return to the space of nothingness – the absolute negation, multiple strata of negation would be irrelevant. On the contrary, this details Nishida's sense of nationalism into one based on voluntarism, and explains away Nishida's protest against the use of thought-police in wartime Japan and any move to restrict education to thought more in line with the National Polity (*kokutai*) – two factors used by Nishida's apologists to illustrate his disdain for fascism in general. It is clear that Nishida did not approve of the educational

⁷⁷ The matter of Westernisation was a key concern during the early Meiji period, when Japanese intellectuals attempted to navigate the process of modernisation. During the Showa period, the proliferation of romantic works suggests some dissatisfaction with modernity and its high degree of Westernisation.

⁷⁸ Ibid. Pp. 520

restrictions imposed by the government; his private complaint against the government characterising and banning liberalism as “selfish individualism” is one example.⁷⁹ His speech in Hibiya Park in 1937, “On the Scholarly Method,” exemplified how unimpeded intellectual pursuits could enrich the Japanese spirit held aloft by the *kokutai*.⁸⁰ Studies into the humanities, he claimed, allowed the Japanese spirit to be articulated objectively in universal terms, emphasising Japan’s role and identity in the global community, and revitalising the spirit with every new generation of research. This again emphasised voluntarism, but presupposed a greater national ideology to be sculpted from intellectual augmentation and criticism.

The fourth and final section of the *Inquiry* deals with religion. “It is a demand,” Nishida began, “in which the self, while perceiving its relativity and finitude, yearns to attain eternal, true life by uniting with an absolutely infinite power.”⁸¹ Nishida explains that religion is the true goal of the individual, and never a means (as to inner peace, or material sacrifice). After immediately identifying the role of religion in seeking the good, Nishida follows by analysing this role in more detail. “Religion is not an individual’s optional relation with a supernatural power, but a communal relationship between members of a society and the power that maintains the peace and order of the society.”⁸² From this point and the previous chapter, it is already possible to see applicability to a nationalism centred on the Emperor (not necessarily Fascist). But by that same token it is impossible to see resistance to such application.

⁷⁹ Yusa Michiko, *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitaro*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), pp. 290

⁸⁰ This speech can be found in Yusa, pp. 271-77

⁸¹ Nishida, pp. 149

⁸² *Ibid.* Pp. 154

The Emperor was considered divine by Shinto tradition, since he drew lineage from the sun goddess Amaterasu. As the embodiment of the Japanese people, his divinity could symbolically be the unity of all Japanese, and as head of state it would be within reason to consider him the custodian of peace and order for Japanese society. In further defining the role of God, and in a way that does not contradict the nationalist utility so far described, Nishida claims that God and humanity are of the same nature, and that humans are individually portions of God.⁸³ God, as the unifier of not only experience but also consciousness, is the root of reality. He has already left open the possibility that God does not have to be the Christian God, but could be Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, or Shinto concepts of the divine. This openness added to Nishida's claim for the universality of pure experience seems to present a philosophy completely open to application. To defend it as a work of Late Meiji liberalism prematurely denies the possibility of Nishida's development toward rightist political thought based on a work that was written in a period of possible transition. Japanese philosophy at the same time began to embrace Tosaka's 'liberal hermeneutic.' This hermeneutic system was the extraction of meaning from historical context – the reading of present ideas into ancient texts, or the application of ancient ideas to the present. This hermeneutic lent its historically dislodged concepts to fascism during the 1930's. By that same token, claiming *Zen no Kenkyu* as a work of immature fascism is no more productive, but it is clear that this work possesses the 'fascist moment' of transcendence which, if not in itself fascist, holds a particular utility for fascist thought. Nishida's *Inquiry* was a philosophical work which was liberal in its hermeneutic method, but shared with fascism the romantic moment of return to something preceding, something which transcended the individual, something immediate and romantic.

⁸³ Ibid. Pp. 155

Watsuji Tetsuro – Morality and Overcoming

The case of Watsuji Tetsuro's *Rinrigaku* and its appeal to traditional morality is more difficult to disassociate from fascism because it was written within the fascist context globally. Yet within his reiteration of Confucian social values, Watsuji committed to the same sort of contextually dissociated analysis as his colleague Nishida. Contextually Watsuji shared intellectual space with thinkers such as Yanagita Kunio and Kuki Shuzo, and like the prominent members of the Kyoto School (Nishida, Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji, Kuki Shuzo, and Miki Kiyoshi) he had studied in Germany with Martin Heidegger. A recent article by Graham Parkes has hastily denounced any claim that proximity to Heidegger produced fascist ideologues, as though he exhumed from his person the aura of fascist thought.⁸⁴ That sort of claim which Parkes would transpose over the Kyoto School critics would be certain nonsense, but Parkes has yet to produce a definition of fascism to clearly denounce. It is clear from his rejections of 'Neo-Marxist criticisms' that Parkes does not have an understanding of fascism in its global dimension, which requires an understanding of fascism abstracted from its political and legal, concrete and historical, ramifications; that in turn requires an understanding of capitalism which allows for a connection of local phenomena to a larger, global (universal) process. What the philosophers of the Kyoto School gleaned from Heidegger was not, of course, advice on fascism, but a philosophical method for appropriating pre-modern historical values in order to construct a trans-historical continuity. In other words, what they gained from Heidegger was a liberal methodology for extracting pre-modern values for immediate submission to the present.

⁸⁴ See Graham Parkes, "Heidegger and Japanese Fascism: An Unsubstantiated Connection," (2009) found online: [<http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/EJPhilosophy/PDF/EJP6%20Parkes.pdf>]

The philosophy of nothingness from either Watsuji or Nishida has little in common with Heidegger's being in content, but in form there is a significant parallel. Both concepts are trans-historical, subject to the full length of the nation's linear timeline and extending into ancient time. For Nishida, one's consciousness already indicated a larger universal consciousness from which the individual was abstracted. Heidegger's being was determined by its temporality, understood by its historicity ("the constitution of being of the "occurrence" of Da-sein as such")⁸⁵, from which concrete historical events are abstracted. Heidegger emphasised, "*only a being that, as futural, is equi-primordially having-been, can hand down to itself its inherited possibility, take over its own thrownness and be in the Moment for "its time."* [sic]⁸⁶ The authentic being can only understand its own historical standpoint in the present when the future is first understood as constituted and resultant of the past. The future is already having-been. For Watsuji also the concept of *ningen* is trans-historical and understood by its temporality.

In his *Rinrigaku* Watsuji famously developed the term *ningen* (人間 human) to become 'human in society' or 'individual in public,' a concept which illustrated that the individual was defined by differing from the community, but was necessarily defined in relation to the community.⁸⁷ To Watsuji, every action, from greetings to inquiries, reaffirmed the social nature of the individual. On these grounds, Watsuji criticised Western philosophers for basing their ethical studies on the individual as exclusive from society,⁸⁸ in purely abstract scenarios such as the Robinson Crusoe figure. Like Nishida, Watsuji

⁸⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 17

⁸⁶ Ibid. pp. 352

⁸⁷ Watsuji Tetsuro, *Rinrigaku*, trans. by Robert E. Carter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 15-16

⁸⁸ Ibid. Pp. 32-33

developed an ethic of the individual's annihilation, and like Heidegger's *Da-sein*, the resultant form of existence in nothingness was a universal determined by the community – space and temporality combined. “The fact that actions were performed previously in a definite manner does not make it impossible for subsequent deeds to deviate from this manner of acting later on. In this sense, we can say that communal existence contains the danger of extinction on each and every occasion. Moreover, human existence as such infinitely aims at the realization of communal existence by virtue of the fact that human beings are *ningen*. Because of this, the pattern of practical connections already realized serves, at the same time, as a pattern yet to be achieved.”⁸⁹ From here we may begin to see the form of *Da-sein* shaping the content of *ningen*, a network of interconnected relatedness between humans forming the community (the world) understood within its temporality. Care for the individual is its dissolution such that the community continues without resistance from individual beings.

The significance here is not that Heidegger corrupted philosophy with a fascistic idea which he spread through modern Japanese philosophy via exchange students, but that the very form of the philosophy undertaken by Heidegger and the Kyoto School was perhaps problematic in allowing fascism to define itself out of their foundations. A renewed defence of the Kyoto School by Graham Parkes has targeted the tendency to link modern Japanese political philosophy with Martin Heidegger as a fascist connection, but Parkes has only commit the opposite problems of those he attempts to refute. This trend in scholarship which Parkes calls “short on facts and long on neo-Marxist jargon”⁹⁰ was established by Harry

⁸⁹ Ibid. pp 12

⁹⁰ Graham Parkes, “Heidegger and Japanese Fascism: An Unsubstantiated Connection,” in Garcia and Heisig, editors, *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 6* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2009), pp. 347

Harootunian and several of his former students who have employed abstract Marxist critiques on Japanese philosophy with the result that the historical context is defined in terms of organic processes found in capitalism rather than specific socio-political events. Parkes instead offers a defence of the Kyoto School equally short on facts, and entirely devoid of theory, pointing to the internationalist language of the philosophy without concern for the significance of analogous particulars from Buddhism or Confucianism. Internationalist language in Kyoto philosophy stemming from Asian thought implicitly lifted Asian morality at an ordinal peak for being more universal than any counter-part in Western philosophy. Instead this move, considered in the capitalist context, was symptomatic of Japan's cultural identity taking on the dualistic commodity-like form of the nation-state – at once universal and unique. The universal form was immutable, mandatorily filled with Japanese particulars following a rubric standardised by the West⁹¹ – a national anthem, a national museum, and national holidays were each set accordingly. Japan's engagement in modern philosophy was at once an act of conformity and a strong assertion of cultural identity. That Nishida and his cohort offered a critique of Western philosophy was a rejection of modernity from the standpoint of cultural particularity.

In *Rinrigaku*, the place of nothingness is the community from which the individual is identified through contrast.⁹² The 'good' for Watsuji is to negate individuality as rebellion

⁹¹ Praesenjit Duara had written of this topic: "The expanded system [of modern nation-states] found institutional expression and was reinforced by new global institutions and fora such as the League of Nations, the Court of International Justice, the Multilateral Treaty of Paris, the World Disarmament Conferences, and the like... Although institutions such as the League were not successful in achieving their primary goal of peace, by integrating and reinforcing the dependency of nations upon the system, discursively and practically, they enhanced the primacy or even naturalness of the nation as the only basis of the sovereign polity. New Nations were dependent upon the standards and procedures of these international bodies for recognition..." from Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Inc., 2003), pp. 21

⁹² Parkes, "Heidegger and Japanese Fascism", Pp. 80-84

from the community, and to act according to what is implicitly expected of the individual by the community. David Dilworth puts this simply: “[the] ‘individual’ arises only as the negation of every whole (society), while... the totality of man is established in the negation of such individuality.”⁹³ The nature of these mutual negations means that the community is itself a place of emptiness, or for Watsuji, ‘absolute emptiness,’ which is the place to which the individual must return for ethical fulfillment and it serves as the foundation for all human activity in historical motion. In criticising Georg Simmel’s definition of society as a set of reciprocal actions shared by pre-existing individuals, Watsuji works in the reverse – the individuality is “something that refuses to be universalised as reciprocal activities,”⁹⁴ and thus, partaking in common social activities (love, friendship, presumably the five relationships of Confucianism) decreases one’s individuality. It is important to note that he contrasts this with universality in capitalist society: “On the contrary, an economically oriented person, who has been produced by the monetary economic civilization prevalent in the modern world, is likely to be universalized only as a mere cog in the wheel of the economic system and place the other sides of her life outside of society.”⁹⁵ Sharing with Nishida his reference to Buddhist ‘nothingness’ as his philosophical base, Watsuji further shares with his Kyoto colleagues a certain usefulness for nationalism along the same line as found in Nishida’s negation toward a sole reality. The time between these two works emphasises the openness of Nishida’s work prior to fascism, as concepts similar to his own continue to be used into the fascist period. Here too the ability of the nation to assume the

⁹³ David A Dilworth, “Watsuji Tetsuro (1889-1960): Cultural Phenomenologist and Ethician,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 24, 1 (January 1974), pp. 21

⁹⁴ Watsuji, *Rinrigaku*, pp. 108

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 108

role of the absolute exists. In such a case, the Japanese community stood as a totality which could overcome Western *Gessellschaft* and all its rampant individualism.

For those who sought ‘Japaneseness’ in the ultranationalist years, Watsuji offered a Japanese system of ethics that criticised Western ethics and its fundamental notion of individualism. Nishida in particular has provided a Japanese ontology that posited ‘pure experience’ as more foundational than any conjuration by Western philosophers, but Watsuji engaged with Western texts more explicitly, invoking and criticising several Western philosophers individually. In his ethical critique Watsuji sacrificed transcendence in favour of a more corporeal solution to the real social problem of capitalist modernity (the problem of the decomposition of the community into atomised individuals). Descartes’ *cogito* consists of an *ego* performing actions such as seeing, doubting, or loving. Watsuji’s *ningen* suggests that these actions cannot be performed by the subject independently, but rather require a pre-existing relationship with an object as the condition of possibility for any such action to occur; in other words, a thing must be seen in order for seeing to take place.⁹⁶ The action itself exists in the ‘betweenness’ of consciousnesses and not as an intentionality of a single consciousness. Hobbes, a contemporary of Descartes’, described humanity in a state of nature as individualistic, essentially a world of many Robinson Crusoes. The lack of any historical foundation for this conception of humanity is enough for Watsuji to dismiss it,⁹⁷ although a social contract could only occur if the community had pre-existed it to allow for such a relation to develop. Kant’s conception of humanity as a unity of dual characteristics – empirical particularities and noumenal abstractions – may have come close to Watsuji’s *ningen*, but Kant constructed his ethics as a study of the subject, and did not grasp the

⁹⁶ Watsuji, pg. 69

⁹⁷ Ibid. Pp. 83-4

interconnection of actions as located in the ‘betweenness’ of subjects/objects, thus he falls into the same error as did Descartes.⁹⁸ Hegel too may have come close to *ningen* when he explained love and family as the realisation of the ‘I’ (the ego) as the unity of the self and other caused by inherent dissatisfaction in solitude.⁹⁹ However, Hegel too failed to see betweenness as the locus of action. These early Modern European philosophers, for Watsuji, shared the same fundamental issue in their ethical works; they each approached the ethical good beginning with the individual subject, the ego. Whether the ego was an absolute individual or a united duality, the ego alone was the subject. That subjectivity was the issue to which Watsuji responded with his development of *ningen*. This *ningen* made universal the ethical subject, thus laying the groundwork for a national identity articulated in Modern philosophy, but also aimed at its overcoming.

Let us consider briefly the role of the Emperor as the Absolute, perhaps most clearly defined in Watsuji’s 1943 work, “The Way of the Japanese Subject.” The Emperor, as the centre of Japanese community and culture, is the Absolute in Japanese ethics. As discussed above, he draws divinity from his relationship to the goddess Amaterasu, but he is also the head of the Japanese state, and thus his figure connects the present nation of Japan to the ancient past in a relationship that is transhistorical and immediately accessible. Unlike the world religions of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism (except for Japanese Buddhism, according to Watsuji), Shinto reverence of the Emperor as Absolute does not hinder the reverence of the state as Absolute since they are one and the same. Since the Emperor is not an absolute god like the God of the world religions, and has no dogma constructed around him, his reverence is capable of universal recognition. Returning now to Watsuji’s *Ethics*,

⁹⁸ Ibid. Pp. 32-33

⁹⁹ Ibid. Pp. 82-3

where he describes world religions in some detail, Watsuji claims there can be no universal religion. A World Religion, detached from the state, depended on the expansion of its host state for its own expansion. Its ethical contribution is valid and significant only when it accepts inclusion in the state rather than superiority to it.¹⁰⁰ Japanese Buddhism, having accepted such a place under the Japanese Emperor, was able to have such a contribution to Watsuji's system of ethics.

Nishida, Watsuji, and Fascism

Neither Nishida nor Watsuji advocate any sort of liberal individualism in their works on ethics. The good, for both thinkers, lies solely in the shedding of individuality – an emptying of content in order to fit into the communal form. Ethics of this nature can little tolerate the appeal to individual liberties which has accompanied liberalism as a political philosophy. The two works may not have been so explicitly fascist in the political sense, since they precede the peak of fascism in Japan following the merger of the *Toseiha* (Control Faction) and *Kodoha* (Imperial Way Faction) political parties. Nor should Nishida and Watsuji be considered politically liberal thinkers, for Nishida has shown a preference for dissolution of individuality over individual freedoms, and Watsuji has advocated an embrace of the community's coercive iron cage as the ethical good. Yet both thinkers do share with fascism a sense of the romantic. Both thinkers sought an escape from abstraction and a return to the most concrete form of existence – that which pre-exists the individual – in what could be considered the philosophical 'fascist moment.' But the escape was described entirely in the realm of ideas. As Marx had written: "Men are the producers of their own conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development

¹⁰⁰ Robert N. Bellah, "Japan's Cultural Identity: Some Reflection on the Work of Watsuji Tetsuro," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (August 1965), pp. 580-1

of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything but conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process.”¹⁰¹ That is, human expression of consciousness is always second to material expression since humans first produced their own subsistence, and so idealism must be founded upon material conditions of its own historical epoch.

