

Nishida Kitarō and the Question of Japanese Fascism

Martin Bastarache

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the MA degree in History

Department of History
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

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Abstract

There has been considerable debate within the field of Japanese intellectual history with respect to the influence of Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) on the ideological foundations and philosophical justification of Japanese fascism. One of the most influential Japanese thinkers of the twentieth century and widely considered to be the father of modern Japanese philosophy, his contemporary relevance is considered to be at risk should these accusations be true. As such, contemporary scholars have attempted to show how Nishida's philosophy was decidedly anti-fascist, and that he was in fact opposed to the actions of the wartime regime. However, as this thesis will argue, by considering Nishida's philosophy within the larger historical context of global modernity one can see that his contemporary relevance lies in just that which allows one to consider his thought as fascist, his critique of modernity. Nishida was reacting to the transforming social and cultural landscapes that had followed the modernization of Japan initiated by the Meiji Restoration (1868). As a result, he attempted to posit a transhistorical ideal of Japanese culture, embodied concretely in the Emperor that could withstand the social abstractions of modernity. However, it was ultimately his failure to grasp his own conditions of possibility in the very modernity that he was critiquing that pushed his thought increasingly to the right, helping to fuel and legitimize the emerging fascist ideology.

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Introduction

In July of 1942, in the midst of the Pacific War, a number of Japan's leading intellectuals held a symposium entitled "Overcoming Modernity." Led by the literary critic Kamei Katsuichirō¹ (1907-1966), the participants debated a number of different topics centered on the theme of overcoming modernity, from the "west within us" to the "possibilities for the present-day Japanese." In the ensuing postwar discourse, this symposium has come to be seen as one of the best illustrations of the philosophical justification for Japanese fascism during the wartime period.² However, to view the symposium in this way runs the risk of overlooking what had been the culmination of decades of concern regarding the modernization of Japan that had weighed upon the minds of many intellectuals throughout the early twentieth century.

In retrospect, the modernization of Japan seemed all but inevitable by the mid-nineteenth century. The arrival of Commodore Perry and his "black ships" in 1853 demanding Japan open their borders and trade with the West, coupled with the colonization of much of continental Asia by Western powers had created a sense of urgency to either modernize or risk colonization.

¹ Throughout this thesis Japanese names will be given in the traditional order of family name first.

² This point is well illustrated in the preface and introduction of Richard Calichman's translation of the symposium, *Overcoming Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008).

Within fifteen years of Commodore Perry's arrival, the Tokugawa Shogunate could no longer maintain the power it had held since 1603 and despite numerous concessions was eventually overthrown in what is known as the Meiji Restoration (1868). Under the banner of "Eastern ethics and Western science," the newly formed Meiji government enacted a process of rapid modernization.³ These efforts were initially met with strong support, military victory over China in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) was seen as an early indication of Japan's successful effort to modernize, and made them the dominant power in Asia. A decade later, Japan's defeat over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) further supported these claims and marked Japan's emergence as a global power.

However, the initial success of Japan's modernization could not overshadow the fact that by the early twentieth century the ideological, social, and cultural landscape of Japan had been radically transformed by the totalizing nature of capitalist modernity. As a result of these transformations, modernization increasingly came to be seen as the "westernization" of society, signified by a move towards a mass culture of consumption driven by hedonistic desire rather than the traditional values and social relations of pre-modern Japan.⁴ The perceived loss of tradition that had accompanied these changes led to a general sense of crisis that swept over Japan throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Ultimately, it was fascism, with its promise to solve the antinomies of modernity at a more concrete level that emerged as the response to this period of uncertainty.

³ The phrase "Eastern ethics and Western science" (translated from the Japanese *tōyo no dōtoku, seiyō no gakugei*) was made famous by the Edo scholar Sakuma Shōzan (1811-1864) and utilized by the Meiji reformers. This quote comes from Tsunoda Ryūsaku, et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1958), 607.

⁴ Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 49.

Therefore, by the time the participants of the 1942 symposium had come together to discuss the situation facing Japan, they were doing so against the backdrop of decades of intellectual discourse that had attempted to confront the fragmentary nature of capitalist modernity. While one can certainly gain considerable insight into the intellectual justification of Japanese fascism by engaging the Overcoming Modernity symposium, it is perhaps more informative to turn to some of the earlier discourse surrounding the perceived problems of modernity. It is in these earlier efforts that one is able to grasp the anti-modernist core of the earlier discourse, which ultimately provided, whether intentionally or not, the philosophical contours of Japanese fascism that the scholars of the symposium were further articulating.

One of the most intriguing, if not controversial, figures of this period with respect to the emergence of fascism in Japan is Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945). Considered by many to be the father of modern Japanese philosophy and the *de facto* leader of the Kyoto School of Philosophy,⁵ Nishida is arguably the most influential Japanese philosopher of the twentieth century both at home and abroad. His thought, known as *Nishida tetsugaku*,⁶ gained wide influence and popularity following the publication of what would become his most famous work, *Zen no kenkyū* (An Inquiry into the Good) in 1911. Nishida's popularity and influence throughout the Taishō (1912-1926) and early Shōwa⁷ (1926-1989) periods, along with his support of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, has raised considerable questions with respect to his relationship with the wartime ideology. However, unlike other prominent intellectuals of the period such as Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960) in Japan and Martin Heidegger

⁵ The Kyoto School of Philosophy was a loose group of intellectuals who gathered in and around Kyoto University under the influence of Nishida. Some of the more prominent intellectuals associated with the school are Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962), Nishitani Keiji (1900-1990), Tosaka Jun (1900-1945), Miki Kyoshi (1887-1945), and Shin'ichi Hisamatsu (1889-1980). More will be discussed on the Kyoto School later in this thesis.

⁶ Literally translated into English as Nishida philosophy

⁷ The early Shōwa is considered roughly to be the period from 1926-1945.

(1889-1976) in Germany, whose relationships with fascism are more readily agreed upon, Nishida's is heavily contested. Nishida was not actively engaged in politics, nor was he overly supportive or critical of the wartime regime. Furthermore, while Nishida continued to write during the war, the complexity and ambiguity of his thought has allowed for a plethora of positions regarding his political leaning. Thus, Nishida's relationship with Japanese fascism remains something of an enigma, as contemporary scholars have failed to discern convincingly one way or the other, whether his thought contributed to its philosophical justification.⁸

The following thesis engages the question concerning Nishida's involvement in fascist ideology. Given the complexity of his thought, and the concept of fascism more generally, this thesis will assert that in order to grasp this relationship one must consider both within the larger historical framework of capitalist modernity. It is only by considering the larger temporal patterns of the twentieth century that one can adequately discern Nishida's influence on fascist ideology. Approached in this way, one need not automatically dismiss Nishida's thought outright on account of this relationship as has generally been the tendency amongst those who make this connection. Keeping in line with some of his supporters, Nishida's thought was not overtly fascist, nor was he necessarily supportive of the government's actions. Yet, his failure to ultimately grasp the conditions of his own possibility pushed his thought in a fascist direction as he wrestled with the fragmentation of traditional Japan brought on by modernization. In other words, Nishida was a modernist anti-modernist. He failed to acknowledge that his own attempt

⁸ In the introduction to Yoko Arisaka's translation of *Sekai no shinchitsujo no genri* (translated as 'The Principle of the New World Order' by Arisaka and as the 'Fundamental Principles of the New World Order' by Valdo H. Viglielmo) she argues that Nishida's political stance has been largely an 'enigma' and that it suffers from a "*Rashōmon-esque*" (in reference to the famous Kurosawa Akira film) nature. However, in her assessment of the historiography she does not offer much of a position instead arguing that any attempts to grasp his politics is itself political and that "our task is to understand the phenomenon of 'Nishida's case' from a perspective that is sensitive to multiple inflections." See Yoko Arisaka, "The Nishida Enigma: 'The Principle of the New World Order.'" *Monumenta Nipponica*. Vol. 51, No. 1 (Spring, 1996), pp. 81-105.

to construct a uniquely Japanese philosophy was structured by the very modernity that he sought to overcome. Furthermore, his critique of modernity (which was largely equated with the West, in Western forms of thought, Western ways of life, etc.) ignored the real source of the changes facing Japan, namely the emergence of capitalism and the capitalist mode of production. By directing his critique at the West rather than capitalism itself, Nishida's thought fit perfectly within the fascist narrative that similarly valorized traditional forms of life as a means of overcoming the antinomies of modernity without ever challenging capitalism itself.

The Politics of Nishida Kitarō: A Historiography

The complexity and ambiguity of Nishida's philosophical system has led to a heavily contested historiography regarding the political consequences of his philosophy. As early as the 1930s, during the initial stages of Japan's militarization and expansion, there were questions concerning his relationship with the wartime ideology. Tosaka Jun (1900-1945), one of Nishida's former students at Kyoto University, was perhaps the most vocal and harshest of his critics regarding the politics of his philosophy during his lifetime. Tosaka saw *Nishida tetsugaku* as representative of philosophy in general throughout Japan during the 1920s and 1930s.⁹ Like other prominent thinkers of the period, such as Watsuji and Kuki Shūzō, Tosaka saw Nishida as an idealist and romantic thinker who relied upon a "mystical method."¹⁰ While he was hesitant to make an outright and direct connection between Nishida and the 'Japanists,' he argued that the

⁹ Tosaka Jun, "Is the "Logic of Nothingness" Logic?: On the Method of Nishida Philosophy (1935)," *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy*, translated and edited by David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 363.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 368-369.

ultimate consequence of such an approach was that it opened the door for the emergence of the myth of Japanese uniqueness that helped fuel the notion of Japanese superiority.¹¹

Conversely, while Tosaka was pointing to the failings of *Nishida tetsugaku* against the rise of fascism in Japan, some right-wing ideologues were also suspicious of Nishida's politics in the other direction. Privately, Nishida had long been sceptical of the education reforms enacted by the government during the 1930s and criticized those and other policies in his diary.¹² Publically, Nishida rarely weighed in on politics until the late 1930s and 1940s when friends and former students within the government began approaching him to discuss issues facing Japan. When asked to pen an essay on the "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere," (his essay was entitled "The Fundamental Principles of a New World Order"), the article was hastily returned to him for revisions on account of its heavy philosophical jargon and divergence with some of the government's policies.¹³ However, while there were some concerns amongst government officials and right wing ideologues on account of some of his differing opinions and Western influence, Nishida was never seen as a serious threat. He was never arrested under the Peace Preservation Laws and he continued to be consulted by his friends and associates within the government.¹⁴

Despite criticisms from both sides of the debate during the wartime period, Nishida's politics seem to have been of little interest and were largely overlooked within the English

¹¹ Tosaka labelled the Japanese inflection of fascism 'Japanism,' on account that it stressed the uniqueness and superiority of the Japanese spirit. It is however synonymous with Fascism.

¹² Nishida's diary has become a major source for his apologists who seek to remove the fascist label from his wartime writings. This is especially true of Michiko Yusa and Ueda Shizutera. The educational reforms and Nishida's scepticism of those reforms that occurred following the Meiji Restoration will be examined in greater detail in the second chapter .

¹³ Nishida defender Christopher Goto-Jones writes extensively on this in his book *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School and Co-Prosperity* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 75-79.

¹⁴ The Peace Preservation Laws passed in 1925 were a series of laws that were designed to thwart the growth of left wing movements such as anarchism, communism and socialism. They were increasingly strengthened over the 1930s as any thought considered too pro-western came under surveillance from these laws.

language historiography until the 1980s.¹⁵ One of the reasons for this lack of interest might stem from the fact that Nishida was primarily introduced to Western audiences in the postwar period as a religious philosopher. As a result, scholars were predominantly interested in the religious implications of his thought with respect to Zen Buddhism rather than any of the political consequences.¹⁶ However, there was a significant shift in interest with respect to his relationship with fascist ideology following the publication of two notable works, Peter Dale's *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (1986) and Harry Harootunian and Najita Tetsuo's article in *The Cambridge History of Japan* (1988), "Japan's Revolt Against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century." Both of these works drew attention to Nishida's relationship with the wartime ideology, harshly criticizing him and the Kyoto School for forging the ideological foundations of fascism in Japan. These accusations fuelled a major debate with respect to Nishida's politics that continues to this day without much resolution. The debates that followed these accusations can largely be divided down the middle, with his critics arguing his thought was in fact fascist (or at least ultra-nationalist and supportive of the government) on one side, and his supporters who deny these claims on the other. However, as will be made evident, within both sides of the debate there remain significant differences as to what the political intentions of his thought actually were.

The works of Dale, Harootunian, and Najita have made major contributions to the interwar and wartime periods of Japanese intellectual history by engaging concepts and

¹⁵ There was significant debate in Japan during the immediate postwar period. However, this thesis will primarily address the English language discourse.

¹⁶ This point is well illustrated in the work of James Heisig and Jan van Bragt, two of the most influential scholars on Nishida's philosophy. Both admit ignoring the political dimension to Nishida's thought as they argue it has little to do with his overall philosophy and the development of his thought. See James Heisig, "The Religious Philosophy of the Kyoto School: An Overview," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1990), 51-81. Jan van Bragt "Kyoto Philosophy—Intrinsically Nationalistic?," *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, ed. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 233-254.

intellectuals that had been previously ignored in the postwar discourse. Furthermore, they are reflective more generally of some of the positive and negative aspects of the side that argue Nishida contributed to the ideological foundations of Japanese fascism. One of the main issues that plague both of these works is that neither are aimed primarily at Nishida himself, instead both deal with intellectuals and concepts of the period more broadly. As a result, while they are able to portray an interesting and provocative account of the intellectual landscape, they have the tendency to either generalize or not engage Nishida's thought directly. One of the consequences of this approach is that Nishida has ultimately been lumped in with a number of intellectuals whose affiliation with the wartime ideology is far more evident. Combining Nishida with other, more fascist, thinkers is problematic as it overlooks the simultaneous existence of both fascist and anti-fascist sentiments in his overall philosophical system.

The issue of generalizing Nishida's thought and combining it with that of other thinkers is made most evident in the aforementioned work by Harootunian and Najita. In their essay, they argue: "[...] despite their use of abstract philosophical language, the Kyoto philosophers unashamedly spoke on behalf of Japanese imperial expansion as the creative moment of a vast historical movement to a new level of human existence."¹⁷ Furthermore, they go on to argue that Nishida and the Kyoto School "glorified the state as the ideal embodiment that justified Japan's leadership role in a war of revolt against the West," and "none came closer than they did to defining the philosophical contours of Japanese fascism [...]."¹⁸ While one can look past the polemical language used to make their arguments that has come under heavy criticism from a number of scholars, the issue of lumping Nishida with his former students and associates from

¹⁷ Harry Harootunian and Najita Tetsuo, "Japanese Revolt Against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century," *The Cambridge History of Japan Volume 6* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 742.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 741-743.

the Kyoto School is more problematic. There are of course similarities between their philosophies as Nishida was a major influence on their intellectual development. However, the school was not a school of thought in the same sense as other schools of thought such as the Frankfurt School.¹⁹ It was not an organization to which one could belong, nor was their official institutional affiliation. On the contrary, the school is best described as a loose organization of thinkers who came together under the influence of *Nishida tetsugaku* with each member developing their own philosophical system. For instance, Tosaka Jun is considered part of the Kyoto School as he studied under and was deeply influenced by Nishida. However, he was also heavily influenced by Marxism and developed his own revolutionary philosophy, sometimes referred to as “scientific socialism.”²⁰ Likewise, Tanabe Hajime, another Kyoto School affiliate, though similarly influenced by Nishida, was also highly critical of his thought and challenged that Nishida gave too much primacy to the experience of the subject. In turn he developed his own philosophy of “metanoetics.” Thus, to jump to the conclusion and say that they, as a collective group, were the closest to defining the philosophical contours of Japanese fascism is slightly misleading without delving deeper into their respective philosophical systems as there exist some crucial differences. Additionally, as alluded to earlier, it ignores the paradoxical existence of both fascist and anti-fascist sentiments in his thought. Nishida cannot simply be lumped in with his former, more politically conscious students.

The other, more pressing issue hindering the connection of Nishida with fascist ideology is the failure to adequately present a thorough understanding of fascism. Without doing so,

¹⁹ The Frankfurt School refers to a group of intellectuals who developed a Marxist social critical theory at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt am Main. The two most famous members are Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969). Unlike the Kyoto School, the scholars of the Frankfurt School shared a common ideological framework.

²⁰ One of the few works in English to approach Tosaka’s revolutionary project of “scientific socialism” is Hiromi Mizuno, *Science for the Empire: Scientific Nationalism in Modern Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

Nishida's relationship with fascism is difficult to argue as his thought was not overtly fascist, and he was, at least privately, critical of some government actions. Nishida apologists are thus quick to point to these aspects as an indication of his resistance to the government's imperial ambitions and thus argue that his thought could not have been fascist. However, his relationship with fascist ideology is far more complex than simply a matter of whether he agreed or disagreed with the government's actions. Nishida's relationship to fascist ideology rests in the shared logic of his argument, the parallel desire to overcome the antinomies of modernity. As such, he was not necessarily fascist in the same sense as the government. To make such a connection is to consider fascism primarily as a form of government rather than a movement, a point that will be further explored in the first chapter.