Nothingness, whether as an ontological space or a betweenness of public individuals, locates the immediacy much sought after by romantic writers. But the search for nothingness as a longing for authenticity was founded upon the reality of authenticity established by capitalism and the separation of subject and object. The alienation of humanity from its own production of subsistence (that is, the alienation of humans from their own productive capacity in human labour power) was the condition for the possibility for conceiving of a return to a pure existence in which human and human activity exist in unity. During the war years, the immediacy of dissolving individualism became the favoured method of overthrowing “Western Modernity”¹⁰² but the process became culturally anchored. In other words, the praxis of the Kyoto School in later years became tied to the expression of cultural uniqueness as the antithesis of Western Modernity. The Emperor as the embodiment of the Japanese nation formed a focal point for romantic immediacy, and his status as such was cited ubiquitously by fascist ideologues throughout the early 1940’s as part of the *kokutai*. If the Kyoto School project began as an expression of a universal morality which might undo the anarchic atomisation of society as embodied in the particularity of the subject, then its

¹⁰¹ Karl Marx, “The German Ideology; A: Idealism and Materialism,” available online at marxists.org [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm] as part of Marx’s collected works.

¹⁰² See the debates entitled *Kindai no Chokoku*, available in translation as Richard Calichman, ed., *Overcoming Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008)

own undoing lie unwritten within its failure to address its own material conditions of possibility. As per Marx:

“This [materialist] conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e. civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; and to show it in its action as State, to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. etc. and trace their origins and growth from that basis; by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another).”¹⁰³

Hence for the Kyoto School, the attempt to anchor a new philosophy in the space of nothingness was itself already anchored on the global system of capitalism that had before Nishida pulled Japan from one historical epoch into the world historical process, inaugurated by the Meiji Restoration. The idea of nothingness or betweenness, discussed above, serve to conceal the material dynamics to which the society coheres, using religiosity to explain away social or political problems while offering an alternative to the oft-stigmatised Marxist line of analysis. One parallel observed today is the manner in which unemployment is too often considered a problem of personal attitude or work ethic rather than systemic saturation of labour and commodities or the natural contradictions of finance capital.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Marx, “German Ideology; B: The Illusions of the Epoch”
[<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm>]

¹⁰⁴ Since the 2008 economic recession this attitude of optimism has been attacked by journalists such as Barbara Ehrenreich and Glenn Greenwald, or see Renata Salecl, *Choice*, Profile Books (2010).

The malaise of Japanese society following the First World War was only accelerated by economic decline in those decades, but rooted in the economic overhaul of the decades prior, whence Japanese labour ceased to be hierarchical and began to be labour by individual contract. From then production ceased to be an art or a skill in the traditional sense, and started as commodity production, allowing labour to be accumulated by the capitalist class, which itself did not wholly resemble the lordly caste of the Edo period. Within these changes was instilled the new need to compete in the global market, by producing as a continuously increasing pace and, through technological innovation or import, by supplanting the amount of human labour-time required per unit produced. In this way, the infamous Tarnac 9 of France were correct when they had written polemically, “We have to see that the economy is not ‘in’ crisis, the economy is itself the crisis. It’s not that there’s not enough work, it’s that there is *too much of it*. All things considered, it’s not the crisis that depresses us, it’s growth.”¹⁰⁵

Nishida, in *The Problem of Japanese Culture*, had to first formulate the meaning of the imperial family to the Japanese people in order to act as a philosophical foundation for Japanese culture. This essay is often used to support the claim that Nishida supported fascism (by virtue of his supporting the Imperial Way doctrine), but his clear preference for peace sets Nishida apart from the fascists at the government level. Instead, Nishida proposed a peaceful realisation of the Imperial Way, by avoiding subjectivising and seeking Japan’s “self-identity of contradictories” in its historical development, in order to discover “All the world under one roof.”¹⁰⁶ The pacifism expressed even in Nishida’s wartime works asserts

¹⁰⁵ The Invisible Committee (also called ‘Tarnac 9’), *The Coming Insurrection*, San Francisco; Semiotexte (2009)

¹⁰⁶ Suzuki Sadami, “Nishida Kitaro as Vitalist, part 1,” *Japan Review*, Vol. 9 (1997), pp. 90

doubt on his association with fascism which is not entirely unjustified, but it raises the question as to whether fascism necessarily requires that violence be given an explicit and tangible form in overcoming modernity, the sort of ideological violence which forms a necessary aspect of revolution. This problem is one that can be solved when considering Nishida's romantic transcendence in terms of the fascist moment of merging with the universal reality. The violence does exist, but only against the sense of self. This form of violence would not need imperialism to overthrow modernity, but would occur voluntarily. In other words, the violence remains entirely intensive rather than extensive. The case of Watsuji Tetsuro on the matter of the Emperor and culture can be gleaned from his 1943 work, "The Way of the Subject in Japan." Pre-modern Japanese grasped the Absolute in their reverence to the Emperor, which, for Watsuji, is the core of Japanese culture and also the source of its superiority to other cultures.¹⁰⁷ His appreciation for reverence of the emperor was present also in his 1920 work, "Ancient Japanese Culture." As Robert Bellah has pointed out, Watsuji's wartime work "The Way of the Subject in Japan" is perhaps merely the reiteration of concepts already developed by Watsuji by 1937.¹⁰⁸ In philosophy violence is rarely granted entitlement to a corporeal existence, but rather is intended in revolutions to be an intensive, mental undertaking on a social scale. As with liberalism under Rousseau or communism under Stalin, Kyoto philosophy under the Emperor and the likes of Tojo Hideki was the revolutionary new thinking that would define Japan's place in the (post-)modern world, and as in those other cases, it had to be imposed.

¹⁰⁷ Bellah, "Japan's Cultural Identity," pp. 579

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 584

Resolving the Contradictories

Thus far, it is clear that the early works of Nishida and Watsuji had the potential to take on a fascist inflection, though they were expressly neither liberal nor fascist in their own times. Attempts to label these thinkers as liberals who opposed fascism find only anti-war sentiments on which to ground their claims. It is conceivable, however, that one could support the intent of fascism while opposing the means. The romantic desire to escape capitalist modernity (rendered in their context as the West), aligns them with the intellectual goal of overcoming the modern, even if both thinkers react against the fanatical militarism of the war years. In light of Alan Tansman's work, the possibility that Nishida and Watsuji could have supported fascism not only implicitly, but unwittingly, should be considered as well. Since fascist sentiment in these early works was limited only to 'moments' the Kyoto School thinkers may have developed initial sympathies with fascism before fascism came into force, and as such there could be no knowledge of it. A significant proposition in Tansman's work is the possibility of the fascist moment, through the very complexity of literary language, to undo itself.¹⁰⁹ Nishida's pacifism may have been an example of this. His embrace of the universal by the destruction of the particular was taken by Imperial Way fascists to mean individual sacrifice to the Emperor, an idealised Japan embodied. But the rejection of Western thought through censorship and the emphasis on Japanese uniqueness allowed for the possibility, examined critically, to see through the fascist appropriation of the absolute to form a particular amongst nations.

A potent method of relating these philosophers to fascism had already been provided before the war by Tosaka Jun. Whilst these two thinkers may not have been politically

¹⁰⁹ Tansman, pp. 6-7

liberal, they were certainly philosophically liberal. In his “Preface to Intellectual Problems of Contemporary Japan” in 1935, Tosaka described the relationship between philosophical liberalism and fascism; his analysis of which warrants discussion of some length here. Liberalism, Tosaka suggested, had never developed potently in public consciousness, but during the Meiji Restoration had been hailed as the mainstay of “social common sense.”¹¹⁰ The bureaucratic and militaristic factions shaped this common sense into a tangible democracy, though not one that constituted a complete bourgeois revolution.¹¹¹ As common sense, liberalism would be the natural enemy of any way of thinking seeking to usurp it, as Japanism (a particular or local form of fascism) would later form. If political liberalism was characterised by abstract freedoms in general, then philosophical liberalism would have contained a similar freedom in the diversity of thought. Within this open nature of liberal thought Tosaka pointed out the problematic liberty from “sociopolitical ideas,” a cultural freedom which became integrated into religious consciousness as well as public. This was but one venue through which intellectuals could pick up religious sensibilities, and could explain the appeal to open universality in the philosophies of the Kyoto School. Tosaka goes on to suggest that the religious inflection of liberal freedoms acted as a mode of escape from political freedom, from reality itself. By means of religion, liberalism could easily become an absolute. The relation between religion and the absolute has been touched upon above. In the name of religion and not of itself, liberalism could make a claim as a universal absolute,

¹¹⁰ Tosaka, pp. 339

¹¹¹ Tosaka says as much, holding to the *Kozaha* (‘lecture faction’) belief that Japan never completed its inception into bourgeois modernity due precisely to such feudal remnants. Ultimately, this bourgeois revolution would have to be completed before a socialist revolution could commence. The opposing belief, that of that *Ronoha* (‘labour faction’) was that the bourgeois had risen far enough during the Meiji Period was ready for socialism.

which could be politicised. The union of politics with the absolute sent this religious consciousness to be subsumed by Japanism.¹¹²

Liberal philosophy arose through the advent of a logical articulation unique to liberalism. This liberalist hermeneutic philosophy Tosaka Jun defines as one which “speaks only about the order of meanings that corresponds to [the real order of things].”¹¹³ This definition broadly applies to idealism, and he is quite explicit in equating idealism and liberalism. The alternative would be materialism, which is grounded in the concrete and was particularly favoured by Tosaka as a Marxist. The application of this hermeneutic was the interpretation of texts through language rather than the accompanying context, converting “words into concepts.”¹¹⁴ The problem this posed was the study of meaning rather than grounded facts. Meaning became transhistorical, and as such, even classical texts could be made relevant to the modern context, or conversely, present meaning could be read into ancient texts. An abundance of classical interpretations of the present (also modern interpretations of the classics) romanticised the historical epoch. This could be seen in such instances as democratic values in Confucianism, or socialism inherent in Buddhism. A philosopher of the Meiji Period, Inoue Enryo, best exemplifies this hermeneutic after finding ‘truth’ in Western philosophy:

“Then I reviewed the Buddhist scriptures again, and gradually came to realise the truth of their teachings. I was overjoyed. Who could have thought that the truth

¹¹² Here Tosaka uses the example of Buddhism as the “manifestation of the Japanese spirit,” see pg. 341

¹¹³ Ibid, pp. 341

¹¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 343

that was the product of thousands of years of study in Europe had already existed three thousand years ago in the East!”¹¹⁵

Romanticising the past naturally allowed nostalgia to develop; this was not unique to Japan. The freedom from reality meant the freedom from present-day problems, since reality in the liberal hermeneutic was substituted by meaning.¹¹⁶ Meaning, applied ahistorically to the present in order to reiterate social problems in different terms. This method, Tosaka lamented, was based in idealism and not in material fact, and as such could only avoid social problems rather than confront and solve them. Materialism, since it was grounded in reality rather than abstract and ahistorical meaning, was for Tosaka the only form of thought capable of resisting fascism.

Nishida and Watsuji, as liberal philosophers, were unable to confront fascism as long as they relied on this liberal hermeneutic. For Tosaka, Nishida’s space of nothingness or Watsuji’s space between beings could not even be called ontological, since they share no connection to the material foundations of modern society (the mode of capitalist production). Furthermore, we gather from Tosaka’s critiques that bound to idealistic metaphysics, the Kyoto philosophers were unable to tackle historical problems and produce any viable solution, but rather could only reiterate the same in language previously never applied in such a way. In Nishida’s work, the religious consciousness is quite apparent, and the very openness of his work, and especially his definition of the absolute as God, belies the abstract freedom of his liberal philosophy. Its romantic advocacy of individual dissolution may have been a well-intentioned response to social abstraction by modernity, lending it a social

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Kathleen M. Staggs, “‘Defend the Nation and Love the Truth.’ Inoue Enryo and the Revival of Meiji Buddhism,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Autumn 1983), pp. 260

¹¹⁶ Tosaka, pp. 343

application. However, this wide applicability, according to Tosaka, was enough to allow its appropriation by Japanist thought.¹¹⁷ Nishida's development of words that already existed in Buddhism into his own modern concepts provided the space for nostalgia, and thus the return to pure experience could never be anything other than a *return*.

Watsuji's use of the liberal hermeneutic made similar developments of concepts from Buddhist roots. This move is especially explicit in Part I of *Rinrigaku*. *Ningen*, *sonzai*, and other terms are removed from earlier contexts and given new meaning. More characteristic of the hermeneutic in Watsuji was the treatment of Western philosophers. Juxtaposing ideas from Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Weber, Heidegger, and various names between them, Watsuji composed a dialogue of meanings not grounded by their own contexts. *Rinrigaku* was as much a response to Aristotle (albeit in an ahistorical interpretation) as it was to Heidegger. This abstraction of meaning, as already mentioned, was enough to feed Japanist thought. It is important here to consider that Watsuji wrote this work within the timeframe of global fascism and thus his overcoming of Western ethical philosophy with his own philosophy of *ningen* more directly contributed to fascism in Japan and addressed the needs of Japan's fascism at a critical time.

Almost a Smoking Gun

In the 1942 conference entitled *Overcoming Modernity*, various members of Japanese academia met to present and discuss their views on how to best overcome Western culture in Asia. This conference in particular is significant for two reasons: first, it included one member of the Kyoto School of philosophy, Nishitani Keiji, a student of Nishida, along with a historian from Kyoto University; second, it included authors and even scientists not

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 345

affiliated with Kyoto University yet who all utilised Nishida's language of nothingness as the key concept in conceptualising an overthrow of the modern world.

“In general, what is called ‘modern’ mean European,”¹¹⁸ Nishitani began, protracting the longstanding division of the West as the other in Japan's narrative. Nishitani noted that Western culture was fragmented into smaller departments or fields of analysis (history, natural science, etc.). The import of Western culture, in turn, fragmented Japanese learning into those same departments. Nishitani laments that Japanese learning had previously been more comparable to pre-modern Western education of the Medieval period – when all fields of study had existed within the purview of religion. So in Japan was learning conducted holistically within the boundaries of Buddhism. The difference between Buddhism and Christianity for the unity of these facets of learning, and here Nishitani echoes earlier ideas of Kyozaawa Manshi, is that Buddhism does not antagonise science with contradictions in the same manner Christianity was perceived to do.

*“Freedom from the world can in and of itself turn to freedom within the world. True freedom opens upon both these aspects, that is, world transcendence and world immanence... Only Oriental religiosity resolves the difficulties of the relation between culture and science as contained in the spirit of the post-Renaissance West. True liberalism can be realized only within this kind of freedom. This is Oriental liberalism.”*¹¹⁹

This freedom through religiosity is attained by annihilation of the egoistic self, the arbitrary ego each individual possesses. The state necessarily suppresses arbitrary egoistic acts such to

¹¹⁸ Calichman, *Overcoming Modernity*, pp. 51

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 56

form an orderly and cohesive society. Nishitani urges that individuals take it further, that each should find freedom through their professional service to the rest of the community. In other words, by mastery of their respective work citizens could lose their sense of self, falling into their role in the community. The moral force which results from such tireless activity drives the nation as a united whole. The cosmopolitan vision in this philosophy that scholars like Goto-Jones propound lies in the same ethic of self-annihilation applied on a global scale. Nishitani even explains the imperial slogan, “All the world under one roof” in these terms – a globalised community attained not through conquest, but through each nation realising its place in the international community. Yet this should not be misconstrued as a global liberal vision, but rather perhaps one of the redeeming anti-modern visions of the fascist project lost amidst vulgar acts of violence and extensive terror. The anti-individualist core of these ideas directly opposes a (Western) liberal alternative.

Let's contrast Nishitani's ideas with those presented by another Kyoto philosopher present at the conference, Shimomura Tatarou, a philosopher of science. Shimomura approached the problem of Europe as the opposed 'other' somewhat differently, and in a manner which acknowledged modernity as something global. The globality of modernity goes beyond its European origin so that any country could become modern no matter how different the historical trajectory had been prior. Shimomura recognised that Japan's overcoming of modernity demanded a critique of its own modernity and not a simplistic attack on the European other as the origin of that modernity. In Europe, the motion to overcome modernity was a reaction to the dissolution of post-Renaissance culture into what Shimomura calls 'external machine civilisation.'¹²⁰ Shimomura's presentation of modernity

¹²⁰ Ibid. pp. 112

as a global historical phenomenon meets Tosaka's critiques of the Kyoto School half way. During the course of *Overcoming Modernity*, Shimomura perhaps came closest to expressing the liberal values of Nishida's thought.

It is important to note that Shimomura does not echo the Nishidian terms of nothingness and self-annihilation touted by the other philosophers discussed thus far. Instead his analysis is better situated to overturn modernity than his compatriots precisely because he seems to recognise, at least superficially, that modern civilisation reflects a change in the material makeup of society. If the Kyoto School was generally a right step in the wrong direction, then Shimomura was at least facing the right direction, even if he didn't analyse deeply enough to make the crucial step. He rejects the Marxist notion that man had been enslaved by their machines, but relents, "Machines originally functioned to liberate man from his enslavement to labor."¹²¹ His notion of spirit as an "objective idealism" possible only by way of modern philosophy and science, methods by which man can seek independence from nature (to obey nature he calls subjective). If instead of spirit Shimomura had tread a more materialist perspective, he might have carried his concept of machinery as the means of emancipation from labour to a critique similar to Postone's decades later – that in the modern period machinery contends with human labour, forcing the latter into obsolescence without replacing it as the sole constituent of commodity value. Instead of spirit, might have sustained a critique of modernity not by means of 'spirit', but by addressing the contradictions of capitalist society. In other words, the Marxist critique of Shimomura is, despite his idea of liberating man by means of machines, he did not locate the

¹²¹ Ibid. pp. 112

tension between man as the value-producing element of modern (capitalist) society and machines which continuously suppresses human labour by decreasing the demand for it.

So what does this mean for Nishitani and the philosophy of nothingness as presented in the conference? The call to undo modernity, ubiquitous throughout the conference talks, reified nothingness into a fetishised slogan. While nothingness was meant to nullify the tension between subject and object as the defining abstraction of modern philosophy, as a fetishised thing it was unable to grasp the tension between man as commodified labour and man as concrete being as the defining abstraction of capitalist modernity. The tireless devotion to work advocated by Nishitani succeeds only in subsuming whole man as concrete being under man as universal, commodified labour. Thus, the conference offered nothing to free modern man from the alienation of capitalist labour, but sought instead to eliminate resistance to it. But this should not even be understood as a betrayal of the anti-capitalist roots of fascist thought, but as a simple failure to understand the material condition of capitalism that make labour and production unique to its historical epoch. One might imagine a pre-modern labourer devoted to his or her craft as part of a social role and individual identity. Since the power structures of pre-modern labour were dissolved into contractual labour, the same bonds of identity to craft do not exist. Therefore a call to allow one's ego to be consumed by work is a call to forego the production of one's identity since social status and labour are no longer intricately linked. But the philosophy of nothingness presented at *Overcoming Modernity* not only failed to recognise the reification of nothingness as a by-product of selfless human labour, it elevated to moral good what Georg Lukacs had once discussed as a form of praxis that is structurally false.¹²² Fascist ideology,

¹²² Axel Honneth, *Reification*, Oxford; Oxford University Press (2008), pp. 26

rather than overthrowing capitalist forms of domination, rephrased them using pre-modern language specific to the cultural background of the ideologues themselves.

The Complexity of Fascism

To conclude about the Kyoto School, attempts to remove Nishida Kitaro and Watsuji Tetsuro from the strain of fascist ideology in Japan have oversimplified or denied the complex relationship between fascism and its contemporary intellectuals. To consider the philosophers of the Kyoto School as liberals opposed to fascism must ultimately fail in light of their participation in the articulation of the *Kokutai* during the war years, or rely on misinterpretation of political disinterest in earlier philosophical works such as Nishida's *Zen no Kenkyu* or Watsuji's *Rinrigaku*. The presence of what seem to be explicitly fascist statements in those liberal works throws into doubt the anti-fascist liberal argument sustained by scholars like Parkes and Goto-Jones. As both Tosaka Jun and Alan Tansman have iterated, contributions to fascism did not have to be consciously intended.

The two prewar works on ethics discussed in this essay exhibit a liberal mode of philosophy which provided fascist moments of self-annihilation as a reaction against modernity. These works held political and social relevance sufficient for fascism as a social movement, and a reverence of the absolute that is capable of developing Japanism and nationalism. The utility of religion and morality in the philosophy was to politicise religious liberal consciousness and fuel fascist sentiment with a concept of universality capable of becoming the next 'common sense.' Religion and morality held great utility for fascism, but as a liberal philosophy against fascism, it held only futility. Yet religion and morality did not, in and of themselves, lead to fascism. The philosophies of the Kyoto School, if their links to fascism are kept visible, need not be entirely dismissed as fascist. The failure of

religion and morality to overturn fascism in the 1940's may be explained by its politicisation. As long as fascism was held aloft by a system of ahistorical meanings, it was incapable of overcoming modernity by returning to concrete existence.

The meaning of the Emperor as the absolute was hence restricted to illusion, unable to replace capital as the foundation of society. Thus, the liberal philosophy of the Kyoto school, in seeking to extract humanity from the abstraction of capitalist production, developed the language to express the abstraction anew, but not the philosophy to resolve it. The result was that the problem of modernity was given an anti-modern response that did not address the materialistic source of the problem, and so lent to fascists a modern problem enveloped in reified pre-modern language – the irony being that reification itself was the modernisation of the pre-modern. But whether liberal or fascist, the Kyoto School is worth studying because it addressed modernity at all. Ultimately the personal political views of each philosopher are negligible, so that what remains is the corpus of texts that outline a universal mode of being in which the communal good is the moral good achieved by the annihilation of selfish egos. That Kyoto School philosophy became mired in the historically specific politics of fascism must never be a reason to dismiss the body of philosophy, but rather to augment it by addressing the criticisms offered by Tosaka and others who would have had them acknowledge the materialistic sources of the problems from which their symptomatic responses originated. Tosaka represents not a rejection of Kyoto School philosophy as an invalid body of thought, but rather his interjection was an attempt to ground the philosophy of nothingness in the concreteness of historical context, thereby further enabling the philosophy to challenge social problems of their time. Simultaneously,

that added challenge would have allowed Kyoto School philosophy to withstand the advances of ultranationalist thinkers and politicians.

Chapter 2

Upon experiencing defeat in the Second World War, Japanese scholars had to account for nearly two decades of fascism in their modern history. They were faced with explaining the causes of such radicalism and how it related to the path of modernisation Japan had been set upon by Emperor Meiji in 1868. Perhaps the most well known Japanese scholar to attempt such an account was Maruyama Masao, who immediately after the war had accepted the task. His analysis should be noted for its rich deposit of detail regarding political movements and military involvement in the rise of fascism in Japan.

Maruyama famously offered an account for fascism as an anti-capitalist movement made up of socio-political groups that had competitively garnered support from military figures and subsequently acquired control over Japanese society. Two aspects of Maruyama's post-war work are to be discussed in this chapter. The first is his concept of fascism. Having had some experience with Marxism as a student, Maruyama was well positioned to evaluate fascism as a reactionary movement formed to solve the antinomies of

capitalist modernity. However, Maruyama bears too much focus in his analysis on the military as the core of Japanese fascism, thereby underplaying the roles of intellectuals and other literary elements of society which harboured the violent ideology as early as the 1920's. Thus, although he is correct in analysing fascism as a movement beyond the state structure, he fails to properly address the social and intellectual underpinnings of the movement *qua* social movement. The result is that, in Maruyama's analysis, fascism was a militaristic takeover of capitalist democracy rather than a more general rejection of capitalist modernity.

The second and related point is to criticise his reconstitution of liberalism and modernity in the Japanese historical narrative. Maruyama takes up a position in favour of liberal modernisation, a position inspired by Meiji period intellectual on modernisation, Fukuzawa Yukichi. Maruyama grounds his work on modernity in the notion of subjectivity (主体性 *shutaisei*).¹²³ From the standpoint of individual subjectivity, *shutaisei*, Maruyama read Fukuzawa and other early thinkers to trace the development of subjectivity as a prerequisite for liberal democracy and a thriving modern society. However, if, as Tosaka Jun had pointed out, the openness of the Kyoto School's philosophy of nothingness was setting up a framework through which radical Japanism could find its own rationality, Maruyama's misrecognition of his own material conditions of possibility (and by extension, those of liberalism). Further, as Tosaka claimed that the liberal nature of Kyoto philosophy, its universalism and idealism, left their work powerless to stop the advance of radical ideologies, Maruyama would have required a significant foundation for his renewal of

¹²³ Koschmann notes that for most purposes the term 主観 (*shukan*) was used to connote contemplative consciousness, while *shutai* referred to ethical, practical subject as discussed by Kierkegaard or Marx, and also used by Nishida in discussing Kant. See J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan*, Chicago; University of Chicago Press (1996), pp. 2

liberalism on which to establish a stable political ideology resistant to those same radical turns. The importance of Tosaka's critiques for the post war period is that if philosophical liberalism had before the war produced within itself the possibility of its own undoing, then that possibility might remain in the re-establishment of liberalism after the war. Hence, if fascism is to be better understood and for the future prevented, neo-liberalism must be checked carefully so that the criteria for another downfall may be prevented.

Fascism as Incomplete Modernisation

In several essays following the war – most notably perhaps were “Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism” and “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism” – Maruyama outlined Japan's fall to fascism as the unfortunate result of an incomplete modernisation, the completion of which was prevented by the lack of individual autonomy in Japanese society. In his analysis, Maruyama divides Japanese fascism into three historical phases: the ‘preparatory phase’ starting in 1919 with the publication of Kita Ikki's “General Outline of Measure for the Reconstruction of Japan” and the formation of his movement group, the Society of Those Who Yet Remain; the ‘period of maturity’ after the Manchurian Incident of 1931, when the military began assuming majority membership of various socio-political fascist groups; and the ‘consummation period’ from 1936 until the war's end in 1945, in which the military allied with political parties and monopoly capital (the *zaibatsu*).¹²⁴ Those divisions, along with his defining boundaries between them, obscure the mass social foundation of fascism in favour of a narrative in which small radical groups are hijacked by eager military proponents. In response to Maruyama, we should turn the analysis

¹²⁴ These are outlined in more detail in Masao Maruyama, “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism,” in *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japan*, Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 26-34

toward the social roots of fascism in order to better understand fascism as a global phenomenon and in relation to its historical context.

Although fascism as a global phenomenon, along with Japan's inclusion in it, has been discussed in the introduction, the discussion will be supplemented here. The uniting principle of fascist ideology, and what best ties Japan into scholarship on fascism in Europe, is the anti-capitalist nature of the ideology. In the words of Michael Lowy:

*“The Romantic anti-capitalist worldview manifests itself in many diverse perspectives that are totally foreign to fascism. It is doubtless also true that starting with the first Romantic movement one already finds elements of what will become fascist ideology much later.”*¹²⁵

Maruyama emphasised even in early socio-political fascist groups of the preparatory phase the presence of anti-capitalist sentiment. In the second phase it grew in intensity and attracted members of the lower class with pseudo-leftist slogans, as he exemplifies not only with the name of the group, the All-Japan Patriots' Joint Struggle Council, but also in their platform: “We intend to overthrow capitalism by the establishment of sovereign authority over industry.”¹²⁶ For Maruyama, fascism was the outcome of an incomplete modernity. However, insofar as capitalism is the defining feature of modernity, Maruyama was unable to connect the rise of fascism in Japan to the dynamics of capitalist modernity and its effects on social relations and labour itself. Hence, Maruyama should be corrected: *Fascism was the outcome of the modernisation process itself*. As per Horkheimer: “The bourgeois upheavals did indeed depend on the ripeness of the situation. Their successes, from the Reformation to

¹²⁵ Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy, “Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism,” *New German Critique*, No. 32 (Spring 1984), pp. 69

¹²⁶ Maruyama, “Ideology and Dynamics,” pp. 31

the legal revolution of fascism, were tied to the technical and economic achievements that mark the progress of capitalism.”¹²⁷

Only by defining modernity in terms of capitalism can a deeper understanding of fascism, and also liberalism, be reached. The late (and therefore hastened) development of capitalism in Japan, Germany, Italy, and Spain set conditions for rapid social change and opened the possibility of anti-modernisation efforts in each country. It should be no wonder, then, that the military-dominated socio-political factions in Japan came to sympathise with the traditional villages in the 1930’s when farmers expressed their strenuous financial burdens and the widened gap of wealth between rural and urban Japan. On the contradictory platform of the Great Japan Production Party to propagate autonomy under a strong central state, Maruyama writes,

*“[T]he tendency towards the concentration of powerful authority and the strengthening of state control... was limited in Japan by the ideology of agrarianism. It should be remembered, however, that the predominant position of this ideology in Japanese fascism did not rest simply on romanticism but was built on a definite social foundation.”*¹²⁸

But idealisation of agrarian (traditional) Japan was not truly a limitation of that particular setting, but rather it was a necessary discrepancy.

As a romantic movement, fascism was inherently anti-capitalist, and as such its contrast of the capitalist core of the nation, which must be controlled, with the yet pre-modern romantic past as rendered in the agrarian countryside was an ideological necessity.

¹²⁷ Quoted from Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, pp. 112

¹²⁸ Maruyama, “Ideology and Dynamics,” pp. 45

Thus, the romantic longing for the past was always outside, even as it was incorporated in, the capitalist system, and was held aloft as the idealised Japanese society. For its sublime position in fascist thought, the villages existed, conceptually, beyond the need for state control. But as the fascists did not understand their own relationship with capitalism, they were unable to escape their dependency on the modernised cities. That Japan's fascists were unable to escape their dependency on the very object of their opposition was evidence that, as Slavoj Žižek said of Hitler for the same reason, they were “not violent enough,”¹²⁹ since they failed to commit the intensive ideological violence required to eliminate the capitalist mode of production as the socially constituting element of modern man and instead inflicted extensive violence on fictitious enemies throughout Asia.

Thus the imperialist entrepreneurs in Asia extolled those elements left behind by modernisation as the space for a voluntary false exodus from the physical manifestation of capitalist development – the cities. That way the dependency on urban manufacturing was concealed by rhetorical implications of condemnation. The intensive labour of the traditional countryside was a common infatuation for global fascism, although fascists were never able to reconcile their ideological need for the countryside and their material dependence on the city as the supplier of military production.

Kyoto School as Contradiction

In 1919, in Maruyama's first period of fascism, Kita Ikki called for revolution, a coordination of reform movements, and the “emancipation of Asian Peoples”.¹³⁰ Already at

¹²⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, London; Verso (2008), pp. 151; As per Žižek, Hitler was “not violent enough” since the Nazi's were not “radical enough” to disturb the most basic foundations of capitalism to reach the “essence” of their society, and instead their violence was exerted on an imagined enemy – the Jews.

¹³⁰ Maruyama, “Ideology and Dynamics,” pp. 28

that time the content of fascism was matured, with both domestic reforms and internationalist aims in addition to its anti-communist stance. Maruyama is correct in highlighting the social, non-military origin of fascism in this period, but incorrect in underplaying the role of intellectuals and literary figures in the further development of fascist ideology. In his scheme of social fascism, Maruyama separates two groups in the Japanese middle class: the first made up of skilled trades, small factory owners, Buddhist and Shinto priests and others of similar income and education; and a second group made up of urban salary-men, journalists, professors, lawyers, and students.¹³¹ Open support of fascism Maruyama accredits to the first group, and not the majority of the second group. Maruyama claimed of intellectuals: *“Most people adapted themselves to the process of fascization and followed in its wake. On the other hand, they were certainly not positive advocates or the driving force of the fascist movement.”*¹³² On the first part Maruyama may have been absolutely correct. On the second part Maruyama overlooked significant contributors to fascism from the intellectual sphere and must be faulted. But what does it mean for an intellectual to have “followed in its wake”?