Before looking at the other side of the debate, and related to the above mentioned point that many studies fail to grasp an adequate understanding of fascism, it is worth briefly looking to another work that has contributed to the discourse, Pierre Lavelle's essay "The Political Thought of Nishida Kitarō."²¹ Lavelle's analysis of Nishida's political philosophy largely ignores Nishida's earlier works, focusing primarily on his later writings that deal more closely with the concepts important to the official doctrine of the state. Thus, he effectively is able to provide a thorough understanding of Nishida's later thought and the influence it had on the wartime ideology, but he is unable to adequately highlight the continuity that existed between Nishida's earlier and later thought.

What is most interesting with respect to the purposes of this thesis is that while Lavelle characterizes Nishida as one who "[...] supported the imperial doctrine, in particular its basic

²¹ Pierre Lavelle, "The Political Thought of Nishida Kitarō," *Monumenta Nipponica*. Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer, 1994), pp. 139-165.

dogmas of *tennō*-centricism and the religious sacredness of the nation and the Japanese state.”²² He does not see either Nishida or Japan more broadly during this period as fascist, as Lavelle states, “to label this view as ‘fascist’ is a source of serious misunderstanding.”²³ There are simply too many differences between Japan and the fascist ideologies of Italy and Germany. Thus, Nishida and the wartime ideology more broadly may be characterized as ultra-nationalist, but not fascist. However, as we will see in the next chapter, to point to the differences that existed on the surface and label Japan as ‘ultra-nationalist’ misrecognizes and overlooks the relationship between fascism and modernity. Furthermore, such an approach leaves Labelle vulnerable to the criticism of Nishida’s defenders that point to some of the seemingly non-, or anti-fascist aspects of Nishida’s philosophy that ran contrary to the official doctrine. Thus in order to adequately grasp Nishida’s influence and relationship with the wartime ideology, one must recognize that both were distinctively ‘fascist’ and not simply ‘ultra-nationalist.’

The other side of the debate has risen largely in opposition to these accusations and is best exemplified in the work of Graham Parkes, David Williams, Michiko Yusa, and Christopher Goto-Jones. Unlike those who assert a relationship between Nishida and fascism, these scholars deal far more directly with Nishida’s thought. However, while they all staunchly deny that Nishida’s philosophy can be considered fascist, there is wide disagreement as to how his politics should be viewed.

The most aggressive defense against the accusations of fascism in Nishida’s thought has come from Graham Parkes who has written a series of articles harshly criticizing Harootunian’s

²² *Ibid.*, 163. *Tennō* translates as Emperor.

²³ *Ibid.*

work on the subject, the article written with Najita in particular.²⁴ In these articles, Parkes suggests that the accusations against the Kyoto School are largely unsubstantiated, and make use of poor translations.²⁵ One term under considerable investigation by Parkes is *minzoku*, which Harootunian, translates as *folk*. Parkes advises that this translation is ideologically motivated by the authors to make the connection with Nazi ideology more apparent as the German word, *volk*, had been used widely in Nazi propaganda and was crucial to its ideology. However, the translation of *minzoku* as *folk* is not as farfetched as Parkes suggests in his critique. *Minzoku* can be translated as people, race, or folk. This is made evident when one looks at other Japanese words such as *minzokugaku*, which is the study of folklore and *minzokuongaku*, folk music. Thus, the translation is not nearly as irresponsible as Parkes seems to suggest.

The link to Nazism, particularly to Martin Heidegger, is part of a larger critique Parkes levels towards those who accuse Nishida and the Kyoto School's thought as being fascist. The connection with Heidegger stems from a number of Nishida's students, most notably Miki Kiyoshi (1897-1945) and Nishitani Keiji (1900-1990), who had both studied overseas with Heidegger, as well as other German and French intellectuals. Nishida himself never went overseas to study, and his connection with Heidegger is entirely through his students, and thus Parkes is right in his suggestion that at least with respect to Nishida the connection is a difficult

²⁴ The series of articles includes: 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 (Jul., 1997), 305-336. "The Definite Internationalism of the Kyoto School: Changing Attitudes in the Contemporary Academy," *Re-Politicizing the Kyoto School as Philosophy*, Christopher Goto-Jones, ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 161-182. "Heidegger and Japanese Fascism: An Unsubstantiated Connection," *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 6: Confluences and Cross-Currents*, Raquel Bouso and James W. Heisig, eds. (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2009), 347-371.

²⁵ Graham Parkes, "The Putative Fascism of the Kyoto School and the Political Correctness of the Modern Academy," 327-328.

one to make.²⁶ However, along with the problem over the translation of *minzoku*, the issue is somewhat of a red herring. Nishida's (and the Kyoto School more generally) relationship with fascist ideology runs much deeper than a connection to Nazi ideology as the particularities of the respective manifestations of fascism in each country varied in a number of different ways. Furthermore, while Parkes criticizes Harootunian and Najita for not putting forth a definition of fascism, neither does he, as he makes no attempt to go beyond fascism understood as Nazism. For Parkes, fascism is synonymous with Nazism, and almost comes to serve as the definition of fascism for Parkes. He thus makes no attempt himself to grasp the underlying core of the ideology. Thus, like the other side of the debate, the problem over the concept more generally remains.

As an alternative reading to Nishida's politics, those who defend his thought against the accusations of fascism vary widely in their views. The most popular view that has developed recently is the view of Nishida's political thought was "internationalist" in its outlook. This position, initiated by Goto-Jones and further developed by Parkes, argues that Nishida's political thought was unique, and does not fall within the right-left dichotomy of the Western political paradigm. In order to make this reading of Nishida, both turn to his controversial essay, "Fundamental Principles of a New World Order" (1943), which they argue is a further

²⁶ Though the connection between Heidegger and Nishida lies beyond the scope of this project, one should be hesitant to accept the argument put forth by Parkes that one could not be made. Though difficult, both Heidegger and Nishida share a number of similarities related to their critiques of modernity that could be made evident by engaging in a deep reading of their respective philosophical works. There are of course noticeable differences in their philosophical systems given their intellectual and cultural backgrounds. However, both were responding to transformations related to the totalizing dynamic of global capitalism, yet they similarly failed in grasping their own conditions of possibility as capitalism itself was not the aim of their critique. Christian Uhl's review of Christopher Goto-Jones' book *Political Philosophy in Japan* (2005) touches upon the parallels between Nishida and Heidegger, see "Review: What Does it Mean to 'Speak Truth to Power'?", *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. 56, No. 3 (Jul., 2006), pp. 469-482.

articulation of his internationalist ideas already found in *Zen no kenkyū*. This work has often come under criticism, even from some of his defenders, on account of the similarities in the language used by the wartime government to express their desire for a “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” However, as previously mentioned, this essay was written at the request of the government and was only accepted following a number of revisions so that it fit in better with the government’s program. On account of these reasons, Goto-Jones and Parkes argue that the language was used as a form of double speak, in order to articulate his ideas while also being able to get past the government censors.²⁷ Thus, rather than see this as a defense of Japan’s imperial ambitions in East Asia, they argue that one must look beyond the language used, and see it for what it really is, “radically polycentric,” where there is “no need for Japan, or any other country to be the ‘core.’”²⁸ Thus, Nishida’s thought should not only be seen as non-fascist, but according to these two scholars, it should also be seen as a form of resistance. However, while they raise some interesting issues, they neglect the majority of Nishida’s writings by jumping from *Zen no kenkyū* published in 1911 to one of his final essays written in 1943. This ignores over thirty years of Nishida’s writings, which when further examined represent an ever growing shift to the right that whether intentional or not, contributed to the ideological foundations of fascism in Japan.

The notion that Nishida’s thought was internationalist and exhibited a kind of alternative to the western political paradigm emerged somewhat in response to the view maintained by some apologists that Nishida was in fact a liberal. Returning to Nishida’s diaries and association with some liberal groups during the 1930s, scholars such as Yusa Michiko maintain that Nishida’s

²⁷ In Graham Parkes see “The Definite Internationalism of the Kyoto School: Changing Attitudes in the Contemporary Academy,” 177-179. For Goto-Jones perspective on this issue see *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School and Co-Prosperity*, 7.

²⁸ Graham Parkes, “The Definite Internationalism of the Kyoto School: Changing Attitudes in the Contemporary Academy,” 178-179.

thought is more representative of the liberalism occupying Japan in the late Meiji period.²⁹ Despite Yusa's efforts to portray Nishida as a liberal thinker, the problem remains as to what to make of both the fascist and anti-fascist elements that occupy the core of his philosophical system. More importantly, it neglects the almost chameleon like nature of fascism, which contradictorily employs modern humanistic language and reasoning to further its own ends when necessary.

One final view on the politics of Nishida's thought that is worth briefly addressing is maintained by David Williams, who more than just defends Nishida's thought against the accusations of fascism but defends Japan's war in the Pacific more broadly. Williams argues against what he calls "Pacific War orthodoxy," which can be understood as the defense of imperialism by the West against the resistance of non-white people.³⁰ Williams maintains that Harootyan, Najita, and Dale, among others, by dismissing the Kyoto School as fascist are defending this "Pacific War orthodoxy" and thus guilty of promoting imperialism themselves. Not only is this an unfair representation of those who argue Nishida's thought was fascist for it ignores any serious engagement of the structure of their arguments, but Williams only continues the problem of defining the world in terms of East vs. West. Seeing the world in these terms played a crucial role in justifying the colonization of Korea and the annexation of Manchukuo. Thus, aside from defending Nishida and the Kyoto School from being dismissed altogether, Williams does little to provide an analysis of the Pacific War and that particular period of history beyond the confines of an East vs. West paradigm despite his initial intent.

²⁹ Nishida's work with liberal groups is presented in Yusa Michiko, "Nishida and Totalitarianism" *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, 118-119. Yusa's portrayal of Nishida as a liberal philosopher is also evident in her biography of Nishida, *Zen & Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō* (2002).

³⁰ David Williams, *Defending Japan's Pacific War: the Kyoto School Philosophers and Post-White Power* (New York, NY: Routledge Curzon, 2004), xvi-xvii.

The historiography outlined above reveals a number of underlying issues that plague the debate over Nishida's involvement in Japanese fascism. First, those who have argued that Nishida contributed to fascist ideology have done so without a deep engagement with his thought. As such, they have relied upon generalizations of some of the more pertinent issues and have in turn left themselves open to the criticisms regarding their reading of Nishida. Second, while his defenders have provided a deeper reading of his thought, they have failed to grasp his thought within a larger historical context, which is vital in comprehending Nishida's connection to fascism. Third, both sides have failed to account for the existence of both fascist and anti-fascist sentiment in Nishida's thought. Finally and somewhat related to the third point, few on either side have adequately approached the concept of fascism more generally. Fascism, as this thesis will argue, must be understood not as a form of government, but as a romantic anti-capitalist movement. Moreover, it is a movement that is in principal politically pragmatic. Without such an understanding, the connection between Nishida and fascist ideology can only be made haphazardly. Furthermore, without an adequate definition, one is left to wonder, given the complexity of the debate, if the concept has caused more confusion than anything else and one would be better served to use a less controversial term such as ultra-nationalist when describing Nishida, or other intellectuals political thought.

Approaching the Question of Nishida and the Ideological Foundations of Japanese Fascism: Some Methodological and Theoretical Considerations

Given the issues that have plagued the discourse surrounding Nishida's relationship with fascist ideology, this thesis seeks to present an alternative position to those that have dominated the debate thus far. In contrast to those who have asserted a relationship between Nishida and

fascism, this work differs in that it does not dismiss his thought as theoretically irrelevant, nor does it consider it as fascist in the same sense as the government. Nishida's opposition to some government policies may even be able to be seen as a legitimate attempt to resist some of the wartime policies. However, this resistance not only failed in thwarting the rise of fascism in Japan, as his defenders assert he tried to do, but also played a significant role in advancing the movement and forging its ideological foundations. Furthermore, Nishida's contemporary relevance lies not in it being a uniquely Japanese alternative to the right-left paradigm that preoccupies contemporary international political theory. On the contrary, his contemporary relevance lies in attempt to overcome the antinomies of modernity that saw traditional values eroding in the face of the totalizing forces of capitalist modernity. What makes his thought relevant is just that which allows it to be characterized as fascist, his critique of modernity. Ultimately, it was his failure to grasp his own condition of possibility that pushed his thought in an increasingly fascist direction. When understood in this way, one can see that Nishida's philosophy, in the words of Slavoj Žižek, took the right step, but in the wrong direction.³¹

In order to make the proposed arguments, this thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter further develops some of the methodological and theoretical considerations by addressing the concept of fascism more generally, and attempts to arrive at a thorough understanding of the term that has so far eluded the historiography. Looking at the modernist beginnings of the concept, it will be argued that fascism is best seen as a romantic reactionary anti-capitalist movement that forms its ideological power in forms of culture, particularly, in literature, film, and philosophy. The works that helped fuel fascism in Japan varied widely in their content, yet they all shared similar aesthetic features that sought to confront the antinomies

³¹ Žižek makes this claim with respect to Heidegger's relationship with Nazism in his book *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London; New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 95-153.

of modernity. Rather than argue whether any of Nishida's works should be considered fascist in themselves, it is more appropriate to identify the "fascist moments" that helped contribute to the ideological foundations of fascism in Japan despite their intended purpose. The concept of a "fascist moment" is borrowed from Alan Tansman, who argues that these moments were:

[...] the efflorescence of a fascist aesthetics—including artistic evocations of beauty and the aesthetic response to them—that attempted to resolve the conflicts of modernity by calling for complete submission, either to absolute order or an undifferentiated but liberating experience of violence.³²

By approaching the question of Nishida's relationship with fascism in this way, it will be possible to grasp both the existence of fascist and anti-fascist sentiments that exist within his thought that the current historiography has so far been unable to account for.

Following this analysis of fascism, the second chapter will turn to the early Nishida, particularly by considering some of the historical developments occurring at the time as well as by engaging his seminal text *Zen no kenkyū*. The publication of this work marked the emergence of *Nishida tetsugaku* and despite the evolution of his thought throughout the decades that followed many of the key concepts of his overall philosophical system were first articulated in this work. For example, it was in this text that Nishida first formulated his conception of pure experience, which would become the foundation of his thought and the logic of 'nothingness.' Therefore, if one is to grasp Nishida's thought overall, one must have a thorough understanding of this text in particular. Furthermore, though this text pre-dates fascism, it would be unwise to suggest it did not contain within it any "fascist moments" that within a particular historical circumstance could lend itself to fascist ideology.

³² Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, 2.

The third chapter continues where the second ends by considering his post-*Zen no kenkyū* works. Much of the discourse on Nishida's relationship with fascism has focused on his wartime writings. However, while a significant effort will be made to engage these texts, attention will also be given to his often ignored works of the interwar period. Given how fascism will come to be defined as a form of romantic anti-capitalism, of particular interest are those on the subject of beauty, art and morality. For, it is in his philosophy of aesthetics more than anything else that one is able to see his critique of modernity and influence on fascist ideology. By grasping the continued evocation of 'fascist moments' in his interwar works it will be possible to turn to his later works and recognize that not only do they legitimize and contribute to the fascist ideology of the period, but that his thought had always contained the possibility for a fascist reading as the philosophical core that empowers his later works never abandoned the categories and concepts of his earlier thought despite the change in subjects.

Finally, this thesis concludes by considering the contemporary relevance of Nishida Kitarō's thought. While it is generally the tendency for scholars to dismiss works that have been produced by fascist thinkers as theoretically and philosophically irrelevant, this thesis maintains that Nishida's contemporary relevance lies in the very aspect of his thought that allows one to recognize his relationship with fascist ideology: in the romantic critique of modernity. Without the romantic critique of modernity and his effort to construct a philosophy that could overcome modernity by appealing to place which could withstand the social abstractions of modernity, it is hard to imagine his thought having any sort of contemporary relevance as it was so structured by these overarching ideas. Nishida's thought, which ultimately failed in its desired ends to overcome modernity, represents a

sort of warning to those who seek a similar ends, and highlights the need for one to grasp their own conditions of possibility in the very modernity that is the subject of the critique.