The philosophy of Tosaka Jun is again significant here, as is the example of a tenuously fascistic intellectual circle found in the Kyoto School of philosophy. If what separates fascism from other forms of romanticism is its *totality*,¹³³ then the ‘philosophy of nothingness’ from the Kyoto School is the intellectual outline for Japanese fascism, as was once suggested with some controversy by Najita and Harootunian – “none came closer to

¹³¹ Ibid. pp. 57-8

¹³² Ibid. pp. 58

¹³³ On this point, I refer to two sources on fascism and romanticism: Sayre and Lowy, “Figures,” pp. 69-70; and Zizek, *Lost Causes*, pp. 98-99.

than they did to defining the philosophic contours of Japanese fascism.”¹³⁴ The author of “The Way of the Subject” cited as a problematic work in Maruyama’s “Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism” was, after all, Watsuji Tetsuro. In that work, Watsuji places the Emperor at the center of the Japanese community as a unifying force for whose benefit all private actions are conducted. More importantly, no individual citizen is truly autonomous from the Emperor, since it is only through the Emperor as the personification of nothingness that the Japanese people are constituted as a people – individuals only as part of a whole. The emperor is hence an embodiment of the society, and as the locus of nothingness performs the same abstract function as a democratically elected state, being at once the representation of the people and also beyond the people in a mutually defining relationship. Published in 1944, “The Way of the Subject” maintains the same philosophical framework Watsuji had created in his work on ethics in 1937, given application outside the ideological realm and into the physical political sphere.

Yet here Watsuji had perhaps the closest flirtation with a material grounding for his philosophy, though that grounding was tragically anachronistic. In premodern Japan, when the hierarchical structure was still based rigidly on birth, the emperor may have played such a role in the material conditions of the medieval Japanese community, when no significant division of labour existed within any one trade,¹³⁵ and varying trades were allocated by social rank determined by birth. Had Watsuji recognised the dynamics of capitalism as having usurped the social mediation of pre-existing civility, he might have proposed the emperor undertake a more inwardly revolutionary project, since the network of hierarchical

¹³⁴ Tetsuo Najita and Harry Harootunian, “Revolt against the West,” pp. 741-742

¹³⁵ See Marx, *On the German Ideology*, Part A, 3 “Production and Intercourse”

bonds by blood which the emperor (and later the shogun) had existed as a unifier materially and, perhaps, consciously.

In his *Rinrigaku*, Watsuji describes a space of nothingness which exists between the individual and the community as the two mutually negate each other. The ethical good, for Watsuji, is the overcoming of one's negation with the community by shedding foregoing individualism and rejoining the community. In his later works, the Emperor assumes the role of the negation of negations, a singular being through which individuals are galvanised into a singular community by his singular will. Other members of the Kyoto School employed similar philosophies of individual negation. For Nishida Kitaro it was negation into universal nothingness preceding subject and object, and this philosophy reached its most fascistic realisation in the two academic conferences of 1941-42, Central Debates (中古路恩), and Overcoming Modernity (近代の忠告), in which questions concerning the philosophy of history and Japan's role in the world were presented and discussed. Consider this quote from Nishitani Keiji, presenting at Overcoming Modernity:

*“Realistically, we live our lives as individual citizens. Yet the state must suppress the arbitrary freedom of individuals. This is an inevitable requirement for the state to exist... Each and every person must selflessly exert themselves in performing their work. ‘Self-annihilation’ basically means extinguishing the arbitrary ego or egoistic self.”*¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Keiji Nishitani, “My Views on ‘Overcoming Modernity’”, translated by Richard Calichman in *Overcoming Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan*, New York; Columbia University Press (2008), pp. 56

Self-negation to the state saturated the presentations of the conference, which also included several literary figures, a theologian, a historian, and a physicist – all members of Maruyama’s second group of educated intelligentsia.¹³⁷

According to Tosaka, proponents of philosophical idealism¹³⁸ quietly substitute ontological categories in their analyses of history with metaphysical categories, which cannot be used to understand history. Tosaka’s promotion of materialism as the only way to understand history and the only way to oppose fascism should be considered carefully. As liberalism is founded on an appeal to abstract equality, abstract freedom, and a claim to universalism rather than a materialist understanding of existence, it is afloat, aloof, as a system anchored only in ideas. “Insofar as [thoughts] are social forces, they have an objective existence, and they are only constituted as thoughts when they are designed to participate in the solution of real social problems.”¹³⁹ But insofar as objective existence is material, liberalism cannot participate in social programs. This is the root of the problem. One aspect of liberal ‘freedom’ is what Tosaka termed ‘freedom from socio-political ideas,’¹⁴⁰ rendered in his time as the embrace by liberal philosophers of religious consciousness. More specifically, the liberal philosophers used religious consciousness in responding to social problems, i.e. the contradictions within capitalism – the abstraction of the individual subject from objectivised labour. But since liberalism does not recognise its

¹³⁷ For a detailed account of fascism in Japanese romantic literature, see Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, Berkeley; University of California Press (2009)

¹³⁸ Tosaka Jun not only refers to German Idealists such as Heidegger, but also specifically the works of the Kyoto School, naming “Nishida Kitaro, Tanabe Hajime, Miki Kiyoshi, et al.” In a note at the end of his essay: “History and Dialectics: Metaphysical Categories are not Philosophical Categories” in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy*, translated and edited by David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo, Westport, Conn. ; Greenwood Press, 1998 pp. 330-338 (note on 338).

¹³⁹ Tosaka, “Preface to Intellectual Problems of Contemporary Japan: Japanism, Liberalism, Materialism,” in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy* (henceforth *Sourcebook*), pp. 339.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 340.

conditions of possibility in capitalism, the contradictions are merely concealed, ‘overcome’ by religious means. Instead of an overcoming, it becomes an escape. “In place of an actual solution to society’s contradictions,” Tosaka wrote, “this escape comes to be an intellectual solution to contradiction – that is to say, an intellectual neglect or elimination of the contradiction.”¹⁴¹ Capitalism presented the conditions of possibility for both Marxism and fascism as romantic, anti-modern (anti-capital) movements, and also for liberalism as a progressive movement for abstract equality. Human equality was possible only after labour equality. It is unique to capitalism that “[e]ach subject is an exchanger; i.e. each has the same social relation towards the other that the other has towards him. As subject of exchange, their relation is therefore that of *equality*.*[sic]*”¹⁴² This point from Marx is significant for hinting that subjectivity itself has taken on a different meaning in the capitalist system.

Maruyama’s Liberal Restoration

With the recent rise of increasingly radical right-wing groups in the midst of another economic crisis, it is imperative to address the challenges Tosaka Jun had presented to the practice of liberal philosophy, and therefore to Maruyama’s revitalisation of liberalism for post-war Japan. Maruyama is famous for maintaining a continuum in the Japanese historical narrative, incorporating its fascist phase not as a random happenstance but as a result of Japanese peoples’ lack of autonomy in private life as a prerequisite for a completed modernity. This lack of individual autonomy, of subjectivity, was perhaps exemplified in the years following the war by narratives both Japanese and American, in which Emperor Hirohito appeared as the enlightened agent of Japan, whose sole decision made sense of the

¹⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 340

¹⁴² Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, translated by Martin Nicolaus, Penguin Classics, 1993, pp. 241

atomic bomb and Japan's position in the world.¹⁴³ That perception of central agency was precisely the lack of political autonomy Maruyama sought to address in his work. In historicising autonomy and liberal values in Japanese political history, Maruyama turned to the Tokugawa intellectuals Ogyu Sorai and Motoori Norinaga, and the famous Meiji enlightenment intellectual, Fukuzawa Yukichi.

Maruyama's "focus on the *modern* aspects of the Meiji Restoration as well as on the growth of modern elements in Tokugawa society,"¹⁴⁴ in his own words, hint that his conception of modernity was detached from capitalism, and was instead defined by Enlightenment ideals (autonomy, democracy) independent of materialist conditions. Therefore his reading of modern elements in a pre-modern society is rendered problematic by the materialist theory of history, which posits that abstract ideas are fundamentally confined by more concrete modes of production – that ideas are historically determined by the material production of society in each era. The aim of his work on Tokugawa Japan is redemptive, a struggle to reclaim Japanese history from the timelessness of fascist historiography. As a member of the Lecture School (講座派 *Koza-ha*) of Marxism in Japan, which taught that private subjectivity had never formed due to the lack of a bourgeois class in the country, Maruyama might be criticised for attempting to locate appropriate subjectivity in a period before the development of a bourgeois class was ever rendered possible. Although Maruyama chose to pursue democracy and liberalism over any Marxist teleology, the Lecture School informed his analysis of modernity significantly.

¹⁴³ See the comparison of Japanese and American accounts of Japan's surrender by Yoshikuni Igarashi, "The Bomb, Hirohito, and History: The Foundational Narrative of United States-Japan Postwar Relations," *Positions* 6:2 (1998)

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Yoshikuni Igarashi, "The Unfinished Business of Mourning: Maruyama Masao and Japan's Struggles with the Wartime Past," *Positions*, 10:1, 2002, pp. 199

Koza-ha Modernity

Marxism in Japan gripped academics of social sciences and humanities after the First World War, when economic hardships thrust Japan's uneven development into scrutiny and the first Japanese translation of Marx's *Das Kapital* was published. The *Koza-ha* were an important group amongst Japanese Marxists, and were largely associated with the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). The *Koza-ha* Marxists accepted the Comintern's evaluation that Japan had not experienced a sufficient bourgeois revolution.¹⁴⁵ The recommendation of the Comintern was that Japan further develop as a bourgeois nation before proceeding with a socialist revolution, as Lenin had decided for the USSR. This evaluation initiated a theoretical debate which split Japanese Marxists on the issue of Japan's readiness for revolution. The dissident *Rono-ha* (労農派 Workers and Farmers Faction) Marxists left the JCP, touting Japan's Meiji Restoration as a successful bourgeois revolution and advocating Japan's readiness to overcome capitalism; any backwardness in Japanese development was purely incidental.¹⁴⁶ The *Koza-ha*, on the other hand, regarded the Meiji Restoration as incomplete and observed that Japan retained several feudal elements which had to be abolished before Japan could progress further.

For the *Koza-ha*, then, feudal remnants combined with a free market to form a unique, Japanese capitalism. However, Andrew Barshay and others have suggested that the *Koza-ha* ignored the ideological factors behind Japan's modernisation. Thus, they were oblivious to the "invented – and strategic – character" of the process of adapting elements of

¹⁴⁵ Thomas H.R. Havens, review of *Marxism and the Crisis of Prewar Development in Japan*, by Germaine A. Hoston, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 42 No. 3 (Autumn 1987), pp. 367.

¹⁴⁶ Brian J. McVeigh, "Different Roads to Modernity and Developmental Alienation," review of *The Social Sciences in Modern Japan: The Marxian and Modernist Traditions*, by Andrew E. Barshay, H-Net Reviews (December 2004), Online at [<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=60601104942413>]

pre-modernity to the modern context – what Barshay calls “the state’s systemic attempt to mobilize [‘tradition’] in its ‘virtual’ war for survival as an imperial power.”¹⁴⁷ The struggle to remain an imperial power perhaps transitioned into a struggle to maintain a unique identity by the end of the Taisho period, when development had already effectively altered the landscape of power relations throughout Japan. In other words, once capitalist relations had effectively replaced hereditary power relations, the nature of identity had begun to shift gradually from one of family or social status toward one of consumerism. Having entered into the nation-state model, Japanese culture became an object of identity amongst global nations rather than an ecumenical culture in which Japanese lived. These are precisely the material differences, the patterns of production/consumption of culture that were mystified by the ideology of fascists and separately by idealist philosophers. As Marx remarked:

*“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”*¹⁴⁸

If the Koza-ha failed to recognise the role of ideology in their analysis of Japanese society, then Maruyama commits the opposite error. His seminal analysis of Japanese fascism as a psychological/ideological phenomenon is withdrawn from the materialist examination of those ideas. If as Postone summarised, “For Marx, capital, as the unfolded commodity form, is the central, totalizing category of modern life,”¹⁴⁹ Maruyama’s

¹⁴⁷ Andrew Barshay, *The Social Sciences in Modern Japan: The Marxian and Modernist Traditions*, Berkeley; University of California Press, 2004, pp. 72-73

¹⁴⁸ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: Chapter 1,” translated by Saul K. Padover, Marxists.org (1995), URL: [<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>]

¹⁴⁹ Postone, *Time, Labor*, pp. 352

approached the subject of fascism by discussing the slogans and language aimed at evoking a sense of tradition and unity without offering an analysis of capital as the historical subject through which those traditions became spectral and nightmarish. Furthermore, Maruyama's writings on liberal democracy are focused on pre-modern strands of liberal thought from Edo period thinkers. This move serves to provide a continuity for Japanese modern history, but repeats the misstep of musing on tradition without discussions of how the modern period had transmuted those traditions to suit the new mode of production and new social relations mediated by labour.

Civilisation and Enlightenment

It is significant to note that Maruyama took keen interest in the work of Meiji-period intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi. Fukuzawa had also championed individual independence as a precursor to national independence, providing Maruyama with a pre-war groundwork from which to develop a narrative for Japan's entry into modernity. Like his Meiji counterpart before him, Maruyama after the war sought to develop in Japan a "sense of conscious membership as citizens of a modern nation-state."¹⁵⁰ It was perhaps the only solution for what Maruyama saw as an incomplete modernity, for democratic reforms without democratic citizens limited Japan's reforms to an informal oligarchy in which the newly defined wealthy class – which was itself mostly, but not entirely, made up of the older lordly class – guided the country along a developmental route. Maruyama might have agreed with Habermas's theory of communicative rationality – that each individual is the ethical agent in a larger society, at the heart of which is the Enlightenment idea of the subject, detachable and capable of inner reflection. For the Meiji period Fukuzawa was symptomatic of the

¹⁵⁰ Robert N. Bellah, *Imagining Japan: The Japanese Tradition and its Modern Interpretation*, Berkeley; University of California Press (2003), pp. 52

agonising, perhaps antagonising, process of hastened industrial development, and Fukuzawa's "Civilization and Enlightenment" (文明開化 *bunmei kaika*) certainly initiated a change in political subjectivity in Japan toward a more individualist manner. However, before the end of the 19th Century, there was considerable backlash against Enlightenment thinking, as the notion "Civilisation Disease" (文明病 *bunmei-byou*) indicated in the press.¹⁵¹ The Emperor's preference for a Bismarck style of leadership and a constitution based on that of Germany maintained a top-down power structure over the course of modernisation. Maruyama's work on subjectivity and liberalism stems from a concern over that lost opportunity to reform Japanese consciousness sufficiently to conduct democratic politics.

Fukuzawa was, then, a failed opportunity for Japan. Maruyama's reading of Fukuzawa provides a humanistic subjectivity that is always fluidly resilient in the face of historical change – each moment of helplessness an opportunity for developing a more potent spiritual autonomy.¹⁵² Such a definition of subjectivity embraces a historically specific character, one that is destined to change as historical forces demand and is therefore ever impermanent. But in his own later self-reading, Maruyama retrospectively considers himself neo-Kantian on the matter of subjectivity, favouring a rooted, transcendental notion of subjectivity in which values and existence are never united, but rather existence must be made to commit to value which remains fundamentally unchanged as the crux of ethical autonomy.¹⁵³ This decidedly transcendental turn by Maruyama abandons historical specificity, the playful definition of Fukuzawa, and thus aims to establish a transhistorical

¹⁵¹ Ronald Loftus, "The Inversion of Progress: Taoka Reiun's *Hibunmeiron*," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 40 No. 2 (Summer 1985) pp. 191

¹⁵² Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity*, pp. 188

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* pp. 189-190

narrative of subjectivity that can connect the Edo period thinkers to contemporary Japanese society in a clearly reasoned continuity. However, the idealist nature that he acquires with this approach jeopardises the ability of his project to address the material dynamics operating beneath the traditions he attempts to analyse.