Chapter 1: Is It Really Fascism? Fascism and the History of Wartime Japan

The question concerning whether Imperial Japan was in fact fascist is one that has primarily risen in the postwar period as scholars have sought to grasp the conditions that ultimately led to the catastrophic events of the Second World War. During the wartime period, Japan, Germany, and Italy were largely seen as coming from a similar ideological position as their shared desire to aggressively install a new geo-political order overshadowed any of the differences that may have existed at the core of their respective ideologies. Thus, those at war with these countries were quick to refer to Japan as fascist without much consideration. Likewise, in Japan throughout the 1930s, scholars such as Tosaka Jun and Imanaka Tsugimaro (1893-1980) had readily used the concept to describe the militarization and ideological currents of the period. However, the question of what it meant to characterize Japan as fascist, and what Japanese fascism was, only started to be explored more thoroughly in the postwar period with the publication of Maruyama Masao's (1914-1996) "Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism"

in 1946.¹ Once the question had been provoked, a debate over its applicability to the case of Japan emerged on account of the numerous differences with how fascism had formed in Europe. By the 1980s, the term had largely fallen out of favour amongst scholars, and it remains highly contested today.

If one is to grasp how Nishida Kitarō and other Japanese intellectuals of the prewar period contributed to the ideological foundations of Japanese fascism, then one must inevitably address the question of whether Japan was fascist, and if so what this means. Those who defend Nishida's philosophy against the accusations of fascism have often pointed to the failure of his critics to provide an adequate understanding of the concept. Therefore, to address these charges this chapter engages the question of fascism both generally and with respect to the specific case of Japan. In doing so, this chapter will serve as the foundation that will allow us to demonstrate that Nishida contributed to the ideological foundations of Japanese fascism. Yet, the understanding of fascism that this thesis will provide shows that Nishida was not, nor must he have needed to be, fascist in the same sense the Japanese government was. Rather, Nishida's thought, like all cultural productions, paradoxically reflected and created the atmosphere of the period. As a romantic critique of modernity, his thought shared many of the same concerns and aesthetic properties of fascism that ultimately, in the environment of prewar Japan, pushed his thought in an increasingly fascist direction.²

¹ Andrew Barshay discusses the impact this essay had on readers, noting "Maruyama appeared—"like a comet,"" and that the essay, "was enormously influential. Indeed, it seems to have had a virtually physical impact on readers." See *The Social Sciences in Modern Japan: The Marxian and Modernist Traditions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 217. I would also note that written in 1946, this essay was Maruyama's first on the topic of Japanese fascism. However, it is important to note the linguistic shift in his writing from ultra-nationalism in this particular essay, to fascism in the essays that would follow. It is not clear why Maruyama made this shift; however, he seems to use them interchangeably. He never distinguishes a difference in the two. The differences between the two concepts, which there surely are some lay beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, in the name of simplicity I will not draw a distinction between the two in his writing.

² The romantic nature of the critique is crucial in grasping the similarities between Nishida and fascist ideology. By 'romantic critique' of modernity' I am following Geörgy Lucáks' concept of romantic anti-capitalism, which he

The following chapter begins by addressing the concept of fascism generally. This thesis does not attempt to come to a static definition of the concept. Nor does it seek to engage in a comparative analysis of the various forms of fascism. Instead, it seeks to provide an understanding of fascism by grasping the underlying ideological core. If done correctly, it is possible to see how the various forms fit this understanding. Thus, fascism in its Italian, German, and Japanese forms could be shown to share this ideological core, which supersedes the differences that existed. Furthermore, unsuccessful fascist movements such as the Action Française in France and the British Nationalist Party in England could likewise be shown to share this ideological core.

In addressing the concept of fascism generally, the cultural foundations of the concept will be first examined. One might think that when engaging the question of fascism that the political aspects should take precedence. However, this view presupposes that fascism is primarily a political system. On the contrary, as it will be argued, fascism is for the most part politically pragmatic. Its origins are found in the romantic critique of modernity, and thus, it forms its power first and foremost in the realm of culture, in productions such as literature, art, film, and philosophy. Thus it is worth first approaching fascism from its point of origin, the romantic critique of modernity. Here, Harootunian's insights into the concept of fascism must be acknowledged as he gives primacy to both the global presence and some of the cultural aspects of fascism, most notably the idea of creating a 'living culture.' By this he means the desire to "return to a fixed moment in an indefinite past (in the present) and the singularity of experience by taking away class, gender, or even regional identifications [...]."³

designates as the critique of modern capitalist society motivated by a longing for the past. (See Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*. Translated by Catherine Porter (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 10).

³ Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, xxx-xxxii.

Once the cultural core of the ideology has been examined, some general political points will be discussed to help further account for the differences that exist between the various manifestations found in the period that were able to secure political power. This analysis will lay the groundwork for us to then turn to the concept of the ‘fascist moment’ that will be used in our reading of Nishida’s philosophy and serves as the means of grasping his relationship to Japanese fascism.

For the second half of this chapter attention will turn to the way fascism has been understood in the study of Japan in the first half of the twentieth century. Beginning with Maruyama’s conception of fascism, some of the underlying issues that have so far plagued the usage of the term within the Japanese historiography will be discussed. Maruyama was highly influential in the postwar debate over Japanese fascism. His theory touched upon many of the important events and factors that led to the emergence of fascism in Japan and that have come to characterize Japanese fascism. However, his theory also contained a number of shortcomings that have helped problematize the use of the concept. The problems that arose from his theory will be examined in greater detail by turning to some of the critics of Maruyama and the concept of Japanese fascism more generally. This chapter will conclude by discussing the applicability of the term with respect to the Japanese experience. Thus, we will seek to demonstrate that there was a pervasive culture of fascism both politically and socially in Japan between 1920 and 1945. Furthermore, the concept of fascism itself will be shown to be crucial in understanding the history of modern Japan. The emergence of fascism in Japan reveals some of the larger temporal patterns of the twentieth century, allowing one to consider this period of Japanese history within a global historical context. As such, philosophies like that of Nishida are shown to not be unique, as they so often are, but fit within these larger temporal patterns.

Modernity, Romanticism, and the Origins of Fascism

What is fascism? It finds its roots in romanticism and can thus be simply stated as an intensified romantic critique of modernity. It calls for the individual to submit the self to the state for the purposes of overcoming the alienation and individualism of modern society. Yet, despite its critique of modernity it is distinctively modern, and is hence *modernist anti-modernist*. Here, modernity must be carefully understood. Modernity should not be taken in stagist terms as a point towards which all societies evolve, or seek to evolve. Nor is it mere modernization, seen primarily in terms of technological advances. Following Moishe Postone's reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory, modernity should be understood as "a specific form of social life that originated in western Europe and has developed into a complex global system."⁴ This global system is structured by capitalism, understood as a totalizing dynamic that is both expansive and transformative. Here, it is worth delving deeper into the distinctive features of capitalist society and what separates it from other historical epochs as proposed by Postone.

What distinguishes capitalist society from those considered pre-capitalist is that the overt hierarchical and political ties that had previously structured society are dissolved, and in their place society comes to be mediated by labour. An important distinction must be made here that separates Postone from traditional Marxists.⁵ Traditional Marxists conceive of labour as a trans-historical "[...] activity mediating humans and nature that transforms matter in a goal-directed

⁴ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 4.

⁵ This thesis maintains Postone's understanding of traditional Marxism as: "By "traditional Marxism" I do not mean a specific historical tendency in Marxism, such as orthodox Second International Marxism, for example, but, more generally, all analyses that understand capitalism essentially in terms of class relations structured by a market economy and private ownership of the means of production." From "Rethinking Marx's Critical Theory," *History and Heteronomy: Critical Essays* (Tokyo, JP: University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy), 33.

manner and is a condition of social life.”⁶ This view is linked to a determinate understanding of the basic categories of Marx’s critique, where categories such as value are interpreted to show that social wealth is always mediated by human labour.⁷ In this view, capitalism is seen primarily in terms of the market and private property. However, in actuality it is much more than the market and private property, and should instead be seen as a totalizing dynamic that is both expansive and transformative.

In contrast, the conceptions of the basic categories of Marx’s critique, such as labour and value, are seen to be historically specific to modern capitalist society. Expounding on the historical specificity of value in capitalist society, Postone highlights that value is a form of wealth that: “[...] is constituted by the expenditure of direct human labour in the process of production, it remains bound to such expenditure as the determining factor in the production of wealth [...]”⁸ Here the distinction between wealth and value must be carefully considered. Value is a historically specific form of wealth, but differs from material wealth.⁹ Machines, though they increase material wealth, do not increase value. Rather, they only transmit value (as direct labour time) or decrease value by reducing the amount of labour power required.¹⁰ Furthermore, the category of value represents the basic relations of production in capitalism, “industrial production is the “mode of production based on value.””¹¹ As a totalizing dynamic, not only does value become a structuring principle for the mode of production, but it also comes to structure and dominate the mode of social relations in capitalist society, as Marx states in the appendix to the first volume of *Capital*,

⁶ Moishe Postone, “Lukács and the Dialectical Critique of Capitalism” in *New Dialectics and Political Economy* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 82.

⁷ Moishe Postone, “Rethinking Marx’s Critical Theory,” 34.

⁸ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: a Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

[...] along with labour it has also appropriated its network of *social relations* and the level of development of the means of labour corresponding to them. Capitalist production is the first to develop the conditions of the labour process, both its objective and subjective ones, on a large scale—it tears them from the hands of the individual independent worker, but develops them as powers that control the individual *worker* and are *alien* to him.¹²

Though the complexity of this issue warrants a greater analysis than can be provided in this thesis, it is worth further informing this point by briefly bringing Lukács and the concept of reification into the discussion.

Lukács made important contributions to the view that the fundamental social relations of capitalist society are mediated by capitalism in his essay *Reification and the Class Consciousness of the Proletariat*, specifically the commodity form. The commodity form is dialectically understood as being structured by, on the one hand use-value, that is how it may be used to satisfy human needs, and on the other hand, exchange-value. The exchange-value is elementarily understood as “[...] the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind.”¹³ It is value, understood in the commodity form that according to Marx and Lukács comes to represent the internal structure of capitalist society itself and thus dominate the social relations. For Lukács, it is only in modern capitalism that the commodity is developed to the point where it becomes the dominant form of social life, and thus it is only in this context that “[...] the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it.”¹⁴ Reification, turning abstract social relations into concrete things is thus unique to capitalist society. In this way, transformations such as the rationalization of modern

¹² Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume I*. Translated by Ben Fowkes (London, UK: Penguin, 1990), 1056.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁴ Georg Lukács, “Reification and the Class Consciousness of the Proletariat,” *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Translated by Rodney Livingston (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 86.

society to which Max Weber had drawn attention, and the quest for efficiency and expansion are historically specific to capitalist society as thought itself becomes structured by the overarching structure of capitalist modernity.

Returning to the previous discussion and turning to the concept of labour in capitalism, like value, labour is not trans-historical, but historically specific to capitalist society. Similarly, it also has a double character and is described by Postone in the following way:

“It (labour) is both “concrete labour” and “abstract labour.” “Concrete labour refers to the fact that some form of what we consider laboring activity mediates the interactions of humans with nature in all societies. “Abstract labour”... signifies that, in capitalism, labour also has a unique social function that is not intrinsic to laboring activity as such: it mediates a new form of social interdependence.”¹⁵

Evident in this passage is the importance of labour in capitalist society as it serves the important role and function as the creator of value. As capitalism is constantly reproducing itself in the name of increasing surplus-value, the social forms of society are likewise continuously transforming. Within modern society, the state of constant transformation causes a certain fragmentation of society as traditional values are eroded in their traditional form and are re-constituted. Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* perhaps make this point best when they state:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air [...]¹⁶

It is in response to this totalizing and transformative dynamic of capitalist modernity that fascism emerged by calling for a return to a reified trans-historical communitarian ideal of folk culture

¹⁵ Moishe Postone, “Rethinking Marx’s Critical Theory,” 38.

¹⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* as quoted in Mark Neocleous, *Fascism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 61.

and values that could withstand the social abstractions of capitalist modernity.¹⁷ Here, the connection with romanticism cannot be overlooked.

Fascism is but one form of romanticism, of which there are many.¹⁸ All romantic worldviews share some common characteristics that structure romanticism in general. Thus, let us look deeper into the nature of romanticism to gain a better understanding of fascism. The most defining characteristic of romanticism is the rejection of capitalist modernity. The rejection of modern society results from the continuous transformation of society that was previously mentioned. This leads to one of the other primary characteristics of romanticism, namely the experience that something fundamental has been lost, and as a result the individual and society itself has become alienated.¹⁹ Dislocated from their place of origin, there is a sense of nostalgia that frames the romantic view towards the past. The past becomes crucial in the romantic worldview as it is reified as a period whereby the social antagonisms and alienation of modern society did not exist. Therefore, the past becomes a sort of ‘lost paradise.’²⁰ If this is what characterizes the romantic worldview in general, then let us turn to the distinguishing features of the fascist form that takes the romantic worldview to its extreme limits.

Fascist Romanticism

As a form of romanticism it should be clear that fascism gains its ideological power in forms of culture. Therefore, aesthetic properties become essential to understanding the fascist romantic worldview. Works that evoke the aesthetic properties of fascism share some defining

¹⁷ Marilyn Ivy, “Foreword: Fascism, Yet?” *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*. Alan Tansman, ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), xi.

¹⁸ The view that fascism is a form of romanticism is influenced by the work of Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre particularly their book *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*.

¹⁹ Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

characteristics, of which the most pertinent will be discussed here. To begin, the critique of capitalist modernity that informs the romantic worldview in fascism is intensified and is filled with violent rhetoric that condemns the various forms of modern life. Modern politics become a primary target for attack, particularly Marxism, socialism, and liberal democracy.²¹ Additionally, everyday life is condemned as being hyper-rational, and thus the fascist romantic worldview glorifies irrationality as a pure and instinctual state.²² Thus, for fascism, ethics and morality are not seen as something rational, or *a priori*. On the contrary, morality itself becomes something instinctual, or inherent. It is morality through action, not action in the name of morality. The political consequences of this position are evident in the events of the Second World War, where these aesthetic concerns led to a ‘politics of death.’²³

In addition to the critique of rationality and passionate rhetoric, what separates fascism from other types of romanticism is the reification of the ‘other’ as the source of society’s discontent. This is an important point to consider because it has been one of the sources of the problematization of the term with respect to non-European inflections of fascism. Within studies of European fascism, which dominate the discourse on fascism more generally, this point is generally not considered as the ‘other,’ but rather as the Jew. This is perhaps made most evident in Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre’s otherwise brilliant exposition of the concept of fascism in *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (which also serves as one of major sources for the reading of fascism presented in this thesis.) They note, “[f]urthermore, its [fascism’s] anticapitalism is often tinged with anti-Semitism: capitalists, the wealthy, and those who

²¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²² *Ibid.*, 68.

²³ The phrase ‘politics of death’ is from Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (Berkeley, CA: University of Californian Press, 2009), 8.

represent the spirit of cities and modern life are depicted as Jews.”²⁴ Thus, for many scholars of fascism, it is anti-Semitism that exists at the core of fascist ideology. However, this misrecognizes the role of the Jew in fascist ideology as the point of critique itself, rather than a reification of the social antagonisms brought on by capitalist modernity itself. Thus, it is not the Jew that is crucial in fascist ideology but the role of the ‘other’ itself, almost always in the form of a different race. The other takes the form of something foreign, which if it were to be eliminated the social cohesion that existed in pre-capitalist society could be restored. In the context of Japan during this period, the other was not reduced to the Jew but to the foreigner, often the Korean. As Ken Kawashima has highlighted in his work on Korean labourers in interwar Japan, the social problems afflicting Japan at the time (unemployment, lack of housing, poverty), which were experienced more intensely by the Korean population, were removed from Japan as a whole and racialized as a problem of Koreans themselves.²⁵ Furthermore, in Japan other problems were also concretely embodied in Western modes of life, which help reveal that it is ethnocentrism, and not specifically anti-Semitism that plays a major role in fascist ideology.

What makes fascism such an elusive concept is the contradictory nature of the ideology. Fascism presents itself paradoxically as both ‘old’ and ‘new.’ The ‘old’ as identified earlier is usually presented as a reified trans-historical communitarian ideal of past folk culture. However, the ‘new’ can take many different forms. For instance, as some scholars have shown, there is a certain emancipatory potential to technology.²⁶ Technology is reified as something mystical, with the ability to restore the glorified ideal of pre-modern society. Furthermore, this point is also made evident in a number of the cries for a ‘New Europe,’ ‘New World Order,’ or ‘Greater

²⁴ Michael Lowy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 68.

²⁵ Ken Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 20.

²⁶ Mark Neocleous, *Fascism*, 66-74.

East Asia.²⁷ However, the fascist aesthetic never actually challenges the overarching structure of capitalist modernity. Instead it focuses upon reified categories that serve as concrete symbols of capitalism's abstract forms of social domination. Unlike Marxism, which is similarly a form of romanticism, fascism is only pseudo-revolutionary.