The Past in the Present

Ogyu Sorai, a Confucian scholar of the early 1700's intrigued Maruyama by objectifying the political structure of his own time. During the first half of the 1940's, the final years of the war, Maruyama studied what he considered nascent modern ideas in the Tokugawa period. At that time, the study of modernist aspects of Japanese history were conducted in contrast to the fascist historiography supporting the regime, and so Maruyama considered such study his saving grace from political forces bent on 'overcoming' modernity.¹⁵⁴ Rejecting the notion of Tokugawa society as a natural hierarchy, and positing it instead as human invention by classical sage kings, Sorai launched an intellectual revolt against an immutable state structure – an opaque parallel for Maruyama's intellectual rejection of fascism. For Maruyama, Sorai's claim that the shogunate left the Japanese people inert, non-subjective, non-intellectual, meant that the success of fascism in guiding the population was a failure of the Emperor System (天皇制 *tennosei*) even before the Restoration, not of liberal democracy since.¹⁵⁵ Here the Koza-ha thesis of feudal elements existing in contemporary Japan was located intellectually. The lack of individual autonomy in the Emperor System remained unsolved after the Meiji Restoration. For Maruyama, that meant the power structure in Japan had remained unchanged. More fundamentally for

¹⁵⁴ Igarashi, "Unfinished Business of Mourning," pp. 199

¹⁵⁵ Andrew Barshay, "Imagining Democracy in Postwar Japan: Reflections on Maruyama Masao and Modernism," *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 18 No. 2 (Summer 1992), pp. 367-8

Maruyama, Sorai separated Confucian value as public norms from private desires, thereby liberating the latter and opening the potential for private life to become the locus of self-determination for subjectivity.¹⁵⁶

Maruyama notes how the Sorai school of Confucian thought separated public responsibility from private creativity, but as Koschmann has pointed out, it was left to Maruyama to evaluate why that separation was insufficient to produce the sort of individualism required for a change in political consciousness. The separation alone allowed for freedom as “the absence of constraint” as per Thomas Hobbes, but failed to reach the political level of self-determination outlined by John Locke.¹⁵⁷ Immutability of the system further meant that “the forces for the development of a new mode of production failed to mature socially during the Tokugawa period.”¹⁵⁸ This statement appears to cast blame on the lack of individual subjectivity in Japan for failure to keep pace with the development of the modern world. This reveals that Maruyama’s concept of time and history were also derived from Marxist conceptions of production as historical process; that is, that Japan was trapped in the feudal stage of historical production due to a lack of individual subjectivity having developed in order to affect democratic change in the nation.

The Last Moderniser

Maruyama’s conception of modernity must be brought into accord with the development of capitalism in Japan if his work is to maintain longevity in the historiography

¹⁵⁶ “The Way is, of course, absolute, so the division between public and private is always a division within the Way itself; nevertheless, it is clear that since the essence of the Way is to maintain ‘order in the state and peace in the world,’ it belongs more directly to the public domain. . . . Conversely, the same thing is revealed by the concept of ‘self-discipline,’ which Sorai included in the private domain.” Maruyama Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, translated by Mikiso Hane, Princeton University Press (1974), pp. 106

¹⁵⁷ Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity*, pp. 173

¹⁵⁸ Maruyama, *Studies*, pp. 249

of Japan and be carried on toward realising Maruyama's goal of self-determinism for Japanese citizens (and non-Japanese alike). Otherwise his work risks repeating the liberalist hermeneutic outlined by Tosaka. In searching for the seeds of modern ideas – self-determination, individual subjectivity – in pre-modern texts, Maruyama offered a redemptive response to the totality of fascist thought and the monolithic fascist line of history. However, Maruyama has failed to incorporate an understanding of the material causes of fascism as a popular movement amidst the antinomies of the capitalist system – the wide wealth gap between small villages and modernised cities; the atomisation of society due to changes in the mode of production toward individual contract labour, or the detachment of cultural significance in modernity due to abstract equality and appeal to universality leading to a call to restore Japan's 'cultural essence.' Maruyama, in attempting to recover modernity for post-war Japan, was unable to properly account for its role in an anti-modern period.

The historicity of Maruyama's corpus served, on the one hand, to recollect the rubble of the monolithic timeline of Japan's long imperial history, an integral part of the totality of fascism in Japan. He did so by returning the works of intellectuals who were intentionally forgotten in the remembering of Japan's idealised past. His act was perhaps that of exploding the structure of fascist historiography, in Benjamin's sense, attempting to rebuild the forgotten pieces to show the alternative, that undermining course of history of previous radical thinkers. Maruyama's great achievement, perhaps, was not the reconstruction of modernist ideas in the postwar, but rather the treatment of his conditions during the war years as the immediate emergency.¹⁵⁹ The recollection of Ogyu Sorai's

¹⁵⁹ "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'emergency situation' in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history that corresponds to this." Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History,"

division of norms from nature, public from private, was an act of rescuing ideas which the historical path of fascism might have left behind. It was therefore an act of subversion, however restrained, against the drag of an ideological totality. Maruyama's tragedy, on the other hand, was that his appropriate treatment of the emergency of the 'now' did not alter his concept of history. Maruyama remained bound to linear history attached to consciousness, driven to a liberal democratic *telos* by a Lockesian realisation of subjectivity.

The detachment of consciousness and (material) existence in philosophy has been an object of sorrow since Marx, and was elucidated in "On the German Ideology." The critique was taken further by Lukacs, who, using Marx's categories of analysis, stressed that thought and existence are in no way identical in any relation to each other as separate entities, but rather are two aspects of one historical, dialectic process (the capitalist dynamic).¹⁶⁰ "Hence," Postone explains, "philosophical thought misrecognises the problems generated by its context as transhistorical and ontological."¹⁶¹ Although Tosaka Jun could not have been familiar with the work of the Frankfurt School Marxists, his criticism of the Kyoto School philosophers is based on a very similar analysis of liberal (positivist) philosophy. The danger in Maruyama's attempt to restore a modernist historiography for postwar Japan rests upon his reliance of a linearly progressive concept of history. Drawing modernist notions from Ogyu Sorai or Fukuzawa Yukichi positioned a monolithic history beside the fascistic dark tower. The problematic arises as Maruyama seeks to simply replace one monolithic

translated by Dennis Redmond, Marxists.org, 2005, URL

[<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>], Thesis VIII.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Moishe Postone, "Lukacs and the Dialectical Critique of Capitalism," Platypus.org, 2003, URL [http://www.platypus1917.org/wp-content/uploads/readings/postone_lukacsdialecticalcritique2003.pdf], pp. 2

¹⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 2

historicality for another, while the monolithic form of history is itself the problem from which he should be desperately seeking escape.

To conclude this section, Maruyama provided necessary work in the last years of the war and in the years immediately following. But as Japan struggles to exit its post-war consciousness, and as economic conditions again reveal political extremities, we must criticise even Maruyama's most crucial work in order to better understand fascism and liberalism with regards to their historical specificities, and with regards to our own. Fascism and liberalism, and their parent context, modernity, must be understood in terms of their conditions of possibility in capitalism as the historically specific mode of production. And the manner in which we represent our historical development must be carefully considered along with changes in our own materialist circumstances. Maruyama, more than many wartime intellectuals, did treat his context with appropriate urgency, that is, as an instance of emergency. Most Marxists in Japan had performed a renunciation, a turn (転向 *tenkou*), against their leftist thought in the face of government coercion. Maruyama, writing from a more central liberal standpoint, was able to engage with the fascist problem with impunity, albeit in a less direct manner. In addition to his sense of urgency, Maruyama was correct when he criticised fascism from the standpoint of modernity. However, his approach was limited by his refusal to commit to a more thoroughly materialist examination of fascism and modernity. As Harootunian points out, Maruyama's use of consciousness as a purely reflective activity did not consider seriously the role of praxis in social transformation, thus leaving Maruyama's own work on consciousness equally reflective without reflexivity, resigned to interpret the world and not to change it. "The implications of this position for

social change are quietistic, meditative.”¹⁶² That is, his treatment of history offered no substantial solution since it did not penetrate beyond consciousness and into the physicality of history.

Having placed his attention solely on the ideological elements of Tokugawa and wartime politics, Maruyama could not account for the particulars of the two historical epochs, one pre-modern and one modern. He favoured transcendental logic, which forced him to err toward abstract ideas taken transcendently (transhistorically), to the neglect of the imminent critique favoured by Marxists. The latter would have allowed him to examine the particulars of the two epoch as incidences within a greater historical dynamic (the emergence of capitalism) – a difference which should have granted him insight into the totalising force unique to the modern period. Neo-Confucianism, then, was regarded by Maruyama as a purely political ideology (parallel, perhaps, in form to fascism), which was jeopardised by social change before the close of the eighteenth century. Ogyu Sorai, by detaching politics from morality, public from private, thought from practise, “made possible a new kind of authoritarian leadership.”¹⁶³ Harootunian further suggests that Maruyama historicised Sorai’s work improperly, suggesting that Sorai’s context was one in which the divide between public and private was inevitable, and the problem was therefore how to safely bring the two together, which was the intent of much of Sorai’s work. Private life, therefore, was simply a feature of public life. The analysis of fascism offered by Maruyama carries the same mistake – rather than a set of pre-modern ideas vying for control of Japanese modern consciousness, the rise of fascism was a revolt against the divide between

¹⁶² Herman Ooms and H.D. Harootunian, “Maruyama’s Achievement: Two Views,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (May 1977), pp. 528-29

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* pp. 533

public and private being as embodied by labour. Maruyama was bound to examine the forms of appearance of his context without gaining access (by means of Marxist categories) to the context itself. In other words, he could only see the outward performances of fascist thought or modern thought, but was restricted from seeing the contextual determinations of those bodies of thought in the field of praxis. That aspect of the dialectics in which fascism and modernism operate are accessible, as Tosaka Jun had claim, only through an analysis of capital.

Chapter 3

The work of Takeuchi Yoshimi proffers an interesting view on modernity in Japan. A contemporary of Maruyama Masao, Takeuchi's view of modernity is perhaps closer to the pre-war Kyoto School philosophers – that modernity is a system of Western origin and of Western import. Against Maruyama's modernist approach, which would have modernity as an essence separated from the European context, Takeuchi formulated modernity as a European force that could be resisted or opposed by an Asian alternative. By the end of the war, Takeuchi was already known in Japan as an expert on Chinese literature, having co-founded the Chinese Literature Research Society (中国文学研究会 *Chugoku Bungaku Kenkyukai*) in 1934.¹⁶⁴ His contributions to the group's journal since led him to write and publish on Lu Xun, a famous leftist author in China. For Takeuchi, Lu Xun embodied China's resistance to modernity through his own selection of readings from “smaller, oppressed nations, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the Balkans, in addition to

¹⁶⁴ Christian Uhl, “Displacing Japan: Takeuchi Yoshimi's Lu Xun in Light of Nishida's Philosophy, and Vice Versa,” *Positions*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 2009), pp. 207

Slavic resistance poetry.”¹⁶⁵ Rather than aid with the import of Western classics and participate in China’s modernising project, or attempting to create a literature of resistance from the perspective of China qua pre-modern China, Lu Xun took inspiration from resistances within the European sphere itself. Those works, according to Takeuchi’s analysis, expressed a sense of urgency in the face of a foreign force that must have been appropriate to China’s context of foreign interference. Japan, in comparison, modernised eagerly, and translations were made of any works considered representative of the West, and so the literature of resistance was largely avoided – a point on which Takeuchi was highly critical.

Another point of analysis from Takeuchi is his treatment of Japan’s wartime intellectuals, in particular the Kyoto School. Unlike many scholars following the war, Takeuchi was not ready to abandon or reject the ideas of the Kyoto School philosophers, and especially those most contentious ideas expressed in the conference *Overcoming Modernity*. Takeuchi instead critically attempts to re-examine the fundamental ideas expressed in the conference proceedings to recover a valid critique of modernity. It is the kind of intellectual engagement which would be very controversial today, for Takeuchi’s logic in the undertaking is that a new, good resistance (against modernity) requires a trek through the worst resistance (fascism), or, in other words, only by passing through evil is salvation possible.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Takeuchi, “Ways of Introducing Culture,” translated in Richard F. Calichman, *What is Modernity?*, New York; Columbia University Press (2005), pp. 46; Since Lu Xun had learned German, he read all of these Western works through their German translations.

¹⁶⁶ Kojin Karatani, “The Discursive Space of Modern Japan,” translated by Seiji M. Lippit, *Boundary 2*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1991), pp. 198

The aim of this chapter is first to discuss Takeuchi's use of Lu Xun and Chinese literature as a mirror for the Japanese context of modernity. His comparison of China and Japan and their attitudes toward the West and modernisation are informative of the intellectual atmosphere in Japan in the prewar period and for Japan's early modern period as a whole. Lu Xun as a model also functions as Takeuchi's basis for a theory of resistance against hegemony. The second part of this chapter will focus on Takeuchi's discussion on *Overcoming Modernity* and his account of Japanese wartime intellectual experience. The two points converge into Takeuchi's notion of Asia as a means of overcoming modernity and escaping the power structure of the West. Takeuchi's treatment of Kyoto thought and Japanese particularism is the opposite of the critique posited by Tosaka Jun. Where Tosaka criticised particularity as dangerously fascistic, Takeuchi sees grounds to abey Western universalism with a more regional response akin to the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere without the ultranationalist hue. Finally, this chapter will end with a theoretical discussion on Takeuchi's contribution to our understanding of modernity. The critical theory of Tosaka Jun and more recent works on Takeuchi will inform an evaluation of Takeuchi's conception of modernity and the critique of that conception.

Lu Xun, a Hagiography

Lu Xun, a famous Chinese literary figure, was the base of many of Takeuchi's analyses of modernity. Takeuchi positioned Lu Xun to reflect his own concerns for Japan, providing Takeuchi with a point of reference from China. China was a significant mirror for the study of Japanese modernity because it was a contemporary example. More significantly, the case of China was considered by many in Japan and elsewhere to be a failed example of modernisation. In his essay "Ways of Introducing Culture" Takeuchi lends Lu Xun as a

contrast to Japanese literary figures in general, showing an example of how Japanese literature avoided the critical task which Lu Xun took up in China. As an author of note, Lu Xun was known in Japan early in his career, but Japanese literary figures who sought to meet him proved disappointing to Lu Xun and thus to Takeuchi. They lament that Japanese authors sought him out for his reputation alone, because he was someone worth meeting, and not for any serious engagement with his works.¹⁶⁷ Leaving their meeting feeling no anxiety, Takeuchi surmises they left uninfluenced by his work, meaning Japanese literature gained nothing through that exchange.

The problem, as both authors saw it, did not belong only to the individual authors who conducted those interviews, but characterised the whole of Japanese literature, with which Lu Xun was quite familiar. In a letter to Xiao Jun, another leftist writer in China, Lu wrote, “Of all the left-wing writers in Japan, only two have yet to commit *tenko* (Kurahara Korehito and Miyamoto Yuriko),”¹⁶⁸ commenting on the tenacity of the left-wing in China.¹⁶⁹ But much more than a petty assault on the Japanese left, Lu Xun continued in the letter to comment on how oppression in Japan was proportionally more systematic and thorough, that the authorities there were “possessed of a Germanic precision and meticulousness” that, if present in China, would have a similar effect. But the systemic oppression was not solely from the top down. Since the Meiji Period, the attitude toward modernisation gained momentum as a more narrowly defined Westernisation. In Japan the import of European literature assumed the standpoint of mainstream European literature, according to Takeuchi, and so the literature of resistance favoured by Lu Xun was regarded

¹⁶⁷ Takeuchi, *What is modernity* pp.43

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 44

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 44

as second-rate, a sign of backwardness, and that backwardness was attached to Lu as well.¹⁷⁰ That attitude toward Lu Xun was not contrary to Japan's view of China as backward, as a country falling behind in the race to modernity.

Indeed, Takeuchi's assessment of Japanese literary prejudices is that they embodied the ideology of Japan's eager modernisation. That is, Japanese, even if not successfully modern, readily believed they would become modern eventually, and dealt with any internal contradictions of (capitalist) development externally by means of expansion. Expansion had been practiced since 1873 with debates to invade Korea – an invasion realised in 1910, and continued until 1945. This expansion was seen by Takeuchi as a “Prussian Type” of movement of colonised nations to escape colonisation by becoming a coloniser, a political attitude parallel to the literary attitude of adopting mainstream texts in order to escape cultural backwardness.¹⁷¹ Such an ideology would place Japan perpetually in a middle tier, more modern than the rest of Asia but never as modern as Europe, so that even the strains of modernisation would present space for hope that Japan could yet try harder to catch up. Those strains did not bring about sufficient questions about modernity itself until the introduction of Marx in Japan and the contemporaneous romantic movement.