The Politics of Fascism

Considering that fascism is a form of romantic ideology, it is best to see it as having political intentions, or ambitions, rather than as a political structure onto itself. Following the Frankfurt School and Walter Benjamin, the politics of fascism should be considered as a “form of aestheticized politics in which aesthetic issues permeate all aspects of society; and the political, economy, and cultural realms should not be considered separately when discussing fascism.”²⁸ Thus, in many ways, the politics of fascism are ambiguous. Fascism seeks total power; the manner in which the power is obtained is cursory to its actual attainment. Marcus Willensky has made this observation in his examination of Japanese and Italian fascism where he points to the writing of Alfredo Rocco and Benito Mussolini, who were two of the first to theorize on the politics of the fascist movement.²⁹ As Willensky highlights on the politics of fascism: “Fascism, in its original form, was a movement of action not formulae—the Italian Fascist regime’s earliest

²⁷ Michael Lowy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* 69.

²⁸ Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* as quoted in Nina Cornyetz, “Fascist Aesthetics and the Politics of Representation in Kawabata Yasunari,” *The Culture of Japanese Fascism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 324.

²⁹ Marcus Willensky offers an interesting examination of Japanese fascism as compared to the European inflections. Willensky engages the topic of fascism in Japan in almost exclusively political terms. Yet, despite the apparent differences on the surface, he is able to show that Japan shared a number of political structural similarities with its European counterparts. Therefore, he is able to cast Imperial Japan in fascist light. However, there are a number of issues that plague this account, most notably the absence of any cultural analysis. The absence of any cultural analysis allows his position to contribute to a so-called ‘victim’s consciousness’ by placing the responsibility for fascism primarily on the military and top-level government. This issue will be addressed in greater detail when examining the concept as it directly relates to Japan, primarily when Maruyama’s conception of Japanese fascism is engaged.

slogan was: “No dogma! Discipline suffices!”³⁰ This is made all the more evident in Rocco’s formulation of fascism where he states:

Fascism never raises the question of methods, using in its political praxis now liberal ways, now democratic means and at times even socialistic devices. This indifference to method often exposes Fascism to the charge of incoherence on the part of superficial observers, who do not see that what counts with us is the end...³¹

Fascism is able to draw on all or any form of political method because it ultimately problematizes modern politics as the reasons for the disintegration of society. Fascism is all that is good in other political methods and none of what is bad. Fascism is almost apolitical as it presents itself as the ultimate truth transcending politics.³² Thus, when examining the cultural industries that fuel the fascist movement one must look at so-called apolitical works, as they are sometimes the most effective in portraying the sense of crisis and creating the ideological foundations of the movement.

It is crucial to supplement this understanding of fascism with some of the work Slavoj Žižek has done on the subject. As briefly eluded to in the slogans of some of the early Italian fascist propaganda, the spirit of sacrifice that lies at the heart of fascist ideology is what provides it with both its mass appeal and danger. The core of all fascist movements is the notion that one must obey, renounce their enjoyment, and sacrifice oneself to the totality of the state.³³ As Žižek notes,

[t]he ideological power of fascism lies precisely in the feature which was perceived by liberal or leftist critics as its greatest weakness: in the utterly void, formal character of its appeal, in the fact that it demands obedience and sacrifice for their own sake. For Fascist ideology, the point is not the instrumental value of sacrifice, it is the very form of sacrifice itself, ‘the spirit of sacrifice’, which is the cure against the liberal-decadent disease.³⁴

³⁰ Marcus Willensky, “Japanese Fascism Revisted,” 62.

³¹ Alfredo Rocco as quoted in Marcus Willensky, “Japanese Fascism Revisted,” 62-63.

³² Peter Osbourne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London, UK: Verso, 2008), 89-90.

³³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, UK: Verso, 1989) 89.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

Thus, here in lies the appeal of fascism, should everyone sacrifice himself to the state, the antinomies of modernity will be overcome. One can also see why that in fascism the representation of the ‘other’ as discussed previously becomes of such importance. The ‘other’ becomes the symbolic source of the decay, its concrete manifestation and thus further impels the people to sacrifice, or risk being overrun by this nefarious ‘other.’

Fascist Moments

The fascist romantic aesthetic outlined above has positioned us in such a way that it is now possible to turn to the concept of the ‘fascist moment,’ which will be used in our reading of Nishida’s philosophy and will serve as the means by which it is possible to grasp his relationship with Japanese fascism. One of the central contentions of this thesis is that one should not simply consider overtly fascist works, or fascist propaganda as that which creates the ideological foundations of fascism. Thus, the ‘fascist moment’ is a useful concept as it allows one to consider how works, which were not necessarily political, let alone overtly fascist, contributed to the ideological foundations of fascism. The concept of the ‘fascist moment’ is indebted to the work of Alan Tansman who employed this concept to analyze the relationship between literature and Japanese fascism.³⁵ Though he did not extend these ‘fascist moments’ to philosophical works of the period, it is the contention of this thesis that they are applicable to works of philosophy, and particularly to the case of Nishida who did not necessarily appear to be offering a political philosophy, especially in his earlier works.

³⁵ Tansman’s concept of Japanese fascism will be critiqued when looking at how fascism has been understood in the Japanese context, and will highlight how his understanding differs from the position put forth in this thesis.

Though it is difficult to establish a concrete definition of the ‘fascist moment,’ as described earlier in the introduction, they are best defined as “[...] the efflorescence of a fascist aesthetic—including artistic evocations of beauty and the aesthetic response to them—that attempted to resolve the conflicts of modernity [...]”³⁶ These moments were manifested in a variety of different forms from literature to philosophy, and over time helped to open up the space for the emergence of fascism, and thus contribute to its ideological foundations. These moments need not necessarily be political in their intent, nor do the authors need to be aware that they were contributing to the fascist aesthetic. As Tansman argues, “[w]hat is distinctive about the fascist moment is that it is kidnapped by politics, but its kidnapping is not wholly passive; its efficacy requires the collusion of its reader, the viewer, or audience.”³⁷ Therefore, in many ways, these are romantic moments that within a particular historical context and circumstance ultimately create the conditions necessary for the emergence of fascism. Furthermore, it is possible to see these ‘fascist moments’ in romantic works that predate the widespread culture of fascism, as fascism is a type of intensified version of romanticism, which finds its origins in modern society.

Japan’s Incomplete Modernity: Maruyama’s Theory of Japanese Fascism

As previously mentioned, Maruyama Masao was one of the first intellectuals of the postwar period to seriously engage the question of Japanese fascism. Given his popularity and influence in the field, his conceptualization serves as a useful point of departure in assessing how the concept has been considered in modern Japanese history. However, before considering his

³⁶ Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

postwar critique and theory, a short biographical sketch will help contextualize and further clarify his position.

Maruyama was born in 1914 in the city of Osaka. His father, Maruyama Kanji was a prominent liberal journalist who had long been critical of the government and promoted democratic reform.³⁸ His father and close friend Hasegawa Nyozeikan (1875-1969), an influential social critic and also a strong advocate for liberal democracy, played a significant role in forging the young Maruyama's intellectual development and political beliefs.³⁹ Maruyama studied at Tokyo Imperial University and upon graduating from the Faculty of Law in the 1930s, began researching and teaching there throughout the 1940s until being drafted into the Japanese Imperial Army in 1944.⁴⁰ As a member of the army, Maruyama would see some of the devastating effects of the wartime regime's policies first hand. He was first sent to Pyongyang, Korea, where he would witness the reality of Japan's vision of the "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere." Shortly thereafter, he was subsequently sent to the outskirts of Hiroshima and was near the city when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on August 6th, 1945.⁴¹ Maruyama's experience in the army had an effect on his political views, more than anything reinforcing his belief in the emancipatory potential of a liberal democracy. Once the war ended, Maruyama subsequently returned to his post teaching at the University of Tokyo where he became one of the most prominent and popular intellectuals in postwar Japan and championed democratic reform. As one of the principal advocates of democracy, his analysis of fascism and the wartime regime must be understood as part of his larger project of political subjectivity in

³⁸ Andrew Barshay, *State and Intellectual in Imperial Japan: The Public Man in Crisis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 248.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Andrew Barshay, *The Social Sciences in Japan: The Marxian and Modernist Traditions* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 208.

⁴¹ J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 170.

Japan, which examined the prewar period in order to grasp how democracy had failed against the rise of fascism. In light of this brief biographical sketch, let us turn to his understanding and theory of Japanese fascism.

As one of the first to seriously engage the question of fascism, Maruyama made an important observation by suggesting that when approaching the subject one must distinguish between fascism as a movement and fascism as a state structure.⁴² This distinction is crucial in understanding how Maruyama perceived fascism to have developed in Japan. For Maruyama, the development of fascism can be divided into three stages, which he defines in “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism” as follows. The first stage, what he called the *preparatory period*, started at the end of the First World War and continued to the Manchurian Incident in 1931.⁴³ This first stage, according to Maruyama, was marked by the emergence of right-wing movements amongst civilians that he carefully notes were not necessarily fascist, but shared certain reactionary sentiments.⁴⁴ According to Maruyama, the right-wing movements that arose during the wake of the First World War were a result of the increasing radicalization of the democratic movements as a result of the events of the Russian Revolution.⁴⁵ The rise of communism and the radical left were thus seen as causing a strong counter movement that was increasingly pushed towards the far-right. Therefore, it is evident that for Maruyama, fascism is an aggressive reactionary movement. In Maruyama’s words:

[...] [fascism] has no positive goals, no unambiguous policies. If it has a single objective, then it is simply that of counter-revolution. Hence its slogans can take only a negative form—*anti-communism*, *anti-semitism*. Hence also the fact that, when it adopts the form

⁴² Maruyama Masao, “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism,” *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, Translated by Andrew Fraser, Ivan Morris, ed. (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1969), 25.

⁴³ The Manchurian Incident refers to the events that led to the full-scale invasion, and occupation of Manchuria that eventually led to the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo. The Manchurian Incident and subsequent occupation are analyzed in detail in Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

⁴⁴ Maruyama Masao, “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism,” 27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

of single-party dictatorship, it will attempt to make counter-revolution into a permanent form of government on the ideological level as well as on practical grounds.⁴⁶

Leaving the benefit of hindsight for a moment, there are a few issues that are worth discussing before continuing with the other stages of his periodization. While Maruyama is correct in identifying fascism as reactionary and counter-revolutionary, he fails to connect this to the larger historical context of global capitalist modernity. It was modernity itself that created the conditions necessary for the emergence of fascism and not simply the Bolshevik Revolution. Likewise, communism, though certainly empowered by the successes in Russia, was also contingent and made possible only by modernity. The appeal of these movements during this period was that they both sought, though in far different ways, to overcome the antinomies of modernity.

Furthermore, what remains somewhat peculiar of his account is that despite differentiating between fascism as a movement and as a political structure, Maruyama does not look beyond the political aspects. The movement of fascism that he is referring to is made up strictly of organizations with political motives, such as the *National Founding Association* and the *Society of Those Who Remain*. Though he does not completely dismiss the role of journalism, philosophy, and other cultural industries, for Maruyama the influence of these are minimal and secondary at best. Looking at the other stages in the development of fascism, his conceptualization of fascism in primarily political terms will be made further evident.

Following the *preparatory period* of fascism is the *period of maturity*, which covers the fallout of the Manchurian Incident to the events of the February Incident of 1936.⁴⁷ As

⁴⁶ Maruyama Masao, "Fascism—Some Problems: A Consideration of its Political Dynamics," *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, Translated by Ronald Dore, Ivan Morris, ed. (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1969), 175.

Maruyama notes, in this period “what had simply been a movement among civilians became concretely linked with segments of military power [...]”⁴⁸ From the events of the February Incident to the end of the war marks the final *consummation period* and denotes what Maruyama considers to be the fascist period of Japanese history, lasting roughly ten years. In this period, Maruyama notes that the military, now openly supporting fascism, along with the bureaucracy, monopoly capital, and political parties formed an unstable ruling coalition.⁴⁹ These two periods are revealing as they indicate that for Maruyama, the military played a crucial role in the development of Japanese fascism. Moreover, he believed it was the military that served as the model for Japanese fascism. Therefore, once again, we see that Maruyama considers fascism almost exclusively in terms of a political structure. By placing the responsibility for fascism on the military, he was also attempting to remove responsibility from the people of Japan, including intellectuals, journalists, students, and even the Emperor. For Maruyama, fascism was not the dominant ideology amongst the majority of the Japanese people, and thus he is in a sense arguing against the existence of a culture of Japanese fascism. Though there was obviously some support for the wartime regime, it was not pervasive. In Maruyama’s words,

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. Rather their mood was generally one of vague antipathy towards it, an antipathy that amounted almost to passive resistance.⁵⁰

Thus, it is evident that for Maruyama, fascism existed at the top of the political structure and was not the pervasive ideology amongst most of the population. In his understanding of Japanese fascism, we see that it is the military that is truly fascist and that they structured society in such a

⁴⁷ The February Incident of 1936 was an attempted *coup d'état* by members of the Japanese Imperial army. Ben-Ami Shillony has written one of the most thorough accounts of the events in his work *Revolt in Japan: The Young Officers and the February 26, 1936 Incident* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

⁴⁸ Maruyama Masao, “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism,” 27.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

way that resistance became impossible. This point is made further evident by looking at his conception of the role of the Emperor in Japanese fascism.

In his essay “Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism,” Maruyama focuses on the ideological underpinnings of Japanese fascism. The Emperor, he argues, played a fundamental role in the development and legitimation of Japanese fascism. However, one should not think that it was the Emperor himself who brought about fascism in Japan. On the other hand, the Emperor served as a type of national symbol who was reified as a supra-historical figure, embodying both civilization and righteousness. As the embodiment of righteousness, there was no freedom of belief, and thus the individual’s capacity to think and act was supplanted by the demands of the state. To quote Maruyama:

[A]ll the internal values of truth, morality, and beauty, neither scholarship nor art could exist apart from these national values. They were, in fact, totally dependent on them... in other words, the definition of what was actually for the good of the country, was handed down by official whose duty it was to give loyal service ‘to His Majesty the Emperor and the Imperial Government.’⁵¹

As the ultimate value, the structure of Japanese society was inherently relative to the Emperor acting as something that could transcend both time and space. Furthermore, the Empire of Japan could likewise be regarded as the culmination of the truth, the good, and the beautiful. As such, those acting in the name of the Empire could do no wrong as their actions were seen as being created by the ultimate value itself and was thus necessarily moral. On this point, Maruyama has highlighted one of the main tenets of fascist romanticism, namely the idea that morality is not rationalized or *a priori*. However, while Maruyama is right to make this observation he goes on to suggest that because of this individual citizens were prevented from acting independently as there was no distinction between the private and public domains. Therefore, in a sense,

⁵¹ Maruyama Masao, “Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism,” *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, Translated and Edited by Ivan Morris (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1969), 6.

Maruyama is arguing that fascism was a sort of state induced trance in which people were prevented from acting independently, as morality was itself created by outward action. Again, it becomes clear that he is primarily seeking to remove responsibility for Japanese fascism out of the hands of the majority of the Japanese people, instead placing it on the shoulders of those at the top echelons of the bureaucracy and military. Thus, Maruyama has invoked a sort of ‘victim’s consciousness’ for ordinary Japanese citizens whereby resistance was impossible and futile. Japanese fascism as implemented from the top down served as one of the cornerstones of Maruyama’s theory and deserves further elaboration, as this is perhaps the main distinction he makes between the Japanese and European forms of fascism. Thus in order to grasp this theory of the Japanese top down approach to fascism, let us turn to some of the differences that he points to.

When analyzing the differences between the Japanese and European inflections of Fascism, Maruyama begins by noting that there are several characteristics that all fascist manifestations share, of which the Japanese case is no different. All manifestations share the emphasis on racial myths, militarization, the rejection of liberalism, and Marxism. However, it is the particularities of Japanese fascism that make it “even more absurd in content than those of Germany and Italy.”⁵² Unlike Italy and Germany, there was no *coup d’État* in Japan.⁵³ The driving force of fascism was rather the bureaucracy and military, unlike Italy and Germany where fascism found support from the lower middle class and intellectuals.⁵⁴ According to Maruyama, this difference is crucial as fascism emerged from the existing political structure and was thus an imposition from the top down. Furthermore, he saw the grassroots fascist movements in Japan as ultimately failing, whereby they were not particularly popular or

⁵² Maruyama Masao, “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism,” 63.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

widespread, and once absorbed into the military's fascism they became one of the most defiant anti-government groups on the political scene.⁵⁵ Thus, unlike in Europe, he argues that Japanese fascism did not have popular support and had been imposed by the state, rather than seen as overtaking the state.