China's own top down approach to modernisation had failed on two counts, first led by Zeng Guofan and then by Kang Youwei. A bottom up approach was possible for the central kingdom because it was free of the perpetual fear of backwardness that afflicted Japan, having historically held a central position for Asian culture, and having before European intervention been the cultural leader of that region. In that way the paradigm shift

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. pp. 47

¹⁷¹ Ibid. pp. 48-49

was different for China, but China's open social structure – civil service exams in China were open to anyone while in Japan only elites were allowed to write – was perhaps more conducive to the universalism and monism of the encroaching global system.¹⁷²

The critical point of Takeuchi's essay on Lu Xun and literature is to address the manner in which Japan had approached modernisation. If Japan had historically become accustomed to importing culture as a peripheral country, then the shift away from Chinese cultural dominance to European cultural dominance did not fundamentally affect the process of importing and accepting. The cluttered method of import, Takeuchi explains, never changed, and new ideas were always introduced as schools. Each school was endowed instantly with its own authority, so that literary groups would style themselves as a 'French type', a 'Soviet type', or other sort packaged image, even if only as adaptation.¹⁷³ The rejection of one authority only results in the formation of an alternative authority, but as a group based on another import.¹⁷⁴ Takeuchi concludes that the Lu Xun type of writer, the independent writer who rejects the authority of such enshrined schools of thought as Lu Xun had rejected the authority of proletarian literature in forming the League of Left-Wing Writers, would be impossible in Japan. In Japan the prejudices against alternatives to the mainstream of high culture would be considered backward rather than resistance to a mainstream *qua* hegemony; thus Japan refused to see the backwardness, the "slavishness" of its own condition ever in pursuit of catching up, ever gluttonously consuming the classical works of bourgeois culture from abroad.

¹⁷² Shiping Hua, "The Meiji Restoration (1868) and the Late Qing Reform (1898) Revisited: Philosophies and Strategies," *East Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Fall 2004), pp.16-18

¹⁷³ Takeuchi, *What is Modernity?*, pp. 51

¹⁷⁴ The *Rono-ha* is perhaps a curious exception from this. It is beyond the scope of this research, but it was perhaps the case that the Rono Marxists had fallen back to a modernist perspective in their rejection of the Soviet evaluation of Japan instead of developing an alternative analysis without recourse to another branch of western thought.

Richard Calichman has written a great deal on Takeuchi, and offers considerable insight to the structure of literature as rendered by Takeuchi. The idea of literature, or the ideal of literature, was itself imported from Europe, and therefore each instance of literature produced in Japan was derived from that transcendent notion of what literature ought to be as defined by mainstream Western works. “As transcendent, idea of literature is held to be *responsible for* those imperfect literary instances that appear in the world.”¹⁷⁵ The problem with that notion of literature, as Calichman criticises, is that the transcendent notion is necessarily corrupted by its having a responsibility in the world and so the idea of literature is radically compelled to a more immanent definition based in ‘feeling’ rather than ‘knowledge’. This degeneration of literature, according to Takeuchi, begins with its institutionalisation, a process through which a universal idea of literature must be determined and subjected to a set of standards.¹⁷⁶ Under such structure, literary fiction or critique must conform to a set of principles set out by the institution, whether bourgeois or proletarian. Even a work of resistance depends upon the recognition by an institution, and so resistance itself is appropriated by the institution being criticised even as the critique is put forth. The standardisation of a concept, the placement of a definition, has the second responsibility of excluding. Works which fail to meet the qualifications of institution will not be recognised by it. Takeuchi’s aim is to criticise that structure of literary thought as set by the “literary establishment” (文壇 *bundan*) that socially institutionalised literature in Japan.¹⁷⁷ Takeuchi’s concept of literature is one that is quite reminiscent of Nishida’s philosophy, for literature grounded in feeling as the immediacy of the interaction between the literary work in the

¹⁷⁵ Richard F. Calichman, *Takeuchi Yoshimi: Displacing the West*, Ithaca, NY; Cornell University East Asia Program (2004), pp. 9; italics in the original

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp 10.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 10 and 14-15

world and the idea of literature takes the form of Nishida's sensual activity as the preceding purity of experience before the subject and object are realised through knowledge.

Takeuchi's preference for feeling over knowledge as the locus of the ideal of literature, the immanent idea of literature as opposed to the transcendental idea, is apparent in his discussion on Japanese authors who sought to visit Lu Xun not for his work, but for his reputation. Those writers went to Lu Xun with the idea of his backwardness already in mind, the abstract idea of Lu Xun as it existed to their knowledge, but failed to bring that knowledge into contact with his works (the world). Hence, the visiting writers only reaffirmed their believe in Lu Xun's backwardness and drew nothing from his context nor from the "anxiety" of his work. Or, as Calichman writes, they sought only to reinforce the framework (*waku*) under which they had already placed Lu Xun.¹⁷⁸ Takeuchi's criticism against the transcendental idea from the standpoint of imminent critiques takes the form of Nishida's attack on the subject/object dichotomy; moreover, this acceptance of Nishida's form of philosophy, the very fundamental critique itself – that is, the critique before the inclusion of cultural content – is perhaps the basis on which Takeuchi seeks to rescue the Kyoto School's attack on modernity from the perilous context of wartime imperialism.

Where Lu Xun and Nishida Meet

The influence of Kyoto School thought in Takeuchi's work has been denied by various Japanese scholars such as Takahashi Kazumi or Tsurumi Shunsuke, referring to the use of such terms as 'self-negation' as mere loan-words or 'baggage' which were insufficient

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 37-38

to indicate any systemic contribution to Takeuchi's theoretical output.¹⁷⁹ However, Takeuchi himself confessed that the Kyoto School, and Nishida especially, produced a significant theoretical contribution to his own view of world history and Asianism. Although Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good* was widely issued as compulsory reading in Japanese high school, Takeuchi gained no effective insight from it until years later, after the Fifteen Years' War had begun, and he recalled in a 1943 article:

*"I recall reading the account of that symposium [The World Historical Standpoint and Japan] with something like wonder, after which I tirelessly sought out the works of its four participants. This symposium also led me to take an extraordinary interest in Nishida philosophy, although philosophy had previously left me indifferent.... I have hardly read anything else.... Now we are both dissatisfied with this school. Although we still follow it, we now expect to find its limitations. Perhaps the progress of reality is so rapid that it has outpaced the school."*¹⁸⁰

The effect of Nishida's philosophy on his theoretical outlook becomes more apparent in Takeuchi's subsequent writing. Christian Uhl highlights Takeuchi's dissolution of his own Chinese Literature Research Society as an embrace of Nishida's philosophy of self-negation and the world historical philosophy put forth by his Kyoto School pupils:

"The Greater East Asian War... represents the negation of modernity and modern culture. It represents history's creative activity through which a new world and world culture are formed from within the depths of this negation...."

¹⁷⁹ Uhl, *Displacing Japan*, pp. 215

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in *Ibid*, pp. 216

The Chinese Literature Research Society must be negated, that is, [all] contemporary culture must be negated. This culture is the shadow now cast upon us by modern European culture. We must negate that self, for we are the creators who bring forth world history from within ourselves."¹⁸¹

Although the dissolution of Takeuchi's own cultural shadow seems to embrace simultaneously the imperialistic tone of late Kyoto School philosophy, Takeuchi goes on to criticise the presentations of the last two symposia proceedings for their Japanism, which was derived from a harsh critique against Chinese 'moral energy' in the face of modernity. This appropriately reveals Takeuchi's "dissatisfaction" with Kyoto School philosophy and his continued use of it. Although, he agreed with the philosophy of the symposium, its ultimate use as a justification of the war in Asia demarcated its limits once cultural particularism had become embedded in it. Thus, Takeuchi's discussions on imperialism in Asia were an attempt to reinterpret what it meant for Japan to lead Asia amidst its aggressive expansion.

Lu Xun in Takeuchi's view also played his own part in China's world historical standpoint, in the Nishidian sense, similar to Takeuchi's disavowal of his Research Society. If, according to Takeuchi, "Literature becomes literature by seeing politics as its shadow and then repelling it, in other words, by becoming aware of its own [political] ineffectiveness,"¹⁸² then Lu Xun's rejection of any dominant corpus of thought defined him by negating the external culture (the various literary societies) that defined his political situation. Lu Xun's suggestion that the purpose of literature lies in its very hopelessness (Lu

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Ibid, pp. 217

¹⁸² Quoted in Ibid, pp. 221

Xun's famous *despair*), that literature is incapable of engaging with politics and so is necessarily an act of leisure. Leisure is distinct from *decadence*, as Takeuchi describes Japanese literature for its ignorance of its political shadow. Lu Xun's act of writing rejected the various political schema around him, those *-isms* to which various literary institutions adhered and sought revolutionary ideas. Japanese writers about whom Takeuchi lamented in his discourse on Lu Xun, on the other hand, did not recognise their political prejudices, and so were constantly subsumed by their ideological context and thus reaffirmed that context with each writing.

Overcoming Modernity Again

The symposium *Overcoming Modernity* was, at least politically, the culmination of Kyoto School philosophy. It was also, as already discussed, the most politically contentious phase of the Kyoto School's history, and was quickly rejected by most scholars in the postwar years. 'Overcoming Modernity' was a wartime catchphrase, amongst so many others – 'Fight to the End,' 'All the World Under One Roof,' to name but a couple – but 'overcoming modernity' was one produced and consumed within the coven of academics. At the conclusion of the eponymous symposium, "overcoming modernity" was not a clearly defined concept, but a loosely interconnected matrix of practice prescribed to ward off the cultural encroachment of the West. In 1958 Odagiri Hideo wrote of the symposium that it "expanded the critique of capitalist society set forth by the Japanese Romantics (its critiques of bureaucratism and 'civilization and enlightenment')," and as a result, "this ideological campaign consisted in the defense and theorization of the militaristic *tenno* state and the

submission to its war system.”¹⁸³ This is but one example of the nation-wide turn against imperialist thought in the post-war years of American occupation. More than distancing themselves from the violence of Japan’s years of fascism, Japanese intelligentsia rejected ideas and sentiments associated with the war as a sort of postwar, liberal *tenko*. The significance of the association and subsequent rejection is the implication that to resume following any of those wartime ideas would mean following a path *historically proven* to lead to militarism and imperialism, an implication constructed as a dominant historical narrative. Contemporary to Takeuchi there were several other scholars who called for a renewed critique of *Overcoming Modernity* as a valid set of ideas rather than a negative ideology defeated in the war.¹⁸⁴

The makeup of the symposium was not confined to one or two academic fields, but included scholars of literature, philosophy, history, music, and science, so the idea of ‘overcoming modernity’ was discussed, was taken seriously, in all corners of the academic realm in Japan. Takeuchi notes that the content of the symposium was sparsely united, that Nakamura Mitsuo and Suzuki Shigetaka were mildly critical of the symposium’s aim of ‘overcoming modernity’ as something itself of Western origin, that the very task of overcoming modernity already existed in Europe just as modernity did.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, the task of overcoming modernity was vaguely described by the speakers as the overcoming of historicism (the positivist tradition of history), and the negation of ‘civilization and enlightenment,’ the modernist principle with which Japan had struggled since modernisation was set upon in the Meiji Period. The Romantic School championed the negation of

¹⁸³ Quoted in Takeuchi, “Overcoming Modernity,” in Calichman, *What is modernity?*, pp. 108

¹⁸⁴ Sako Junichiro and Usui Yoshimi are both named by Takeuchi as holding sympathy for the symposium, both contemporaneous with Odagiri and with Takeuchi himself.

¹⁸⁵ Takeuchi, “Overcoming Modernity,” pp. 115

modernity, yet Kobayashi Hideo, had questioned modernity only as Western modernity, “The overcoming of Japanese modernity is not the issue,” though he did not clearly define Japanese modernity. It seems as though ‘Japanese modernity’ was a way to safeguard technology in Japanese society from the critique of all things Western in Japanese society. This vague caveat was more or less agreed upon by Shimomura, Tsumura, Hayashi, and Kamei, who each emphasised a spiritual or conscious strengthening for Japan as the answer to ‘civilisation sickness’ – an infliction not of the body but of morality and spirit.

Takeuchi sees the strength of the symposium and its ideas in its lack of finality, its inconclusive ending, which resulted after a lengthy discussion about a concept only vaguely defined. That discussion left “an ambiguity that we somehow did and did not understand.”¹⁸⁶ Although he disagrees with any claim that the symposium was a product or producer of fascist thought, he offers no substantial argument to that effect. Instead he characterises the event as one of simultaneous resistance and submission. Thus the gathering for intellectual cooperation was a space balanced delicately between ideological pandering and revolt. Instead Takeuchi praises the symposium for its openness as the very source of its continued availability after the war – and of its easy condemnation. This is reminiscent of the problem faced by the Kyoto School in recent historiography, and once again of Tosaka’s attacks on Kyoto philosophy before his imprisonment. If Takeuchi would place the symposium between the possibilities of resistance and submission, Tosaka would perhaps dialectically posit the proceedings as both or neither. The very openness of the symposium’s content allows it longevity precisely because of its refusal to be anchored in its own material context. Such disavowal of their own contingency denied the speakers access to the possibility of real

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 117

resistance, since the categories of capitalism were not incorporated into the discussions of modernity. However, the presenters did question history in its progressive, linear conception and argued for an alternative for Japan. The result ultimately suffered because of its open ended conclusion, a fact which allowed the message of the conference a breadth of adaptability by thinkers of any affiliation. Thus, the conference took on the character of the Romantic School, criticising modernity and history without anchoring them in the material dynamic operates as the junction point of production and consciousness.

The contingency addressed by Takeuchi is an “intellectual trembling during the first year of the war” as it was described in the symposium’s concluding remarks.¹⁸⁷ The ‘trembling’ refers to the launch of the Pacific War on 8 December 1941, on which day arrests were made of intellectual dissidents.¹⁸⁸ On the following day, Kawakami and Kamei, not a year before they were to speak at the symposium in Tokyo, both wrote uncritical praise for the war as a spiritual awakening or a moment revolt from slavery, respectively.¹⁸⁹ However, Kamei would admit in 1957 his surprise that China had never been problematized during the symposium.¹⁹⁰ From this remark Takeuchi suggests that Japanese resistance against the war was stifled by a lack of Asia in Japanese consciousness. That is, Japan, having defeated China and Russia at the turn of the century, detached itself from Asia in terms of development along the lines of modern history. Hence, Japan ceased to understand its relation with the rest of Asia, just as it dislodged itself from the position of a ‘slave nation.’ During the war years, from 1931 to 1945, Japan was conceptually afloat – no longer

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, pp.113

¹⁸⁸ Many arrests were made under the 1925 Peace Preservation Law (治安維持法 *chian iji hou*). It was under this law that both Tosaka Jun (1938) and Miki Kiyoshi (1945) were imprisoned.

¹⁸⁹ Takeuchi, “Overcoming Modernity,” pp. 119-120

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 123-125

a slave, but not a master; not a colony but not a major power. Thus war punctuated a long stage of transition in Japanese consciousness. That the war was considered a fight against imperialism at the same time that it was a war of imperialism gave a semi-rational structure to the transition from 'slave nation' to master – that the master is the one who owns slaves. Takeuchi is correct to attack this mentality, for it was apparent from the beginning that Japan did not take the war to the imperial powers directly, but sought to become a master to overthrow a master, thereby repeating the system which dominated them.

The Kyoto School and the Romantic School, two major sources of thought present in the symposium, had in common an attack on certain categories of thought. The Kyoto School had enjoined the ideas of temporary, eternal war with nation-building in the previous conference, *The World Historical Standpoint and Japan*, in addition to outlining what would later become the basis for *Overcoming Modernity* – an opposition between “European crisis consciousness” and “Japanese consciousness of world history” and the overcoming of the status quo by means of war (“the creation of a new global Japanese culture”).¹⁹¹ The unity of individual action, state action; internal force, external force, etc. was the very place of absolute nothingness. It was what Takeuchi considers empty philosophy – Tosaka had already attacked Nishida for the same reason – it was a philosophy which perfectly encapsulated the ideas of total war, but was unable to resolve them. Similarly, the Romantic School, and subsequently the publication *Literary World* which was overtaken by the Romantic School, perfectly encapsulated the idea of national polity and Japanese essence. After the defeat of the Marxists, *Literary World* was the largest forum of (mostly centrist) writers, but it could not defend itself against the national polity writings of the Romantic

¹⁹¹ Quoted in *Ibid*, pp. 132

School, nor from Yasuda Yojiro's intellectually disarming prose, which undermined values and categories of thought alike.¹⁹² *Overcoming Modernity*, then, was the attempt to reconcile all of the oppositions surrounding the involved intellectuals at that time: Eternal War and Total War, ultranationalism and 'civilization and enlightenment,' and East vs. West.