Imposed from the top down, the possibility for fascism in Japan was thus tied to what Maruyama deemed to be an 'incomplete modernity.' Japan's incomplete modernity was characterized by the feudal remnants that remained despite modernization. The simultaneous existence of both old and new prevented the emergence of a modern political subject that was evident by the absence of a bourgeois revolution. For Maruyama, one of the best examples of this can be found in agriculture. He reasons that the development of capitalism in Japan was always done at the expense of agriculture. Though large-scale industry had modernized, feudal production methods remained commonplace in small-scale agriculture, and thus the most advanced and primitive techniques existed side by side.⁵⁶ Feudal absolutism and monopoly capital, rather than competing, began reinforcing each other. According to Maruyama, it was this co-existence that was the decisive obstacle in the emergence of a modern Japanese political subject that was necessary for a strong democratic movement amongst the citizens of Japan.

Maruyama's theory of fascism, as outlined above, points to a number of significant issues that are worth further examining against the conception of fascism that this thesis previously presented. Given that for Maruyama fascism in Japan was structured and emerged as a result of Japan's 'incomplete modernity,' should it have 'completed' its modernity, then the possibility of fascism would likely not have existed. Aside from this view serving as a means of eliminating the responsibility of the wartime government's actions from the majority of the people, it

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 74-75.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

suggests that the project for postwar Japan should be in ‘completing’ its modernity with which the possibility for fascism returning would be removed. Understanding Maruyama’s reification of August 15, 1945 as a new beginning can help elucidate this claim. Maruyama notes, “[...] what is called Japanese fascism, especially as a State structure, collapsed on 15 August 1945.”⁵⁷ However, he goes on to suggest that the end of the war itself does not eliminate the possibility of fascism returning, as the conditions still exist, Japan’s modernity remains incomplete. Thus, when Maruyama suggests that the establishment of a modern political consciousness is the primary task of the postwar period, he is in a sense trying to use the new beginning that the postwar period offers as the chance to complete modernity.⁵⁸ There are two issues with his theory of incomplete modernity and reification of August 15 that are worth discussing further.

With respect to his theory of Japan’s incomplete modernity, one should be cautious to think that the existence of both old and new is an indication of failing to modernize. Though certain pre or non-modern traditions and values remain in capitalist modernity, they do not maintain their original form. Rather, these traditions are re-constituted in the modern form and are thus ubiquitous in all modern societies. Furthermore, what is problematic with Maruyama’s reification of August 15, 1945 is that this view suggests that fascism is a sort of aberration of modernity, rather than distinctively modern. As demonstrated earlier, the possibility for fascism exists only in modernity, understood in terms of global capitalism.⁵⁹ The suggestion that ‘completing’ modernity would eliminate the possibility for the development of fascism is incorrect and highlights Maruyama’s failure to grasp the conditions of possibility that led to fascism. This is because the only way in which the possibility for fascism could truly be eliminated, would be by eliminating modernity itself.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁸ J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan*, 174.

⁵⁹ This position has been influenced by Harootunian’s *Overcome by Modernity*, especially the preface, pp. ix-xxxii.

In addition to promoting a theory of ‘incomplete modernity’ and top down approach for the emergence of Japanese fascism, there are three other significant points that Maruyama points to in further postulating the uniqueness of Japanese fascism from its European counterparts. First, Japan was uniquely characterized by its emphasis of a family-system whereby the entire nation is structured as a sort of extension of the family. On this point Maruyama cites a statement by the chief secretary of the Japan Village Government League Tsuda Kōzō who stated:

[i]n the family-system principle of Japan the keynote society is not the demand for individual rights, as in the modern countries of the West, but service to the family as a whole... Our nationalism should be the extension and enlargement of this family-system principle. The Emperor is the sovereign... and general representative of the State as a united body.⁶⁰

Evident in this statement is the notion that at the center of this family-state was the Emperor. At this point it is worth interjecting our analysis to briefly discuss the role of the Emperor in Japanese fascism in Maruyama’s thought and more generally, as Japanese fascism is often referred to as ‘Emperor system fascism’ its role is central and must be considered. This is also important to our own discussion on Nishida’s relationship with fascism as Nishida was an unmistakable supporter of the Emperor.

In many ways Maruyama is right to argue that within the fascist ideology the Emperor was a national symbol, a crystallization of a timeless Japanese culture, and the embodiment of truth and morality. On the other hand, as we saw earlier, Maruyama was apologetic towards the Emperor considering him in a more passive role, even suggesting in the postwar period that the Emperor was not antithetical to democracy in Japan.⁶¹ Since the publication of Maruyama’s essay the Emperor’s involvement in the wartime actions has become well known following a

⁶⁰ Maruyama Masao, “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism,” 37.

⁶¹ Rikki Kersten, *Democracy in Postwar Japan: Maruyama Masao and the Search for Autonomy* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 17.

number of major works published on the reign of Emperor Hirohito as information on his rule became more available.⁶² Thus, we are now afforded with a considerable degree of hindsight that can better inform our understanding of the Emperor's direct relationship with fascism. However, the significance of the Emperor's relationship does not lie in his direct involvement, as any analysis emphasizing this aspect runs the risk of overstating his personal agency and control over the situation, as well as exonerating the system that resulted in the very reification of the Emperor as a concrete manifestation of a timeless Japanese culture by placing the burden on one, or a few people.⁶³ As we alluded to in the analysis so far, and will develop further later in this chapter, conditions of possibility for the reification of the emperor as this figure were part the larger historical process of global modernity. As fascism promised to provide the cure to the transforming social relations of capitalist society, the Emperor served as the connection to the past. The fact that the Emperor continues to serve a similar role, as a symbol that links the past to the present extending into the future, shows just how much the role is shaped by the conditions of global capitalism.

Returning to Maruyama's theory of the uniqueness of Japanese fascism, he adds to list the emphasis on agrarianism, and the greater Asia principle. The importance of agrarianism has been alluded to previously in the discussion of Maruyama's theory of an 'incomplete modernity' as he saw Japanese fascism relying on an archaic agrarian principle to mobilize the countryside. On the other hand, the greater Asia principle served as a means of legitimizing Japan's colonization of Asia by proposing that it was only the Japanese that could free the Asian people

⁶² See for example, Irokawa Daikichi, *The Age of Hirohito: In Search of Modern Japan* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1995). Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York, NY: Perennial, 2001). An earlier, more contested work that explores this theme is David Bergamini's *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy* (New York, NY: Morrow, 1971). This work was met with major criticism upon its release and has often been overlooked in the historiography. Its absence in the historiography and the resistance that exists in the contemporary historiography to tie the Japanese imperial house to the wartime actions of the government is discussed in Harry Harootunian, "Hirohito Redux," *Critical Asian Studies*. Vol. 33, No. 4 (2001), 609-636.

⁶³ Harry Harootunian, "Hirohito Redux," 614-616.

from the grips of Western colonization.⁶⁴ Given the importance of the greater Asia principle in Nishida's own connection to Japanese fascism this point will be developed in greater detail in the third chapter when examining his essay on the new world order. At this point, the importance of the greater Asia principle in Maruyama's discussion lies in its uniqueness to the Japanese inflection of fascism. Given the vast differences between Maruyama's conception of Japanese and European fascism that he has postulated, critics eagerly point to these as examples as to why Japan should not be considered fascist. Japan may have been militaristic, but they were not fascist.⁶⁵ The analysis of Maruyama's conception of fascism has shown that despite some of the lucid points he makes, he is ultimately incapable of accounting for the differences between the various forms of fascism. His failure to grasp fascism in terms of its relationship to global capitalist modernity has plagued his account of the period. It would seem that his conception of fascism as a result of an incomplete modernity, served as a means of absolving the responsibility for the wartime actions from the majority of the people of Japan, including intellectuals. This suggests that for Maruyama, Japan lacked a 'culture of fascism,' and thus it was not the dominant ideology but rather imposed as such. However, let us look to some of the critics of Japanese fascism to see how his conception eventually contributed to its gradual disavowal in describing Japan during the interwar and wartime periods.

⁶⁴ Maruyama Masao, "The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism," 51.

⁶⁵ James Fulcher's examination of the bureaucracy in Japan from the Tokugawa Shogunate to the postwar period is an example of this view. The military expansion and colonization of Asia, he argues, was not the result of a fascist culture but rather a disintegration of the bureaucratic state to the military powers. See James Fulcher, "The Bureaucratization of the State and the Rise of Japan," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jun., 1988), pp. 228-254.

Fascism and Japan: The Failure of a Concept?

The steady repudiation of the concept of fascism to describe Japan is perhaps best signified at the beginning of Peter Duus and Daniel I. Okimoto's essay, "Fascism and the History of Pre-War Japan: The Failure of a Concept" where they lament "old paradigms never die; they just fade away, though not soon enough."⁶⁶ This essay is worth examining briefly, for in addition to the general issues that plague the use of fascism in Japan, they also further exemplify the problems with Maruyama's theory of fascism.

In addition to the problems directly related to the use of fascism to describe wartime Japan, they note that the concept in general suffers from numerous empirical and logical problems. For one, and this continues to plague the use of the term, there is a certain ambiguity of the term given the numerous definitions that exist. Of the definitions, they argue that some are so narrow that the differences between the various manifestations cannot be accounted for. However, the opposite problem also exists, defined too broadly, the concept encompasses so much that it is rendered almost meaningless. In addition to these definitional problems, they note that fascism has often been used to signify a certain age in the development of industrial society and thus suffers from the rigid periodization of history typical of stage theories.⁶⁷ With respect to the case of Japan, the problems run even deeper. Citing Maruyama as one of the most influential and best arguments for the case of Japanese fascism they note that,

[...] but neither Maruyama, nor anyone else until recently, has pressed on to the obvious conclusion: the Japanese case is so dissimilar that it is meaningless to speak of Japan in the 1930s as a "fascist" political system. Sometimes incidental differences add up to an essential difference.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Peter Duus and Daniel I. Okimoto, "Fascism and the History of Pre-War Japan: The Failure of a Concept," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Nov., 1979), 65.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

Of course the authors do not dismiss that there were fascist movements or ideas in Japan during this period, but they existed “[...] only as a minor side current.”⁶⁹

What remains of particular interest in their assessment of Japanese fascism is the manner in which they construct their argument. Duus and Okimoto are not arguing in defense of the wartime regime, nor are they defending any of their actions or policies. Rather, they are arguing that the concept of fascism does more harm than good in allowing one to get an accurate picture of the historical period. Had they not have been arguing against the use of fascism to describe Japan, one would almost think that they were defending Maruyama’s theory as they support the view that the responsibility of Japan’s actions throughout the interwar and wartime periods lies on the military and high levels of government. Somewhat ironically, it is ultimately Maruyama’s theory that portrays Japanese fascism as ‘unique’ that had ultimately problematized its use.

It is only recently that scholars have started considering the broader cultural aspects of fascism that the term has been rehabilitated in its applicability to Japan. The attention has shifted from the politics to the cultural underpinnings, whereby the focus is now on how literature, philosophy, film, and other ‘cultural industries’ both reflect the atmosphere of the period, as well as contributed to the advancement of the movement. The most notable examples of those who have approached fascism from this angle are Harry Harootunian and Alan Tansman, who have both been briefly discussed throughout this thesis. As some of their positions have already been identified and examined, the analysis that follows will remain concise by highlighting what their respective articulations of fascism are and some of the shortcomings their positions possess.

Harootunian’s inquiry into the culture of interwar and wartime Japan has greatly influenced the historical discourse, but as identified earlier, he has also been the subject of

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

considerable criticism. In describing the emergence of Japanese fascism he notes, “Fascism in Japan, and elsewhere, appeared under the guise of what might be called *gemeinschaft* capitalism and the claims of a social order free from the uncertainties and indeterminacies of an alienated civil society [...]”⁷⁰ He goes on to suggest that “[...] modernism and fascism were contemporary to each other sharing the temporality of simultaneity and constantly imbricating each other in such a way as to constitute a network of thick intertexts.”⁷¹ Harootunian’s analysis of fascism thus rightly points to it being intrinsically linked with capitalist modernity. For, the opening up of the space for which an appetite for something like fascism emerges is in the unevenness of capitalist development, which is why fascism seeks a time and place for which the social abstractions of capitalism modernity have yet to penetrate, or better yet cannot penetrate.⁷² In Harootunian’s analysis it is also evident that he goes beyond the narrow confines of fascism as a political system and extends it to the broader cultural landscape of the period by looking at the work of philosophers, literary figures, and filmmakers. Yet, as identified in the historiography of Nishida’s politics provided in the introduction, his critics have remained unsatisfied with his approach. They charge that he lacks a concrete understanding of fascism, as he does not approach the concept directly. However, as the aforementioned analysis has shown, this critique is somewhat unfair as Harootunian, though perhaps not explicitly enough for his critics does provide an understanding of fascism via the uneven development of capitalism. The conception

⁷⁰ Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture and Community in Interwar Japan*, xxx.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xxxi.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 216-217. On the uneven development of capitalism, Harootunian argues that capitalism is signified by a state of constant expansion of excess, surplus, and profits (xv). As a result the “price paid for continual expansion is the production of permanent unevenness, permanent imbalance between various sectors of the social formations, the process by which some areas must be sacrificed for others, such as the countryside for the city in the early days of Japan’s transformation, as noted by Yanagita Kunio, the colony for the metropole, or even one city for another” (xv). The link between uneven development and the rise of fascism in his analysis is influenced by Ernst Bloch, who as early as 1932 had written on this connection and almost foreshadowed the rise of fascism through its ability to promise to solve this crisis. See Ernst Bloch, “Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics,” *New German Critique*. Translated by Mark Ritter. No. 11 (Spring, 1977), pp. 22-38.

of fascism that has been put forth in this chapter has thus attempted to address these critics by addressing the concept directly, expounding on the romantic origins of the movement, and its relationship with capitalist modernity.

More recently, Tansman has examined the aesthetics of Japanese fascism to show that there was a prevalent culture of fascism in Japan that spanned the 1920s to the end of the Second World War. Tansman's concept of the 'fascist moment,' as previously discussed is an important contribution as it highlights the impact of seemingly apolitical works to the fascist movement. However, there is one issue that persists in Tansman's work. Though he connects fascism to modernity, seeing fascism as a response to the fracturing forces of modernity, his definition of modernity leaves much to be desired. He defines it as the following:

By "modernity" I mean something as general as what Schiller called the "disenchantment of the world," the earlier, poetic version of the process Weber would later come to call secularization. It is a time of "blankness," lacking former myths and other objects of unselfconscious worship... Such "blankness" provides a clean slate on which to inscribe new myths, as well as opportunities for re-enchanting the world.⁷³

That this is connected to anything more concrete is only evident in a small footnote that comes at the end of the paragraph where he notes, "[f]or T.J. Clark, arguing in the Marxian tradition, the blankness of secularization and the disorienting character of modernity are propelled by the accumulation of capital and the spread of capitalist markets."⁷⁴ What exactly Tansman means by modernity is questionable as his position is theoretically weak, and demands further elaboration on his part given that the crux of his argument for Japanese fascism rests on the concept of modernity. Therefore, this thesis has sought to develop some of the shortcomings of Tansman's conception of fascism as a means of providing a more concrete understanding and theoretically grounded argument. At this point, with the understanding of fascism provided

⁷³ Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, 14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fn 17

earlier in the chapter, and in light of how fascism has been understood in the historiography of modern Japan, let us turn to the conditions of possibility for the existence of fascism in Japan.

Fascism and the History of Interwar Japan: A Substantiated Connection

A fundamental hypothesis of this thesis is that the conditions of possibility necessary for the emergence of fascism, namely capitalist modernity, existed in Japan. Beginning in the 1920s, there was a pervasive culture of fascism that emerged, though it is possible to see the beginning of a fascist aesthetic, realized in ‘fascist moments,’ in a number of philosophical and literary works as early as the turn of the century. The emergence of fascism was interlaced with the increasing sense of crisis that dominated the atmosphere of the period. This sense of crisis, as highlighted earlier, was the result of the various, and continuous, transformations of society brought on by the process of modernization that was linked to the pursuit of increasing surplus-value that marks capitalist modernity.

One of the most optically drastic changes that accompanied these transformations was the massive urbanization that followed the transition to an industrial capitalist mode of production. By the end of the Tokugawa period, Japan had a population of approximately 31.5 million people, with an urban population of about four million.⁷⁵ Edo (renamed Tōkyō following the Meiji Restoration when it was once again named the capital of Japan) was the largest city, with approximately 1.1 to 1.4 million people living there in the final years of the

⁷⁵ Jean-Noël Biraben, “Le point sur l’histoire de la population du Japon,” *Population*. Vol. 48, No. 2 (Mar. – Apr., 1993), 453. The Urban population estimation comes from Thomas Oberson Wilkinson, *The Urbanization of Japanese Labour, 1868-1955* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1965), 24.

Tokugawa period.⁷⁶ The next two largest cities were Osaka and Kyoto, which were a little more than half the size of the population of Edo, while Nagoya, Hiroshima, and Sendai all had populations exceeding 50 000, mark some of the other major cities and towns in Japan during this period.⁷⁷

Following the Meiji Restoration, both the overall and urban populations rapidly increased. The population of Japan had increased to just less than 56 million in 1920, and reached 73 million by 1940.⁷⁸ The urban population of around four million at the end of the Tokugawa period had likewise tremendously increased to around 10 million in 1920, and that more than doubled to over 27 million in 1940. Over the same time period, the rural population actually decreased by about 300 000, though this was likely due to the war effort as the population slightly increased following the war. With respect to Tokyo, and the other major cities, the population increases were staggering. In 1920, Tokyo had doubled its Tokugawa period population to approximately 2.2 million. This more than tripled to about 6.8 million in 1940. Similarly, Kyoto and Osaka in 1920 had populations of approximately 590 000 and 1.2 million respectively. By 1940, these populations had drastically increased to slightly over one million in Kyoto and about 3.3 million in Osaka.

As mentioned previously, engendering these demographic changes was the emergence of an industrial mode of production that can be further highlighted by drawing on some governmental statistics of the period.⁷⁹ For example, corporations related to the manufacturing

⁷⁶ Thomas Oberson Wilkinson, *The Urbanization of Japanese Labour, 1868-1955*, 22.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Statistics Bureau, Director-General for Policy Planning (Statistical Standards) & Statistical Research and Training Institute. Historical Statistics of Japan, Chapter 2 subsection 7 "Population, Population Density, Population of Densely Inhabited Districts and Area by Prefecture, All Shi and All Gun (1898-2005). [<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/chouki/02.htm>] Population statistics from here on are from this source unless otherwise stated.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Statistics Bureau, Director-General for Policy Planning (Statistical Standards) & Statistical Research and Training Institute. Historical Statistics of Japan, Chapter 6,

industry rose from 2 577 in 1903 (the first year statistics are available) to more than 23 000 in 1935 and around 45 000 in 1943. Likewise, corporations related to commerce rose from 6 492 in 1903 to more than 54 000 in 1935. These large increases point to an increasingly modern workforce, which highlights the commodification of labour power during this period of rapid industrial expansion. That these changes to the landscape of Japan affected the atmosphere of the period are impossible to identify by engaging a statistical analysis, as statistics can often be misleading, concealing the various social and economic problems that were experienced as a result of these changes. Therefore, let us turn our focus to the work of Kobayashi Hideo (1902-1983) in order to exemplify how these changes affected the mood of the period.

Kobayashi's May 1933 essay "Literature of the Lost Home" captures the atmosphere of the period that resulted from these demographic transformations perfectly. Near the beginning of the essay Kobayashi bemoans, "'Born in Tokyo' – I cannot fathom what that really means. Mine is an unsettled feeling that I have no home."⁸⁰ He continues:

Where there is no memory, there is no home. If a person does not possess powerful memories, created from an accumulation of hard and fast images that a hard a fast environment provides, he will not know that sense of well-being which brims over in the word *kokyō* (home town; native place). No matter where I search within myself for such a feeling, I do not find it. Looking back, I see that from an early age my feelings were distorted by an endless series of changes occurring too fast. Never was there sufficient time to nurture the sources of a power and enduring memory, attached to the concrete and the particular. I had memories but they possessed no actuality, no substance.⁸¹

The sense of displacement that Kobayashi alludes to, as a result of the never-ending transformations to society, illustrates perfectly what Marx and Engels had captured in the *Communist Manifesto* when they suggested, "all that is solid melts into air."

subsection 8-a, "Corporations by Industry (1903-1949)" [<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/chouki/06.htm>]. Statistics that follow are from the same source.

⁸⁰ Kobayashi Hideo, "Literature of the Lost Home," *Literature of the Lost Home: Kobayashi Hideo—Literary Criticism, 1924-1939*. Translated and Edited by Paul Anderer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 48.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

If Kobayashi had been the first, or the only writer to highlight the transformations to Japanese society, and the ills of modernity, one might be able to argue against the existence, though not the conditions of possibility, of fascism. However, this mood is also captured perfectly in the work of Kawabata Yasunari, who is largely considered the Japanese modernist writer *par excellence*. Kawabata's work from the interwar period powerfully, yet subtly, conveys the cultural crisis of the period by highlighting the confrontation between tradition and modernity. One of his first short stories published, *The White Flower* (1924), portrays this conflict in almost hopeless terms. The story, very short, fragmented and poetic, tells the story of a young girl who on the way to see her cousin on his deathbed ends up in a sanatorium. The confrontation between tradition and modernity are first highlighted in an exchange between the girl (without name, referred to only as she, or the girl) and the doctor. Initially grateful that he has cured her from illness, her mood quickly changes to anger when the doctor says to her: "How often I've gazed at your body in an emotional way. But I've also gazed at your body all over in a rational way. To me, as a doctor, your body was a laboratory."⁸² With this she suddenly begins to feel hatred towards the doctor, and the reader is thrown into another exchange, this time with a young writer. Unlike the doctor, the writer is not focused on what is rational, but rather what is beautiful. The writer says to the girl, "you bring beauty like a fragrance that you can't see with the naked eye, like the pollen that perfumes the spring fields... with such beautiful material—if I weren't a novelist, my emotions could not have let you live into the distant future."⁸³ Like the comments from the doctor, her mood shifts to one of hatred.

These two exchanges are allegorical of the modernization of Japan and the confrontation with tradition. Modernization allowed Japan to evade colonization by the West and Kawabata

⁸² Kawabata Yasunari, "The White Flower," *Palm of the Hand Stories*. Translated by Lane Dunlop and J. Martin Holman (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988), 28.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 29.

acknowledges this aspect with the doctor curing the illness of the girl. However, the dogmatic rationality of modernity, even in issues of beauty is a problem of modernity, and a major concern of Kawabata's. However, Kawabata, through the exchange between the novelist and the girl, acknowledges that tradition (represented by the novelist) will not suffice in the modern world. Though there is a strong impression of hopelessness in face of the confrontation between tradition and modernity, the ending hints at something else, a possible overcoming: "[s]he sat alone in her own room... [a]s she peered up her white skin that gradually grew limpid... "if some man would woo me with one word..." she felt like nodding. And she smiled."⁸⁴

With this, it is possible to see that not only did the conditions of possibility for fascism exist in Japan, but that there was an emerging culture of fascism. In this story by Kawabata, it is possible to see two elements of the fascist romantic worldview that were pervasive in Japan during this period. The most obvious is the critique of rationality that was exhibited the girl's hatred for the doctor who saw her as a 'laboratory.' This critique of rationality, as something that overlooked true beauty, was a major theme in all of Kawabata's works. Furthermore, the ending of the story is an excellent example of how Kawabata is hesitant to dismiss modernity outright, which is evident in the doctor curing the girl as well as her hatred for the writer who refuses to see anything besides beauty. Thus, he was flawlessly able to depict the crisis that emerged from the confrontation between tradition and modernity. Moreover, this significantly reflects the fascist aesthetic, which is simultaneously both old and new. Therefore, with both Kobayashi and Kawabata it is possible to see that not only did the conditions of possibility for fascism exist in Japan, but that there was an emerging culture of fascism. While Kobayashi

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

highlights the sense of displacement caused by modernity, examining Kawabata reveals the more subtle critique of rationality.⁸⁵

What has been outlined above has attempted to put this volatile period of Japanese history into a global context by highlighting that the conditions necessary for the emergence of romanticism, and its derivative fascism, are found in capitalist modernity. Whenever one is in capitalist modernity the conditions for fascism exist and as a result Japan can and should be regarded as fascist from the late 1920s until the end of the war. Given the relation to capitalism is difficult to understand why it was Japan, Germany, and Italy where fascism was able to take hold and become the dominant ideology. Some, mostly Marxists, have proposed a late modernization theory to answer this question and therefore they reacted more aggressively to the transformations that occurred. However, as Harootunian demonstrates, fascism can be found throughout the globe during this time in many if not all modern nations. The United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and France, all had fascist movements during this time. They simply never took hold in the same way, never becoming the dominant ideology. What seems to be the case for the emergence of fascism during this period in these countries is an almost perfect storm, whereby a strong centralized state comes together with a growing culture of fascism at the

⁸⁵ Though it lies beyond the scope of this thesis, both Kobayashi and Kawabata can be, like Nishida, linked with the ideological foundations of Japanese fascism through shared themes and characteristics with the fascist aesthetic. Both Tansman and Harootunian, already discussed in this chapter, have commented on the links between Kobayashi and Japanese fascism. See also James Dorsey, *Critical Aesthetics: Kobayashi Hideo, Modernity, and Wartime Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009). There are also many scholars, such as Paul Anderer, who are hesitant to make this connection. On the subject, Anderer argues that while “[i]n no sense did his wartime writings represent resistance literature [...] neither was Kobayashi a crude apologist for the military or Japanese expansionism [...]” See Paul Anderer, “Introduction,” *Literature of the Lost Home: Kobayashi Hideo—Literary Criticism, 1924-1939*, 3. The connection with Kawabata is a more difficult and contested connection to make on account of his status in Japanese literature and his Nobel Prize win. Tansman, along with Nina Cornyetz, has also extensively commented on the relationship between Kawabata and fascism. The argument put forth by these scholars, like that attempted in this thesis with respect to Nishida, is that the work despite being ostensibly apolitical it shares a fascist aesthetic and given the problematization of politics in wartime Japan the work offers a powerful, yet tacit, support for the actions of the wartime regime. In addition to Tansman see Nina Cornyetz, “Fascist Aesthetics and the Politics of Representation in Kawabata Yasunari,” *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*. Alan Tansman, ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 322-354.

grassroots level. With respect to grasping Nishida's relationship with fascism, the purpose of this chapter was to show that one must look beyond the political aspects of fascism in order to uncover the romantic aesthetic core of the ideology that was fuelled through cultural productions such as philosophy, film, and literature.

Chapter 2: Philosophy at the End of the Meiji: Zen no kenkyū and The Origins of Nishida tetsugaku

Nishida Kitarō's popularity and reputation as the preeminent Japanese thinker and 'father of modern Japanese philosophy' is perhaps no more evident than in the resurgence of his popularity in the immediate postwar period. In July 1947, two years after his death and the end of the Pacific War, over two hundred people lined up three days in advance outside the Iwanami bookstore in the Kanda district of Tokyo to purchase the first postwar edition of his collected works.¹ By this time, Nishida's seminal text *Zen no kenkyū* (1911) had long been popular in Japan, having been regarded as a sort of 'contemporary classic' and must read amongst the youth in the 1920s. Yet, despite his reputation as the 'father of modern Japanese philosophy' that followed the publication of *Zen no kenkyū* on account of his 'unique' synthesis of Eastern and Western thought, the language and structure of the philosophical discourse had largely been formed by the transformations that followed the Meiji Restoration. Therefore, Nishida's thought was itself similarly shaped by the conditions of global modernity. While Nishida's contribution to the history of Japanese philosophy should not be diminished on this account, one must

¹ John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 186. See also J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan*, 88.

acknowledge that his thought was as much shaped by the intellectual currents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as he helped shape them. Therefore, recognizing his thought with respect to the larger historical transformations occurring in Japan, and more importantly the world, is crucial in dispelling the notion that his thought represents a unique Japanese alternative to Western philosophy. Instead, Nishida's thought should be regarded as distinctively modern, and as part of a global discourse surrounding the critique of modernity. It is in this critique and his attempts to theorize on the unique specificities of the Japanese character that one can begin to see his contribution to the ideological foundations of fascism, as his work shared a number of similar themes and concerns with the romantic fascist aesthetic.²

This chapter will thus seek to substantiate these claims by contextualizing Nishida's thought within the historical context of the period, beginning with a brief biographical sketch of Nishida's early years. Additionally, some of the major transformations marking Japanese society more broadly during this period, such as the educational reforms, will be addressed as they would have had a major impact on Nishida's intellectual development. Once some of the developments of the period and the impacts on Nishida's own thought have been outlined, the attention will turn to his major work *Zen no kenkyū* whereby a deep reading of the text will be made in an effort to grasp the foundation of his thought, as well as to highlight the various 'fascist moments' that are evoked throughout the text. Thus, even though this work predates the emergence of fascism, it shares many similarities with the fascist aesthetic that within the interwar and wartime period helped foster the conditions and ideological foundations of the fascist movement. As this work contained many of the core ideas that form the foundation of his philosophical system, we will have situated ourselves in such a way that it will be possible to

² His writings on the uniqueness of the Japanese character will be examined in the next chapter, as it is only in his later writings that he began to apply his philosophical categories to these subjects.

turn to some of his later works where the romantic aesthetic core of his ideology is further developed, and his veneration of the Emperor, and primacy of the state as the mediator of individuals are more apparent, revealing a continued influence on the ideological foundations of Japanese fascism.

Contextualizing Nishida's Intellectual Development: The Meiji Educational Reforms and the Emergence of Philosophy in Japan

Born on May 19th, 1870, the third year of the Meiji period, Nishida grew up during a period of rapid social and ideological change that had accompanied the Restoration. The son of Nishida Yasunori (1834-1898) and Tosa (1842-1918), Nishida was born in the small village of Mori outside the city of Kanazawa. Nishida's family had long held the administrative position of *tomura*, which served a mayoral type role that was ultimately responsible for overseeing the affairs of several small, nearby villages.³ Having been unique to Kaga Province, this position was disbanded following the Meiji Restoration when Kaga was made to merge with nearby Noto Province to form Ishikawa Prefecture as part of the Meiji government's efforts to unify and modernize the country.⁴ These changes would no doubt have a major impact on Nishida's upbringing as his family tried to adapt to the transforming social roles of modern Japan. Nishida's father became an educator and landowner until he lost the family fortune in 1892 by investing in the rice market.⁵ Yet, despite some of the setbacks Nishida's family faced during

³ Yusa Michiko, *Zen & Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 5.

⁴ Ishikawa Prefecture remains today. For a thorough examination on the Japanese government's unification efforts during the early Meiji period that uses Ishikawa Prefecture as a case study see James C. Baxter, *The Meiji Unification Through the Lens of Ishikawa Prefecture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1994).

⁵ Yusa Michiko, *Zen & Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō*, 37.

this transformative period, Nishida was able to gain admission into the prestigious University of Tokyo, studying in the newly formed department of philosophy and graduating in 1894. After graduating, Nishida taught at the Fourth Senior High School (what is now Kanazawa University) for ten years before going on to teach at the University of Kyoto in 1910 where he would stay until his retirement in 1928.⁶ Having spent the better part of his life in a formal education setting as both a student and a teacher, perhaps the most impactful of the changes that followed the Meiji Restoration on the young Nishida were the reforms to the education system that were both far-reaching and drastic.

Transforming the education system to meet the demands of a modern society and economy was one of the cornerstones of the Meiji government's modernization project. Prior to the Restoration, formal education had predominantly been available to only the samurai and aristocratic classes. The course of study was primarily centered on the Confucian classics, which had long been emphasized in Japan and throughout the rest of Asia. However, with emphasis shifting towards modernization, this model of education was seen as backwards and irrational and was eventually pushed to the wayside. In its place, a Western style education system was sought, which was regarded as both rational and modern. The first major changes to the education system formally came in 1872 with the Fundamental Code of Education (*Gakusei*), which created a comprehensive national education system based on Western models. The *Gakusei* divided the education system into three levels, creating eight universities, two hundred and fifty six middle schools, and 53 760 elementary schools throughout the country.⁷ Whereas in the pre-Meiji period education had been primarily accessible to only the samurais and elites,

⁶ D.S. Clarke, Jr., "Introduction," *Nishida Kitarō* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), viii-ix.

⁷ William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann, eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume 2: 1868 to 2000* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 764.

elementary school became compulsory with the stated goal that “in the future, there shall be no village with an uneducated person.”⁸ These initial changes stayed in effect without significant modification until the Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku chokugo*) in 1890 that prominent Meiji intellectual Inoue Tetsujirō would later call, “the sacred book of Meiji.”⁹

Implemented in 1890, the Imperial Rescript was drafted by a number of court counsellors, scholars, and religious leaders who were growing concerned with what they perceived to be the erosion of morality at both the local and national level. The purpose of the document was thus to provide traditional moral guidelines to accompany the more Western, scientifically oriented education system that had been initiated with the *Gakusei*. As the beginning of the Imperial Rescript states:

Our Imperial Ancestors founded our empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly planted virtue; Our subjects, ever united in loyalty and filial piety, have from generation to generation, illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Nation, and herein also lies the source of Our Education.¹⁰

The rescript thus sought to link education and morality together by appealing to their mutual foundation in the trans-historical character of the Japanese people that were embodied concretely in the emperor. One of the more interesting points to consider with respect to this document is that it was not directed at the individual *per se*, but on the other hand, it was aimed towards the *kokutai* (national polity) as a whole.¹¹ Individualism was increasingly seen as a Western mode of life that caused the fragmentation of society and erosion of traditional values. Therefore, in this document, the *kokutai* came to supersede the individual, whereby the individual was but one

⁸ “Preamble to the Fundamental Code of Education,” *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume 2: 1868 to 2000*, 95.