As Karatani Kojin has shown, the situation of Japan surrounding the Fifteen-Years War was a repetition of a very similar situation Japan had faced before. Indeed, the Showa Period was largely a repetition of the Meiji Period, as questions of modernity and Westernisation were expressed anew under new theoretical frames such as Marxism and Romanticism. As the 1877 (or Meiji 10) Southwestern War (西南戦争 *Seinan Senso*) had signaled the end of the *samurai* class and the beginning of Japan's modernised standing army, a significant part of the Meiji Restoration, the February 26 Incident (1936 or Showa 11) propelled radical right-wing ideas into the foreground of politics and led to increased military control over the government, in what was effectively the Showa Restoration.¹⁹³ Both events ushered in a new constitution (Meiji 22 and Showa 21), and both periods featured sacrifices of individual rights in favour of national rights. The invasion of Korea occurred in several stages: it was debated as early as 1873 by lords still considered *samurai*, was forced to sign unequal treaties in 1876 in much the same manner Japan had been forced by Commodore Perry of the United States, was occupied by Japan's modernised army and made a protectorate in 1905, and finally annexed in 1910. The transition into an imperial power is illustrated by that procession because the control exerted by Japan increases as Japan modernises and moves conceptually away from Asia. Karatani provides an interesting schema for how this change from bourgeois modernisation into national rights and

¹⁹² Ibid. 143-145

¹⁹³ Karatani, "The Discursive Space of Modern Japan," pp. 196

imperialism in the Meiji Period was doubled with another axis of change in the Showa Period, so that four spaces of thought became widespread: Bourgeois (Modernist), Imperialist, Asianist, and Marxist.¹⁹⁴ It is this map of Japan's discursive space in which Tosaka Jun and Takeuchi Yoshimi stand in opposite fields.¹⁹⁵

This is particularly interesting because Asianism and Marxism represent the regional and the global conception of Japan's historical movement, the potential debate over whether there is a global modernity through which each nation must negotiate its path, or whether there is a possible alternative modernity centered on a distinct cultural fulcrum (Asia or China). It is clear that Tosaka and Maruyama both subscribe to the global view of modernity, while Takeuchi and the Kyoto School philosopher before him sought an alternative in Asia. Takeuchi's argument, however, is that the war occupied simultaneously two fields of thought, Imperialism and Asianism, which existed in parallel as two violent acts: the Greater East Asian War, and the Pacific War. The two fronts treated as *other* two different entities which formed for Japan two ends of the modernisation project, the beginning and the end.

Modernity and the Orient (And Japan)

When Takeuchi refers to Lu Xun as the founder of modern literature, he critically contradicts what had been the dominant Japanese opinion of Lu Xun and Chinese literature more generally as backward. At the same time he continues his attack on Japanese literature as slavish. Now that his work on Lu Xun and Japan's wartime intellectual engagements have

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, pp. 200

¹⁹⁵ See Viren Murthy, "The Tribulations of Temporality: Impossible Resistance in Takeuchi Yoshimi and Tosaka Jun," *Whither Japanese Philosophy*, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy (2009), pp. 91

been discussed, Takeuchi's conception of modernity can be brought into question. It is clear already that he agrees with the wartime intellectuals insofar as modernity is something to be held in question and approached with caution. It is also clear that he disagrees with the modernist tradition and its global sense of progress and liberal ideas. Takeuchi's notion of modernity is a broad matrix of capitalism, European religious sense, and historical perception, but is undoubtedly Western.

*“Modernity is the self-recognition of Europe as seen within history, that regarding of itself as distinct from the feudalistic, which Europe gained in the process of liberating itself from the feudal (a process that involved the emergence of free capital in the realm of production and the formation of personality qua autonomous and equal individuals with respect to human beings).... Simply being Europe does not make Europe Europe. The various facts of history teach that Europe barely maintains itself through the tension of its incessant self-renewals.”*¹⁹⁶

What Takeuchi seems to be at the edge of grasping here is the birth of the capitalist dynamic in Europe as the dynamic which drives modernity. The “emergence of free capital” is linked intimately with the need for Europe to incessantly renew itself, reproduce itself as Europe. The trans-global expansion that followed was the extensive reproduction of Europe. The differences between Belgium, England, France, Portugal, Spain were but minute concrete instantiations – the use value – of Europe as a cultural product. As Takeuchi continues soon after: “Through incessant tension, Europeans attempt to be their own selves. This constant

¹⁹⁶ Takeuchi Yoshimi, “What is Modernity?,” in Calichman, *What is Modernity?*, pp. 54

activity to be their own selves makes it impossible for them to simply stop at themselves,”¹⁹⁷ and so because their identity has become established by the new mode of production, it is the act of producing and re-producing which allows their own selves to continue existing as such – “This is precisely what is called the spirit of capitalism.” Europe’s arrival in the Orient was inevitable so long as competition and ceaseless production forced Europe to expand temporally and spatially. Takeuchi’s ‘Oriental capitalism’ was the inevitable result of Europe’s invasion of the Orient and the import of modern ideas and forms of production that accompanied their need to open markets in Asia. Of course there was resistance to modernisation, but even that resistance was largely incorporated into modernity, institutionalised and given new form. But, according to Takeuchi, the heterogeneity of the Orient caused Europeans to recognise the internal contradictions of their own self-expansion, and that these contradictions jeopardised further progress, so that “European unity vanished from within,”¹⁹⁸ at which time the world fragmented and Russia attempted to negate capital altogether.

The more resistance present outside Europe, the clearer the contradictions of modernity became within Europe. The alterity of Takeuchi’s concept of modernity comes from this resistance. This duality is only possible once Europe’s mature modernity comes into contact with the Orient, that is, once it is forced to reproduce itself as an export/import rather than internal development. By this same notion, the Orient as such only exists because of Europe, and can only understand itself through the same system of knowledge used by Europe to understand it as other. This process refers to the dismemberment of the ecumenical world view of Asia, after which moment the world view is stretched globally,

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, pp. 55

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 56

and can only be understood at once in the manner of a modern state – a member of a global system. The movement of history, in this conception, is one of alternating advance and retreat – Europe advances itself as the Orient defines itself in its retreat, and once Europe approaches a crisis of contradictions, the Orient may begin to advance. Resistance is Oriental, while the (advancing) wish for self-preservation is European. Japan, according to Takeuchi, was properly neither. Japan lacked the resistance to keep it sufficiently Oriental, as was clear in Japan’s rapid development of modern production and institutions. Yet Japan also lacked the wish for self-preservation, and so Japan did not become European through its development, and thus Japan remained trapped without an identity – “Japan is nothing.”¹⁹⁹ Because Japan is (inherently) nothing, it must regard itself through its reflections from the Orient (Asia) and from Europe (West), and so Japanese writers’ inability to understand Lu Xun on his own terms was, perhaps, due to their use of him instead as an external image of Japan – desiring to become something *other* but cannot, but nonetheless uses that *other* as a teleological model.²⁰⁰ Thus, Japan defined itself internally as what it saw of itself externally through its own examinations of the Orient or the West (revealing success and failure, respectively). In looking at the Orient in such a way, Japan was repeating the same style of self-understanding pursued by Europe.

When Japanese scholars inquired into the existence of the Orient, they did so against the presupposition that the Orient is not self-evident, that is, it was something that could be proven or disproven, that is, “it became a method to compare extractions,” and so its scholarship “*fell into decadence*” (*sic*). Decadent scholarship, under the guise of the scientific method, presupposed progress, which Takeuchi called the “*decadence* of

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 64

²⁰⁰ Calichman, *Displacing the West*, pp. 146-47

scholarship” (*sic*).²⁰¹ That sort of progressive thinking enabled Japan as a nation to convert every failure into the launch of a new stage of development, what Takeuchi calls the “*slave’s* progress.” In his analysis on the honour student culture of Japan, this progressive notion becomes clearer. Failure to achieve is not taken as the fault of the honour students, but of those students who did not learn enough from the honour students. The next course will be made better by raising the average. But Takeuchi rejects this model, as his characterisation of Lu Xun should have foreshadowed – failure to achieve is the fault of the honour students, who failed to take into account the ‘backward’ students. From those students, from those scholars who were considered backward or of a lower quality Japan might have been able to harvest resistance. Japanese literature, therefore, is the literature of fantasy which does not know itself as fantasy. From it, other literary figures may be described as backward, but the slavish mentality Takeuchi describes applies more not to the slave who rejects his slavery, but to the slave who does not recognise his slavery. Such was the case that Japanese literature and scholarship sought to examine externally such matters as modernity or Oriental culture, or Japaneseness, without recognising its own position in relation to those objects of study. In words that were not used by Takeuchi, Japanese literature did not recognise its own condition of possibility.

The phenomenon of *tenko*, the ideological turn usually brought about by coercion, is a symptom of what has been described above. Takeuchi describes *tenko* as the conscientious action of the honour student, a title they are doomed to lose should they not commit the act. “Conscientious behavior consists in abandoning communism for totalitarianism when the latter appears newer. If democracy comes, the progressive attitude most befitting the honour

²⁰¹ Takeuchi, “What is Modernity?,” pp. 64-65

student is to follow democracy.”²⁰² It is important to note that *tenko* is treated here not in terms of individual choice, but in terms of trend. Thus, the conversion of a number of modernists in the Meiji Period, or a number of Marxists in the Showa Period, are considered symptomatic of change and reform in Japan having always been conducted in a top down fashion. *Tenko* is not considered largely shameful precisely because it is considered progressive along the line of Japan as a whole. But one who commits *tenko* is one who is exactly opposite of Lu Xun, since one has chosen to forego resistance and self-preservation in favour of progress, that decadent totality which drove Japan since the Meiji Restoration. The progressive totality, it should be appended, is itself the ideological level of modernity, that is, is the extraction of ideas from the capitalist dynamics of modern production. It could be said then, that Japan’s success in modernising so quickly was due to Japan not preserving its Oriental consciousness from the mode of production they readily imported. Instead, Japanese identity was itself swept up by the need to expand as part of modern becoming.

Modernity, Takeuchi’s Insight

There is significance in this conception of modernity and evaluation of Japan for the analysis of fascism in Japan. If the motions of history consist in the advances of Europe and retreat of the Orient, then the war was surely a moment of European retreat. Japan, in the absence of Europe, went on the advance, seeing its desires to escape slavery distortedly reflected in Asia. The criticism offered by Takeuchi here is that Japan ought to have ceased the moment not fill the role of Europe, but to annihilate the very slave framework that had been developed upon Europe’s initial arrival. In other words, Japanese writers and scholars, and the ideologues themselves, sought to overthrow the West by taking their place in Asia,

²⁰² Ibid, pp. 75

but did not sufficiently understand modernity so as to break free of the East/West trap in which Japan operated. They were unable to free themselves of modernity precisely because they repeated its dynamic.

Takeuchi's concept of modernity is one that brings into question the concept of time dominant in Japan (and imported from Europe) – linear, historical time upon which notions of progress and stages rely. This aspect of Takeuchi's thought he has in common with Tosaka Jun, but from a different standpoint. As mentioned earlier, Takeuchi and Tosaka occupy different positions in Japan's discursive space. Tosaka's Marxist position enabled him to attack idealised particulars used by the Kyoto School and the Romantics in their own assaults on modernity. Takeuchi's Asianist position criticised the universality of the West and the notion's of progress raised by the West as the teleological end of linear historical time. Unlike Tosaka, Takeuchi does not explicitly ground his concept of modernity in the categories of capital, but rather the intentionally more vague notion of a period of time characterised by Europe invading the Orient.

Takeuchi's insistence on using the term 'modernity' free from an explicit anchor in capitalism belies the revelation he claims to have experienced reading the Japanese translation of *Das Kapital*.²⁰³ Christian Uhl has pointed out that Takeuchi was disinterested in Marxist economic analysis, but Takeuchi nonetheless seems to approach the problem of domination from another avenue. Viren Murthy's cross-examination of Tosaka and Takeuchi has yielded significant insight to Takeuchi's project in relation to Marxism. Although the opposition of Europe and the Orient in Takeuchi's work conceals the dynamic of capitalism

²⁰³ "Through reading *Das Kapital*, my eyes were opened. I was usually afraid of the terror of logic. I realised how silly the textbooks were. I thank *Das Kapital* for my mistrust of all infusion, explanations and digests." Quoted in Murthy, "Tribulations of Temporality," pp. 109

as fundamentally the opposition of exchange and use values, his opposition as given does provide a framework that exceeds the analysis of modernity in terms of class struggle or evolutionary progress.²⁰⁴ As per Takeuchi:

*“It can be said that Europe is first possible only in this history, and that history itself is possible only in this Europe. History is not an empty form of time. It includes an infinite number of instants in which one struggles against obstacles so that the self may be itself, without which both the self and history would be lost.”*²⁰⁵

This fragmentary view of history is remarkably similar to that of Walter Benjamin.

Benjamin was, like Takeuchi, not concerned with retrieving knowledge of the past as such than in recovering forgotten or repressed moments in the past which could be utilised in the present to dialectically affect the flow of history.²⁰⁶ Benjamin, and later Giorgio Agamben, also proffered a view of history full of potentialities not realised by the dominant narrative of history, so that many possible pasts vie for recognition in history.²⁰⁷ For Takeuchi, this view of history places ground (modern) time in the dynamic of self-expansion as self-actualisation. That dynamic of self-expansion itself belong to the dynamic of capitalism, so that self-expansion means self-reproduction.

Calichman, Murthy, and Uhl each acknowledge the connection to Nishida’s philosophy in Takeuchi’s notion of resistance as negation and Lu Xun as the model agent of

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 110-11

²⁰⁵ Takeuchi, “What is Modernity?” pp. 54; also cited in Murthy, pp. 112

²⁰⁶ Harry Harootunian, “Historical Materialism’s Task in an ‘Age of Globalization,’” *Radical History Review*, Vol. 2001, No. 79 (Winter 2001), pp. 96

²⁰⁷ See Harry Harootunian, “Uneven Temporalities/ Unpredictable Pasts: Forms of Time in the Historical Field,” *Whither Japanese Philosophy III*, Tokyo; University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, 2010

negation. The negation prescribed by Takeuchi differs from Nishida and the Kyoto School primarily in that his sense of negation is itself made possible only by urgency, the same sense of historical crisis described by Benjamin. It is neither side of the global dynamic, that is, neither Europe nor the Orient, which ought to be negated, but rather the antinomy as a whole which must be negated in order to achieve real resistance. It is this eschatology developed by Takeuchi independent of any contact with the Frankfurt School Marxists, posits a Benjamin-like alternative construction of history which exists outside world history. However, because Takeuchi did not ground his analysis of modernity deeper in the categories of capitalism, he was not able to construct his eschatological view beyond the notion of negation, and instead imparted a lecture, in which he outlined his eschatology in a manner open to interpretation:

*“[T]he Orient must re-embrace the West.... The Orient must change the West in order to further elevate those universal values that the West itself produced. This is the main problem facing East-West relations today, and it is at once a political and cultural issue.”*²⁰⁸

To go further with Takeuchi’s critique of modernity, it would be necessary to elaborate on his Europe-Orient model of modernity by expressing Europe’s expansion using Marx’s categories of analysis. Until Takeuchi’s work to prepared for the lofty task, his analysis of Japanese literature still provides interesting insight to the ideology of Japanese intellectuals throughout the obscuring process of modernisation. Indeed, a recent article by Kuan-Hsing Chen makes mention of a similar mentality having appeared in China: “Most intellectuals in China do not have an interest in India, for India is a ‘backward’ country, not

²⁰⁸ Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Asia as Method,” Calichman, *What is Modernity?*, pp. 165

worth of ‘comparison.’”²⁰⁹ Thus we should acknowledge too the destabilising effects modernity casts upon self-identity, which Takeuchi’s work has prepared us for. The next step for Takeuchi’s *telos* has already been initiated by Murthy, that is, to bring Takeuchi’s eschatological view of history to Tosaka’s conception of a historically specific categories and a particular notion of everydayness.

²⁰⁹ Kuan-Hsing Chen, “Takeuchi Yoshimi’s 1960 ‘Asia as Method’ Lecture,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (2010), pg. 6

Conclusion

“The historical materialist cannot do without the concept of a present which is not a transition, in which time originates and has come to a standstill. For this concept defines precisely the present in which he writes history for his person. Historicism depicts the ‘eternal’ picture of the past; the historical materialist, the experience with it, which stands alone. He leaves it to others to give themselves to the whore called ‘Once upon a time’ in the bordello of historicism. He remains master of his powers, man enough, to explode the continuum of history.”²¹⁰

Modernity as a homogenising force has troubled intellectuals for generations. From the first years of its inception in Japan as the Meiji Restoration, intellectuals struggled to define modernity for Japan, meaning they sought to extract modernity from the West. They

²¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” translated by Dennis Redmond, Marxists.org, 2005, URL [<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>], Thesis XVI

tried to understand the two entities as distinct, so that modernisation would not mean Westernisation. This problem has plagued Japan politically and culturally ever since and has yet to be resolved. At each instance of crisis, when the contradictions of modernity revealed themselves in Japan, the question of modernisation was thrust to the fore of Japan's intellectual labour. Modernity was vaguely held to mean development – of industry, individual autonomy, education, etc. – and its questioning was always also a questioning of the West. However, modernity has a more fundamental dynamic, which Karl Marx had analysed in great depth and exposed as a dynamic containing many internal logical contradictions. That these contradictions were more fundamental, that is more universal, a regional understanding of modernity was insufficient to contend with the inevitable economically-determined crises of modern development.