⁹ Inoue Tetsujirō’s quote is taken from Richard M. Reitan, *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010), 92.

¹⁰ “The Imperial Rescript on Education,” *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume 2: 1868 to 2000* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 108-109.

¹¹ Richard M. Reitan, *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan*, 93.

part of a greater totality, in a sense negating the individual. The *kokutai* was therefore represented as a timeless collective, one that could withstand the social abstractions of global modernity, which had ultimately been the source of the eroding traditional moral values.

With the Imperial Rescript, education was condemned when undertaken for personal pleasure or gain, and was emphasized as something to be pursued for the benefit of the entire nation. Furthermore, for the purpose of harmony, the document went on to call for the subjects of the empire to “always respect the constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the state; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of our imperial throne coeval with heaven and earth.”¹² As Richard M. Reitan has suggested, coalescing morality, education, and one’s duty to the state in a reified timeless collective, the *kokutai*, the Imperial Rescript invoked a sort of performative strategy to ethics and morality, whereby the virtues of the *kokutai* were considered to be innate and having existed throughout the whole of time.¹³ So long as personal action was guided by service to the nation, it was a moral act. Thus, undertaking education for personal gain, or for other motives, became an almost immoral act as it evaded one’s responsibility for the nation.

The changes to the education system outlined above were initiated during the early stages of the Meiji Restoration and would therefore play an important role with respect to Nishida’s own intellectual development, as he was one of the first generation of students that would go through the entirety of the new education system. Nishida’s own efforts to synthesize Eastern and Western philosophy was an indication of the influence of these changes as the discipline of philosophy was introduced in Japan on account of the modernization of the education system.

¹² *Ibid.*, 109.

¹³ Richard M. Reitan, *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan*, 93.

Moreover, they reveal some of the complex issues that mark the debate regarding Nishida's influence and relationship with Japanese fascism.

As mentioned in the introduction, Nishida's criticisms of some of the government policies, particularly those on education, have been a source for those who sympathize with Nishida. One of his most ardent supporters, Yusa Michiko, has pointed to some of his early opposition to the education reforms, dating back to his high school days as an example of his resistance to a centralized, totalitarian government and support for liberal democracy. Drawn on an incident from 1887 in which the government was further attempting to centralize the education system, Nishida and his classmate, Yamamoto Ryōkichi dropped out of high school to show protest these efforts.¹⁴ With respect to this incident Yusa notes, “[b]ehind this resistance lay a firm belief in the legitimacy of the constitutional state and in the efficacy of parliamentary government, political parties, and honest in civil service.”¹⁵ One can agree with Yusa that these protests clearly exhibit a sort of resistance to some of the early reforms, yet it is a leap to argue from events such as this that Nishida did not share a number of similarities with the government ideology in his philosophy, particular in his later years. The above mentioned Imperial Rescript on Education, as we will see, helped create the language and structure of the discourse surrounding morality, ethics, and other related themes in Japan. This is evident in Nishida's own writings, as he often evoked a similar language, and shared a number of themes, most notably that of a performative morality.¹⁶ Thus, while Nishida's contribution to the intellectual discourse helped form the emergence of philosophy in Japan, he was also contributing to an

¹⁴ Yusa Michiko, “Nishida and Totalitarianism: A Philosopher's Resistance,” *Rude Awakenings*, 108. Although Nishida was able to gain admission to Tokyo Imperial University, this incident did affect his early academic career by forcing him to register as a special student, which was looked down upon at the university. See Nishitani Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō*. Translated by Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ This aspect of Nishida's thought will be discussed in detail in the third chapter.

already rich discourse that had started to materialize following the initial Meiji reforms. Before engaging Nishida's thought, it is worth turning to the development of philosophy in Japan more generally in order to better contextualize Nishida within the developments of the period.

As part of the effort to modernize the education system, the University of Tokyo hired Ernest Fenollosa, a young graduate from Harvard University in 1878 to teach in the newly formed department of philosophy. Fenollosa lectured on the history of philosophy from Descartes to Hegel, and was an emphatic supporter of Herbert Spencer.¹⁷ Thus, from the very foundation of the discipline it is evident that if one wanted to study modern philosophy they were essentially made to study Western philosophy. Consequently, the discourse had always been orientated towards the West and modern Japanese philosophy should ultimately be seen as part of that discourse, rather than its own unique one.¹⁸

Introduced in large part by Ernest Fenollosa, there were a number of philosophical currents from Europe and the West that permeated the intellectual atmosphere of the period helping to establish the later discourse. Though English philosophy, such as that of Mill, Bentham, Locke, and Smith were significant, they were predominantly influential in economic and practical matters of the state rather than with respect to the discipline of philosophy itself. Within the discipline of philosophy, American pragmatism was somewhat influential, but it was German thought, which approached the questions and problems of modernity most directly that found the most appeal and garnered the most influence. As contemporary Japanese philosopher Karatani Kojin has argued, "[m]odern Japanese philosophy has been formed by the vocabulary

¹⁷ Van Wyck Brooks, "Ernest Fenollosa and Japan," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. Vol. 106, No. 2, (Apr. 30, 1962), 106.

¹⁸ Naoki Sakai, Richard F. Calichman, and John Namjun Kim, "Interview with Naoki Sakai," *The Politics of Culture: Around the Work of Naoki Sakai*, Richard F. Calichman and John Namjun Kim, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 232.

and ways of thinking of German Idealism. It is this that came to be seen as “philosophy.”¹⁹ Karatani goes on to make another important observation with respect to the development of philosophy in Japan, elaborating that:

Yet philosophy must consist of clear thinking that is based on one’s life and experience. In this sense, it is precisely the “literary critics” who were the more philosophical. Yet these men were primarily affiliated with French literature and philosophy.²⁰

Therefore, according to Karatani, philosophy and literature rather than being identified as two distinct disciplines are better viewed as two different modes of philosophical inquiry. While the German philosophical tradition influenced the language and structure of philosophy, it was the French tradition that influenced that of literature. This is an important point with respect to Nishida’s own intellectual development as it is evident that, as a student and later professor of philosophy, his attempts to confront the antinomies of modernity were structured by the German philosophical tradition of romantic idealism, particularly the work of Kant and Hegel. Therefore, despite incorporating elements of Zen Buddhism and other Eastern traditions and being located physically in Japan, his thought must be considered as part of the growing global discourse that found its origins in the West.²¹ As such, his thought should not be considered as uniquely Japanese.

Returning to Karatani’s exposition of the development of Japanese philosophy, an additional and important observation that he makes with respect to the influence of the German and French philosophic traditions in Japan is that these disciplines were really the opposition

¹⁹ Karatani Kojin, “Overcoming Modernity,” *Contemporary Japanese Thought*, Translated and edited by Richard F. Calichman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ That the philosophy of Nishida, and the Kyoto School more broadly fit within the Western philosophical tradition is also a point that is made by Naoki Sakai. In an interview with Richard F. Calichman and John Namjun Kim, Sakai states, “[...] the Kyoto School is basically constituted in “Western philosophy.” It is absolutely necessary to read these texts as “Western philosophy” even though the school was located in Japan.” As quoted from “Interview with Naoki Sakai,” *The Politics of Culture: Around the Work of Naoki Sakai*, 232.

between two aesthetics, and thus philosophy in Japan was “nothing more than “aesthetics.””²² On this point, Karatani emphasizes the influence of Kant’s aesthetics on Japanese philosophy. For Kant, aesthetic judgment is based upon judgment that transcends and unifies the contradiction between sensation and idea. As Kant states at the beginning of the *Critique of Judgment* (1790):

If we wish to discern whether anything is beautiful or not, we do not refer the representation of it to the object by means of the understanding with a view to cognition, but by means of the imagination (acting perhaps in conjunction with the understanding) we refer the representation to the subject and its feelings of pleasure or displeasure. The judgment, of taste, therefore, is not a cognitive judgment, and so not logical, but is aesthetic...²³

As Karatani goes on to highlight in his analysis, with the romantic that followed Kant, aesthetic judgment came to be the foundation for all judgment.²⁴ As the first ‘modern Japanese philosopher’ Nishida’s thought is representative of these larger epistemic shifts, as his thought shares with it many aesthetic similarities and themes with German romanticism. Thus, it is possible to see that the emergence of philosophy in Japan was intimately linked with modernity itself, particularly overcoming modernity, as philosophy from the outset had attempted to confront the antinomies of modern society. These developments are crucial in grasping the links between philosophy, particularly for the purposes of this thesis the thought of Nishida, and the ideological foundations of Japanese fascism. Even if most philosophers of the interwar and wartime period did not necessarily support the actions of the government, many shared romantic aesthetic similarities that ultimately opened the space and contributed to the ideological foundations of the fascist movement. At this point, let us delve deeper into the influence of

²² Karatani Kojin, “Overcoming Modernity,” 105.

²³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 203.

²⁴ Karatani Kojin, *Overcoming Modernity*, 109.

German philosophy, particularly Kant and Hegel on the thought of Nishida as a means of further laying the foundation for a deep reading of *Zen no kenkyū*.

Beyond Kant and Hegel: Nishida and the Influence of German Romanticism

That Nishida's thought was heavily influenced by the German romantic tradition and should primarily be seen as an 'aesthetic' philosophy is evident in some of his earliest writings. *Bi no setsumei* (An Explanation of Beauty), one of Nishida's first original essays, written in 1900, was an early formulation of some of the major tenets of his philosophical system that would be further expounded in his seminal work *Zen no kenkyū* eleven years later. In this essay, Nishida begins by offering a critique of Edmund Burke and the British psychologists who emphasized that beauty is identical with selfish pleasure. Acknowledging that this position is not completely without merit, he maintains that it is ultimately inadequate as "[t]he sense of beauty is pleasure, but the reverse is not always true. Everyone would agree that no matter how much pleasure things such as fame, wealth, food, and drink give us, we do not at all consider them aesthetic pleasures."²⁵ Nishida then goes on to approach Kantian conception of beauty that sees beauty as 'disinterested pleasure,' and proceeds to reformulate it by synthesizing it with the Buddhist notion of *muga* (which translates as 'no-self'). *Muga*, which meaning 'no-self,' represents a disavowal of the self and is achieved "when one forgets one's own interest such as advantage and disadvantage, gain and loss."²⁶ For Nishida, much like the German romantics, aesthetic beauty is truth. However, it is not logical truth, as logical truth cannot be conceived of within a state of *muga*, as Nishida claims that this would then mean that "[...] an anatomy chart

²⁵ Nishida Kitarō, "An Explanation of Beauty: Bi no Setsumei," *Monumenta Nipponica*. Translated by Steve Odin, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Summer, 1987), 215.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

would occupy the highest level of art[...].”²⁷ Rather, according to Nishida, the truth that underlies beauty is ‘intuitive truth,’ which is attained when the self is overcome and becomes one with all things.²⁸ Therefore, the understanding of beauty elucidated in this essay suggests that the feeling of beauty is the feeling of *muga* itself.

What is important to take away from this early theoretical construction beyond the alternative aesthetic conception that he posits is the critique of modernity that comes to underscore his overall philosophy. By calling into question the aesthetic possibilities of personal pleasures and rationality, Nishida is not only challenging the individualistic selfishness characteristic of modern society, but the perspective that takes the individual as the foundation of society, rather than the relations between individuals. Thus, while in this particular essay he advances an aesthetic principle that overcomes this individualistic selfishness, in his later thought he will expand this to his wider philosophical system in the conception of pure experience, whereby everything becomes essentially aesthetic. In addition to lending support to the claims made by Karatani regarding the development of philosophy in Japan as primarily an ‘aesthetic’ enterprise, it also helps identify that Nishida’s thought fits within the German romantic tradition and was an attempt to go beyond the philosophy of Kant (as well as Hegel, though this was not made explicitly in this particular essay).

Although many scholars typically assert that Nishida’s philosophy was an original, uniquely Japanese philosophy, few would deny the Kantian and Hegelian influence and there is some divergence in opinion as to whether one should be stressed over the other. Those that emphasize the Kantian reading of Nishida’s thought, such as Christopher Goto-Jones, have done

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 217.

so as a means of distancing Nishida from fascism by stressing the Kantian influence. In his re-interpretation of Nishida's political philosophy, Goto-Jones brings Nishida and Kant into dialogue with one another, and suggests that there exist striking similarities between Kant's theorization of an international order in *Perpetual Peace* (1795) and Nishida's conceptualization of a greater East Asian co-prosperity sphere.

In his articulation of a political theory that could achieve 'perpetual peace' Kant opines that the possibility is dependent upon "[a] league of a special sort must therefore be established, one that we can call a *league of peace* (*foedus pacificum*), which will be distinguished from a *treaty of peace* (*pactum pacis*) because the latter seeks merely to stop one war, while the former seeks to end *all* wars forever."²⁹ In order for this to come into fruition, Kant further suggests that all nations must eventually become 'enlightened' republics. Goto-Jones compares this with Nishida's conceptualization that argues, "[t]he nation is the greatest expression of unified communal consciousness today, but the expression of our personality cannot stop here; it demands something still greater. In other words, [it demands] the unity of a 'human-society,' grouping together all of humanity."³⁰ Like Kant, Nishida's conceptualization is contingent upon 'enlightened nations' coming together, which prompts Goto-Jones to formulate the statement "only enlightened states can form genuine transnational groupings" that he suggests would be approved by both thinkers.³¹ Goto-Jones does note that their respective conceptualizations of enlightenment differ in that for Nishida enlightenment refers to the "self-realization of a nation's contradictory self-identity as the derivative location between the individual and the absolute."³²

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace," *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. Translated by Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983), 117. Emphasis is in the original.

³⁰ Nishida Kitarō as quoted in Christopher Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School and Co-Prosperity*, 63.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

³² *Ibid.*, 64.

Whereas for Kant, an enlightened nation is a republic in which the executive and legislative branches are separate.³³ While Goto-Jones' comparison between Kant and Nishida raises some interesting issues, and certain similarities in their philosophical projects, it does not in any way discount his relationship with the fascist aesthetic, as he would like it to. Furthermore, it grossly overlooks the Hegelian influence on Nishida's thought that underlines Nishida's philosophical system, which will now be examined.

Nishida's Hegelian influence, and the consequences of such an approach, was the subject of inquiry and critique by his contemporary and former student Tosaka Jun. Tosaka, it should be noted, was himself deeply influenced by Kant, and his thought has most recently been approached as a type of Kantian Marxism, which is likely to have played a role in his heavy critique of Nishida's Hegelian influence. According to Tosaka, Nishida was the prototypical bourgeois intellectual who attempted to solve the problems of the day (namely hunger, labour issues, war, etc.) with religious idealism and abstract philosophical concepts such as nothingness. Nishida's thought he lamented, represented a romantic systematic organization of the categorical world that made use of a mystical, trans-dialectical method.³⁴ The results of such a method were such that it had a "metaphysical religious and mystical effect on its readers."³⁵

In addition to noting this "mystical effect," Tosaka engaged in a materialist critique of Nishida's dialectic method that he saw as one that could only think of the "meaning of things

³³ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 114. One could also append to this some of Kant's thoughts articulated in "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" written six years prior to *Perpetual Peace*. Kant begins the essay by claiming, "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another... *Sapere Aude!* "Have courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of enlightenment." Quoted from "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, 41. Emphasis is in the original.

³⁴ Tosaka Jun, "Is the "Logic of Nothingness" Logic?: On the Method of Nishida Philosophy," *Sourcebook for modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 365-369.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 371.

that are worthy of their names,” and not of things as they actually were.³⁶ He thus goes on to draw upon an example from Nishida’s thought to argue that his logic of nothingness was not a logic at all, as it could not think of experience itself. It could only think of the logical significance of existence. With Tosaka’s critique of Nishida in mind, let us inquire further into Nishida’s Hegelian influence.

As Tosaka’s critique helped draw attention to, the influence of Hegel on Nishida came primarily in the form of his dialectical method and his ‘concrete logic’ that saw history as the ascending self-realization of the absolute. Following Hegel, Nishida constructed a logic that could understand reality prior to the split between subject and object. As Maren Zimmerman has noted with respect to Nishida’s Hegelian influence, what separates their dialectical logic is their respective articulations of the ultimate construct: Hegel’s ‘Spirit’ and Nishida’s ‘place of absolute nothingness’ (*mu no basho*).³⁷ Nishida’s formulation of the ‘place of absolute nothingness’ as the ultimate construct was an attempt to go beyond the Hegelian dialectic by grasping a hidden logic that “conceals in itself its own dialectical movement.”³⁸ In his attempts to go beyond the Hegelian dialectic, Nishida in some ways shared with Marx a critique of Hegelian logic that emphasized a lack of praxis. As a result, Nishida develops a system that saw the unity of consciousness as one grounded in action.³⁹ For Nishida, the world is not fully formed for people by God, but rather, the self must become active and creative in forming the

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 369.