History as it is largely conceived now in Japan is derived from the modernist tradition, of which Fukuzawa Yukichi and Maruyama Masao, though from entirely different periods, are perhaps the two best known representatives. The prevalence of the linear notion of time is problematic. The Kyoto School had criticised modernity and time from Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good* up to the wartime conference conducted by Nishida's students and members of the Romantic School. The move to locate in the primacy of primordial experience in everyday activity was an anti-modern attack on the subject/object dichotomy that is often said to characterise modern philosophy. But that dichotomy is, in the modern period, a reification of the more fundamental dichotomy of exchange value and use value.²¹¹ The attempt to criticise modernity in the realm of thought along isolated Nishida, Watsuji, and the Kyoto School from reaching the root of their civilisation sickness.

²¹¹ Murthy, "Tribulations of Temporality," pp. 96

Their association with fascism in the postwar period turned many away from the critique of modernity, and heralded a new wave of modernist thinkers led by Maruyama Masao. Although Maruyama was not enough for Japan to consciously close the fascist chapter of its history, his work provided a psychologically calming narrative for Japan's modern history that could account for fascism in an unbroken continuity. However, Maruyama's modernist construction of history failed to sufficiently explain fascism as a global, social phenomenon due again to an inability to ground his analysis in the historical specificity of capitalism.

Takeuchi Yoshimi, a contemporary of Maruyama, offered an alternative explanation for Japan's fascist phase, as well as a view of historical development that criticised the modernist perspective extolled by Maruyama. The dialectical vision of Takeuchi was derived from Nishida's philosophy of nothingness, and especially the outgrowth of his philosophy by his students at the two wartime symposia. Takeuchi was closer to identifying capital as the driving dynamic of modern history, but he did not situate his analysis of modernity deep enough in the context, using Marx's categories of analysis, to develop a clear methodology for overcoming modernity.

Modernity and Modernism

Throughout this work, a Marxist, more specifically a Postonian Marxist, definition of modernity was employed as a constant against which to evaluate modernity as treated by the various thinkers addressed. As Postone describes:

“For Hegel, the Absolute, the totality of the subjective-objective categories, grounds itself. As the self-moving ‘substance’ that is ‘subject,’ it is

*the true causa sui as well as the endpoint of its own development. In Capital, Marx presents the underlying forms of commodity-determined society as constituting the social context for notions such as the difference between essence and appearance, the philosophical concept of substance, the dichotomy of subject and object, the notion of totality, and... the unfolding of the dialectic of the identical subject-object.*²¹²

To reiterate, that definition of modernity is one which holds that the modern period is a historically specific period defined at its most basic level by the dynamic of capitalism. This dynamic, as the totality of the modern world system, is continuously reproduced in the dualistic commodity form (exchange value and use value, or universal and particular). Furthermore, capital, as the fundamental dynamic which governs our production, also guides our mental production by delineating what is materially possible. Tosaka Jun was invoked throughout this paper both because of his situation in Japanese philosophy, and because of his uncanny recognition of capitalism and its antinomies.

Had they recognised capital as the dynamic by which time and activity were organised, the Kyoto School could have produced a philosophy that would offer true emancipation, and a philosophy safe from the ravages of fascist ideologues. Instead, what the wave of idealist philosophers produced was a retreat from the universal antinomies of capitalism, which after the First World War were gradually revealed through economic hardship exacerbated by the uneven development of urban and rural Japan. Their retreat, however, was situated purely as idealism, and so had no ground on which to criticise modernity as capitalism. The form of Kyoto School thought, as Tosaka exposed, was to posit

²¹² Postone, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, pp. 156

the outward appearance of the capitalist dialectic and attempt to understand it anew. “Thus the logic of nothingness is not a [true] logic; for it cannot think of existence itself – it is only able to think of the logical significance of existence.”²¹³ Since they saw modernity in its intellectual products and not in its underlying dynamic (the commodity form of exchange and use values), the very attempt to undo modernity by Nishida and Watsuji only served to reproduce the same conditions. These conditions were repeated continuously, unable to escape the dialectic framework which they could examine only superficially. The result was that as the political situation in Japan grew more desperate, these philosophers were not able to ground their analysis in such a way that would position their thought against the tides of fascism, and so instead were swept along with it.

The defeat of fascism signaled the end of ‘overcoming modernity’ as a dominant idea in Japan, and gave way to a renewed push for modernisation under American vigil. Taking up the modernist tradition of Meiji Period thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi, Maruyama attempted to reconstruct a historical narrative for Japan which would provide an idea of continuous development from the pre-modern (Tokugawa Period) to the present. The continuity focused on liberal ideas of individual autonomy and democracy, and attempted to show how their incompleteness by the end of the Meiji Period had caused a fascist backlash later. Maruyama’s conception of modernity included a notion of progress, and so already in form it reproduced the earlier problems of modernity which were assaulted before the war.

It should be noted that Maruyama’s ‘modernist’ understanding of modernity is only capable of viewing Kyoto philosophy as problematic according to their engagements in politics and the official ideology. Although Maruyama was familiar with the Marxist

²¹³ Tosaka Jun, “Is the ‘Logic of Nothingness’ Logic?,” pp. 370

tradition, orthodox Marxism in Japan was still focused on class struggle as the driving motion of history, and was not in a position to accept the revelations of the Frankfurt School or Tosaka Jun into the ideological workings of capitalism beyond class struggle (and centred instead on time, for instance). The Romantic movement of the 1930's, including the work of the Kyoto School – for it was romantic philosophy – was an assault on the modernist conception of history dominant until the February 26 Incident. Maruyama's consideration of fascism as the result of an incomplete modernity is ill conceived. Indeed, it was modernism itself that was the target of romantic anti-modernism.

“Modernisation inevitably disturbs the pre-existing structure of meaning and motivation in any society where it gets seriously underway.”²¹⁴ The Romantic School was keenly aware of this disruption in meaning early on. Their increased influence and resultant takeover of *Literary World* attests to Japan's dissatisfaction with modernity. The rise of romanticism and fascism were contingent on Japan's perceived loss of cultural integrity after decades of modernisation (and its accompanied Westernisation).²¹⁵ While Maruyama's account of fascism was important because of its detail and depth of knowledge about the ideology of that time, the modernist framework he utilises prevents him from linking fascism to modernisation itself. As such, Maruyama's view of modernisation as an *in absentia* cause of fascism, and therefore its reconstitution as the solution, failed to examine more deeply the intimate relations between fascism as a romantic project and (capitalist) modernity as the condition for the possibility of that project.

²¹⁴ Robert N. Bellah, “Meaning and Modernisation,” *Religious Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (October 1968), pp. 44

²¹⁵ Nina Cornyetz, “Fascist Aesthetics and the Politics of Representation in Kawabata Yasunari,” in Alan Tansman, editor, *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, Durham; Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 337-338

The renewal of modernism in the postwar years necessarily made way for its opposite, or its negation. Takeuchi's expression of 'literary intuition' spawned a sustained critique on Japanese modernity that ran counter to Maruyama's. Positing Lu Xun as his model for resistance against modernity (Europe), Takeuchi attacked Japanese attitudes toward modernisation and resistance. His evaluation of Japan's lack of proper resistance in literature can be extended to the Kyoto School. The 'resistance' to modernity posed by Nishida and Watsuji took the form of reconfiguring concepts borrowed from Buddhism and Confucianism for use in Western philosophy. Hence, they re-conceived those religious notions within the opposition between Japan and the West, but were unable to absolve themselves of the opposition itself. They instead attempted to 'master' their own religious consciousness by taking up the position of Europe in that dialectic. They could only reiterate their antinomies by enshrining them in Western terminology, but could not overcome those antinomies without understanding the dialectic form. The eschatological view of nothingness, therefore, was incapable of effecting change. It could change only one's attitude toward modernity, but not modernity itself.

Takeuchi's critique is notably similar to that of Tosaka, who also warned of the Kyoto School's superficial use of the dialectic. Takeuchi does not discuss Marx, but it is clear that he had acquired some revelation from his reading of *Das Kapital*. We can only speculate on the manner in which Takeuchi's disdain for logic and economics allowed him conceptual space to interpret Marx through less directed terms such as Europe and the Orient, but his sense for the dialectic operating at an abstract level beneath the transformations of history doubtless enabled him significant insight. This insight not only enabled him to critique Japanese literature as incapable of resistance (for lacking the same

insight he had) but also to critically re-examine the lost causes of the two wartime symposia. Takeuchi exceeded even Tosaka in his appropriation of Nishida's philosophy to develop an eschatological vision of resistance to modernity. Nonetheless, his eschatology must be attached to a *telos* by a deeper analysis of capital. By substituting Europe and the Orient for the categories of capital, Takeuchi would be better positioned to think of resistance in terms of individual negation of the mode of production. More than a rejection of dominant forms of thought, resistance would require a particular and universal recognition of labour and production in order to reconfigure historical time and human activity.

Tosaka's concept of modernity has been expounded in various accounts by Harootunian, and has not been given such detailed treatment here. Tosaka's views on modernity, however, reveal a unique understanding of Marxism in which both the modernist (liberal) and fascist modes of thought are intimately joined in the context of capitalist modernity. As might be opposed to the modernist model of individual autonomy being the bulwark against political oppression, Tosaka saw finitude in everyday experience as opening the possibility of a critical learning – an inquiry into both a problem and the fundamental roots of that problem – which was always at the same time a self-critique.²¹⁶ Tosaka maintained a critique of linear time, and at times hinted toward his everyday notion of time as inescapable (a source of domination).²¹⁷ Had Tosaka survived his imprisonment during the war, he might have resumed his attack on modernism and perhaps develop a teleological or eschatological viewpoint to oppose the modernist resurgence.

²¹⁶ Harry Harootunian, "Constitutive Ambiguities: The Persistence of Modernism and Fascism in Japan's Modern History," in Alan Tansman, editor, *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, Durham; Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 93-95

²¹⁷ Murthy, "Tribulations of Temporality," pp. 106

Fascism

At the heart of this attempt to better understand modernity was an attempt to better understand fascism. This is not born of a purely academic desire, but of a growing sense of urgency during our current global context. Another economic recession in 2008 has again revealed the antinomies of capitalism, and in many countries this has led to a widespread embrace of conservatism. On the fringes fascist groups are re-entering politics or are otherwise claiming social attention. In the mainstream of politics, the antinomies of capitalist modernity are being stretched wider as the wage gap increases, the rate of unemployment increases, and the average real wage decreases, all while nations attempt to see an increase in their productive output as measured by Gross Domestic Product.

In the very sense Benjamin proclaimed, the present is the site of utmost urgency. As such, the urgency itself moves with us. An anarchist group in France recently wrote in an anonymously published booklet: “We have to see that the economy is not ‘in’ crisis, the economy is itself the crisis. It’s not that there’s not enough work, it’s that there is *too much of it*. All things considered, it’s not the crisis that depresses us, it’s growth.”²¹⁸ Capitalism itself is the crisis. Insofar as the anti-progressive policies of reactionary politics is enabled by progressive modernism, the forward movement of history ought to be to escape the antinomies of modernity so as to make ‘civilisation sickness’ impossible.

To this end, that is, to the eventual (but by no means inevitable) emancipation humankind and the elimination of the conditions for the possibility of fascism, we must begin by augmenting our understanding of the root causes of fascism in the self-concealed

²¹⁸ The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, Cambridge; MIT Press (2009), pp. 42; also available online: URL [<http://tarnac9.wordpress.com/texts/the-coming-insurrection/>]

dynamics of capitalism. We must go beyond Maruyama's analysis of fascism as a socially embedded phenomenon, for 'society' is not, in and of itself, the root cause of fascism. The historically specific dynamic which made possible fascism in the first half of the 20th century remain today unchanged in its most abstract level of operation. The uneven development of Japan's agricultural and industrial centres exacerbated antinomies which shook the most culturally sensitive members of Japan into realising the loss that accompanied modern industrial development. These sentiments were manifest in Japan's romantic movement.

The corporatist reaction to the cultural and simultaneous economic crisis was common to fascisms in Europe, and can be seen as an inherent possibility in capitalism. "Capitalism always already inscribes the possibility and the *necessity* of this reversal. In its seeming external negation of liberal, capitalist democracy, fascism in fact completes, as its '*internal negation*,' the truth of capitalist democracy.(*sic*)"²¹⁹ It is this aspect of capitalism that modernists such as Maruyama failed to grasp, and so his analysis of fascism as social phenomenon is limited to grassroots political groups. The larger part of academia and literary movements escape his analysis. As a social movement, Alan Tansman's work on fascist aesthetics in Japan fills this lacuna in Maruyama's conception. Tansman informs us of how subtly the arts can infuse a sense of passion in the individual. The fascist moment, as described at the beginning of this paper, is the moment of radical nostalgia in a literary work. The subject of the work dies and is at once reconstituted in an act of figurative violent.

*"In the Japanese aesthetic, the self is both lost and reconceived,
aesthetically and politically, in these moments. This reconstituting of the self*

²¹⁹ Marilyn Ivy, "Foreword: Fascism, Yet?," in Alan Tansman, editor, *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, Durham; Duke University Press, 2009, pp. ix-x

occurs through the mediation of material images of decay and loss, and then through violence and death, which can heal the fractured intellect by engaging all the senses and eliciting a purely bodily experience.”²²⁰

According to Tansman, the ubiquity of fascist aesthetics in popular literature, film and music, overpowered the will of any but the most astute and cautious purveyor of their forms, since it was the very challenge against forms that primarily gave those works their allure. The eclectic pull which emanated from such arts were symptomatic of a popular sentiment. The sensibilities rendered by what Tansman might call fascist media must have already existed latently in society, waiting to be recalled to life by aesthetic experience.

That fascism took power in countries which were latecomers to modernisation is indicative that capitalism was the deepest underlying cause. That fascism also spawned smaller movements in developed countries within communities under economic strain in Canada, England, Ireland, America, and even India should further highlight the social fragility of the economically alienated. Fascism was predominantly a middle-class movement. It was a popular recognition that “capitalist methods had failed them,” and many were seduced by fascism’s “third way” as a legitimate solution to overcome capitalism itself.²²¹ Any resurgence of fascism would similarly rely on the economic disenfranchisement of the middle class in order to gain popular support.

These studies on fascism ought to grant us more insight into the workings of such extreme politics, but additionally they reveal the negative safeguards hidden within capitalism. Of course the dialectic of capitalism is a complex determinant in our course of

²²⁰ Alan Tansman, “Reading Fascism’s Form,” *Representations*, Vol. 104, No. 1 (Fall 2008), pp. 149

²²¹ Kevin M. Doak, “Fascism Seen and Unseen: Fascism as a problem in Cultural Representation,” in Alan Tansman, editor, *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, Durham; Duke University Press, 2009, pp.35-36

history, but such debates as the one surrounding the Kyoto School and their tentative political engagements should not be seen as an attempt to establish the forbidding of a subject. The debate itself should be overcome, in a way. Rather than suggest that the Kyoto School philosophers are “philosophically nugatory” due to them being “mere fascist or imperialist ideologues,”²²² we should perhaps move beyond the debate by attempting what Slavoj Žižek has done with Heidegger, who was also the subject of precisely this type of debate.

Heidegger scholarship suffered a long series of exchanges concerned with his Nazi engagement, and whether his philosophy itself should be regarded as fascist (though this debate does not seem to have decreased the number of Heidegger scholars!). Žižek writes, “but it is more complex than Heidegger’s mere luck in striking the right balance in the depth of his Nazi engagement: the difficult truth to admit is that Heidegger is ‘great’ *not in spite of, but because of* his Nazi engagement, that this commitment is a key constituent of his ‘greatness.’²²³ This is perhaps the step we should be willing to take with the Kyoto School philosophers. Whatever their political entanglements might have been, they were made possible by the very same conditions and intuitions which inspired their philosophy and made them ‘great.’ In this sense we can and should continue to study the Kyoto School, not to preserve them as fascist ideologue, but to rescue their pertinent critiques of capitalism as Takeuchi had done with *Overcoming Modernity*. They were in their time able to produce a critique of modernity, which can still learn from – with academic distance – because we are still bound to modernity.

²²² Parkes, “Putative Fascism of the Kyoto School,” pp. 305

²²³ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, pp. 119

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