³⁷ Maren Zimmerman, “Nishida’s “Self-Identity of Absolute Contradiction” and Hegel: Absolute Negation and Dialectics,” *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*. James W. Heisig, ed. (Nagoya, JP: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2006), 184-186.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁹ On this point Nishida suggests that “[t]he unity of our consciousness is essentially grounded on action. Our actions is not merely movement. Action must have the significance that we see something through it.” Nishida Kitarō as quoted in G.S. Axtell, “Comparative Dialectics: Nishida Kitarō’s Logic of Place and Western Dialectical Thought,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Apr., 1991), 167.

world.⁴⁰ Action here must be carefully considered as it is not necessarily willed by the individual's consciousness *per se*, but rather, it occurs at an unconscious level, moving on its own accord.⁴¹ This theory of 'action-intuition' was developed in part in his early works including *Zen no kenkyū*, however for the most part, it would be developed in his later works of the 1920s and 1930s. While it would require too much jumping ahead to go into detail on this point, one can briefly recall what was mentioned in the earlier discussion of Nishida's essay *Bi no setsumeī*, namely that for Nishida truth is intuitive. Therefore, one can see that for Nishida, action itself can manifest truth. Considering some of the aesthetics of Japanese fascism identified in the preceding chapter, Nishida's attempt to go beyond the Hegelian dialectic helps draw attention to some of the aspects of his thought that helped foster the conditions and ideological foundations of Japanese fascism.

While these aspects of Nishida's thought help distinguish some of the primary differences between Nishida and Hegel, by taking into consideration Marx's critique of Hegel it is possible to expose some of the limitations that Nishida's thought shared with Hegel despite these differences. As Moishe Postone has drawn attention to, Marx's mature critique of Hegel is not simply that he "turned Hegel on his head" by turning his idealistic dialectic into a materialist one, but that Marx historicizes Hegel's 'spirit' by claiming that Hegel's logic is in fact the logic of capital. As Postone illustrates:

[i]n terms of Marx's analysis, Hegel's concepts of dialectic, contradiction, and the identical subject-object express fundamental aspects of capitalist reality but do not adequately grasp them. Hegel's categories do not elucidate capital, as the Subject of an alienated mode of production, nor do they analyze the historically specific dynamic of the forms, driven

⁴⁰ G.S. Axtell, "Comparative Dialectics: Nishida Kitarō's Logic of Place and Western Dialectical Thought," 178.

⁴¹ In *Zen no kenkyū* Nishida writes, "The will often takes action as its goal and accompanies it, but the will is a mental phenomenon that is distinct from external action, and action is not a necessary condition of the will." Quoted from Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*. Translated by Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1987), 20.

forward by their particular immanent contradictions. Instead, Hegel posits the *Geist* as the Subject and the dialectic as the universal law of contradictory social forms of capitalism *but not in their historical specificity*.⁴²

As we identified in the preceding chapter, for Marx the important point about capitalism is its historical specificity, which also makes up his critique of Hegel. Hegel's analysis was thus able to assert some fundamental aspects of capitalism, but that he could not grasp their historical specificity. This critique of Hegel's logic can similarly be extended to Nishida whose logic of nothingness converges with that of Hegel's through its insistence on the contradictory relationship between nothingness and the true self as the ultimate realization of existence.⁴³ By similarly positing a transhistorical subject, Nishida essentially creates the same error by failing to grasp the historical specificity of his own categories, and ultimately his own conditions of possibility, a point that we will return to as a means of concluding and reflecting on Nishida's contemporary relevance in the conclusion. At this time, let us turn to a deep reading of Nishida's thought, as articulated in *Zen no kenkyū* to begin grasping Nishida's relationship with the fascist aesthetic.

Approaching the Early Nishida: Zen no kenkyū and the Beginnings of Nishida Testugaku

As it has been mentioned throughout this thesis, *Zen no kenkyū* is arguable the most influential Japanese philosophical text of the twentieth century helping form the foundation of *Nishida tetsugaku* and later the philosophy of the wider Kyoto School. Yet, despite the reputation that this text now commands, it initially found little interest outside of academic

⁴² Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, 81. Emphasis in the original.

⁴³ Maren Zimmerman, "Nishida's "Self-Identity of Absolute Contradiction" and Hegel: Absolute Negation and Dialectics," 199.

circles. According to Nishida biographer Yusa Michiko, it was not until Kurata Hyakuzō (1891-1943) “enthusiastically endorsed” the work in 1921 that its popularity outside of academia took off and became the modern philosophical classic that it is known as today.⁴⁴ Kurata’s praise of Nishida’s work is interesting in itself, as it speaks to the power of Nishida’s prose:

In the arid, stagnant Japanese philosophical world, shamelessly filled with the smell of worldliness, he whose work gives us pure joy, moral support, and even a slight sense of surprise is Mr. Nishida Kitarō. His work is like the finely scented pale blue bellflowers growing out of dried-up, sterile earth in the mountain shadows.⁴⁵

Kurata’s praise echoes in many ways what Tosaka would later mention in his critique of Nishida when he suggested that he had an almost mystical effect on its audience. Empowering Nishida’s work further, like the literature of Kawabata Yasunari, was that it was seemingly apolitical. Without a specific ideological position espoused, Nishida’s work resonated with its audience, providing “moral support” in a period of cultural crisis and political uncertainty.

Therefore, that his popularity amongst the general public only started to materialize in the 1920s should come as no coincidence as its romantic idealist nature garnered newfound appeal in this period of political uncertainty and cultural crisis. As a result, one should be hesitant to dismiss the influence of *Zen no kenkyū* on the ideological foundations of fascism simply because it predates the emergence of the movement in Japan. One should recall that a work need not have been overtly fascist to have contributed to the fascist aesthetic. On the contrary, as scholars such as Alan Tansman have shown, some of the works that contributed most powerfully were ostensibly apolitical. Moreover, the purpose of this thesis is not to label *Zen no kenkyū* or any of Nishida’s other texts as specifically fascist. Rather, the purpose is to identify the various ‘fascist moments’ that share with the fascist aesthetic certain aesthetic

⁴⁴ Yusa Michiko, *Zen & Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō*, 129-130.

⁴⁵ Kurata Hyakuzō as quoted in Yusa Michiko, *Zen & Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō*, 129-130.

similarities and themes, which helped foster the conditions and ideological foundations of the movement.

Therefore, in order to accomplish the desired ends of our reading of *Zen no kenkyū* by identifying some of the ‘fascist moments’ that are evoked at various points throughout the text, the approach undertaken will begin by engaging in an exposition of some of the central ideas of Nishida’s text with his conception of pure experience serving as the point of departure. This will allow for a number of Nishida’s primary concepts to be identified such as reality, nothingness, and the good. As Nishida’s text was structured around a religious theme, the topic of religion will permeate the discussion. Likewise, as the analysis of the text unfolds, the various ‘fascist moments’ will be identified and discussed. Let us turn now begin our engagement with Nishida’s text by turning to the cornerstone of his thought, the concept of pure experience.

Pure Experience and the Fascist Aesthetic: The Critique of Rationality and the Sacrifice of the Self in Zen no kenkyū

Divided into four sections, the first section of *Zen no kenkyū* is devoted to the concept of pure experience. Remarking on how he came to write the text in the preface to the first edition, Nishida notes that although pure experience is the cornerstone of his thought and the underlying theme of the entire work, he had initially written the second and third sections on reality and the good, respectively, only adding the section of pure experience later. Therefore, he suggests that first time readers skip the first section on pure experience and begin with the second, as he perceived this to be the core of the work.⁴⁶ This, it could be suggested, is why chapter 5, the first chapter of the second section of the book has the somewhat curious title of “The Starting Point

⁴⁶ Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, xxx.

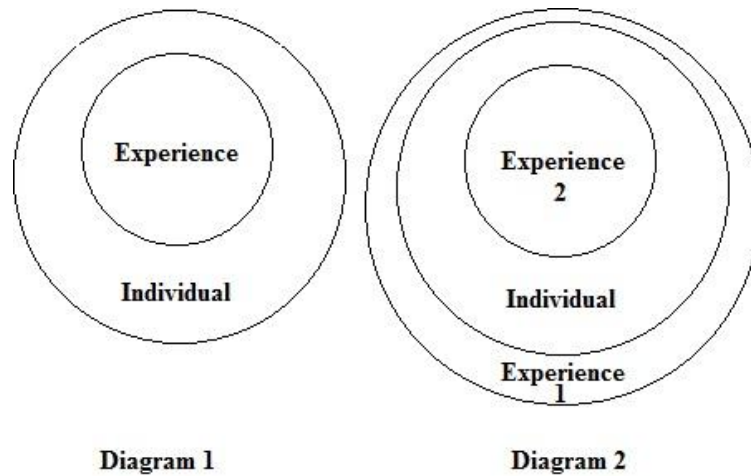
of the Inquiry.” However, as Nishida scholar David Dilworth has contended, it would be difficult to approach the text as Nishida suggests given that the text is so heavily bound to the concept of pure experience as elaborated in the first section.⁴⁷ It was in this conceptualization that Nishida synthesized Eastern and Western thought, giving a Hegelian reading to themes found in Zen Buddhism that ultimately provided the originality of the text and helped solidify the academic discipline of modern Japanese philosophy.

If one is to grasp Nishida’s conception of pure experience, it is necessary to first distinguish what he means by experience more generally. In the preface of *Zen no kenkyū* he differentiates his understanding from some of the pervading Western theories of the time by arguing that “it is not that experience exists because there is an individual, but that an individual exists because of experience.”⁴⁸ According to Nishida, the self is also experienced, and thus experience is understood dialectically as the unity between the self-experiencing and the self being experienced. Masao Abe (1915-2006), himself a student of the Kyoto School having studied under Tanabe Hajime, provides a useful pair of diagrams in the introduction to the second English translation of the work that can help further illustrate the difference between Nishida’s conception of experience (Diagram 2) and what he perceives to be the dominant view (Diagram 1):⁴⁹

⁴⁷ With respect to the first section being added after sections two and three Dilworth argues, “Indeed, the philosophical ideas of *A Study of Good* (the first translation of *Zen no kenkyū* was given this title which is a more direct translation of the title, while the second translation titled *An Inquiry into the Good* is a more accurate translation of the purpose of the work) were so integrally grounded in the concept of ‘pure experience’ that the contribution of the whole work would by and large vanish if it were to imagine the text without this concept elaborated in Section One... [it] would be rather a commonplace restatement of ideas of such authors as Berkeley, Spinoza, and especially of the German transcendentalism...” Quoted from David Dilworth, “The Initial Formations of ‘Pure Experience’ in Nishida Kitarō and William James,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 24, No. 1/2 (1969), 94.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Nishida specifically references Ernst Mach’s (1836-1916) conception of experience as an example of the predominant Western position. Mach was an Austrian physicist and philosopher who was connected with the Vienna Circle of logical positivists.

⁴⁹ These diagrams appear in Masao Abe, “Introduction,” *An Inquiry into the Good*, xvi.



Looking at ‘Diagram 1’ it is evident that experience only exists within the individual. However, evident in ‘Diagram 2’ is Nishida’s dialectical understanding of experience, one that identifies the existence of the individual as being contingent upon being experienced (represented in the second diagram as experience 1) in addition to him or herself experiencing (represented by experience 2). Thus for Nishida, experience does not exist on account of the individual, but that the individual exists as a result of the unity of the dialectic of experience. The Hegelian influence on his thought is evident in this conceptualization and can be further identified by looking at what Nishida defines as *pure* experience.

In chapter one of *Zen no kenkyū* Nishida immediately begins the text by distinguishing between pure experience and experience in general, stating:

To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one’s own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by *pure* I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one sensit it, but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be. In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 3. Emphasis is in the original.

Evident from the way in which Nishida characterizes this difference is that like Hegel, Nishida is primarily concerned with grasping experience (and consequently existence) prior to the split between the subject and object. This is the moment, before which any reflection or judgment can occur, and thus pure experience has no meaning whatsoever, it is simply things as they are. Within this conceptualization, Nishida has hierarchized experience in such a way that pure experience comes to represent the superior, or ultimate form of experience for which one should aspire to achieve. Pure experience, to use a Heideggerian term, represents a type of ‘authentic’ existence. The key for this authenticity is in the unity of consciousness, which so long as it is maintained the experience can be considered pure. However, if interrupted, meanings and judgments enter into our consciousness and destroy the unity of experience. Accordingly, the moment can therefore no longer be considered pure, or authentic.

On the issue of the unity of consciousness and pure experience one should hesitate to jump to the conclusion that the something like the act of thinking is antagonistic. On the contrary, thinking plays a fundamental role in Nishida’s conceptualization of pure experience as thinking is itself constituted as a kind of pure experience. Nishida thus conceives thinking to be “[...] a single activity that develops a certain unifying reality” that is the “[...] response consciousness to a mental image and the mental image is the first step in thinking: thinking and mental images are not separate things.”⁵¹ Moreover, Nishida adds to this that the purpose of thinking is to manifest truth, as it, like pure experience, exists prior to being tainted by judgment. One can therefore see that thinking exists at a seemingly unconscious level until like pure experience it is interrupted. What is of interest with Nishida’s conception of thinking is that he

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

does not take it to correspond with one's will or desire, as this would necessitate feelings of judgment. Rather, thinking proceeds on its own accord, serving the primary function of manifesting truth.⁵²

That thinking in Nishida's view, when occurring unconsciously in the realm of pure experience, manifests truth is a good point to begin shifting our focus to the way in which Nishida shares certain similarities with the romantic fascist aesthetic. For Nishida, truth is "fundamentally singular."⁵³ It comes closest to the concrete facts of experience, and he defines it as "that which has unified our experiential facts... [t]o know the truth or to accord with it is to unify our experience; it is to proceed from a lesser to a greater unity. If we regard our authentic self as being this unifying activity, then to know the truth is to accord with this greater self, to actualize it."⁵⁴ Truth is thus on the one hand intrinsically linked with the self, radically individual as it comes from within the state of pure experience. However, given his dialectical understanding of experience it also comes from outside the self, and is only achieved by uniting with something greater than the self, an absolute. For Nishida, truth is universal, but it is both subjective and objective in the sense that universals exist contradictorily both inside and outside the individual. They lie within pure experience, which cannot adequately be described as either subjective or objective because it exists prior to this split. It is the unity of these positions that is achieved by disavowing the self and submitting oneself to something greater.

Evidently, this conception of truth shares with it a number of similarities found in his earlier work *Bi no setsumei*, where he attempted to articulate a conception of beauty from the standpoint of *muga*. From this standpoint, Nishida linked aesthetic beauty with intuitive truth,

⁵² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

something existing prior to the split between subject and object. However, we see in *Zen no kenkyū* that Nishida takes this earlier formulation and expands it to his wider philosophical system lending support to Karatani Kojin's claim that modern Japanese philosophy was primarily aesthetic. Like the romantics that followed Kant, Nishida's thought equated aesthetic judgment with judgment more broadly. Moreover, Nishida's conception of truth is fundamentally linked with reality itself, as he sees intellectual and practical truths to be one in the same, part of the same unity found in pure experience.⁵⁵ However, before further looking at this link, let us inquire into the critique of rationality that is exhibited in Nishida's conception of truth.

In conceptualizing the truth in the way he does, Nishida shares with the fascist aesthetic a critique of rationality that posits a return to a more instinctual foundation of truth and knowledge. This critique is evoked, albeit subtly, throughout the text and is manifested in various 'fascist moments.' One such moment, comes at the conclusion of the first section on pure experience, and is particularly revealing for the language employed. Nishida writes:

True religious awakening is neither an abstract knowledge based in thinking nor a blind feeling. In this awakening we realize with our whole being the profound unity at the base of knowledge and the will. The sword of logic cannot penetrate it and desire cannot move it. This awakening is the basis of all truth and contentment. Though their forms vary, all religions contain this fundamental intuition at their bases. And religion must exist at the base of learning and morality, which comes into being because of religion.⁵⁶

The language used in this passage is telling— "the sword of logic cannot penetrate it and desire cannot move it." Logic (or rationality), which is embodied in the scientific method, lies at the heart of modern society and is seen as the ultimate source for discovering truth. Evident in this passage is that Nishida is attempting to move away from truth as scientifically deduced by

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

establishing a conception of truth (occurring within the realm of pure experience) as something that transcends rationality and that exists at a deep level of consciousness, prior to being corrupted by judgment and feeling. Furthermore, ‘desire,’ in a typically Buddhist fashion, is seen as corrupting, and obscuring the truth. Nishida’s critique, embodied in the language used is directed against modernity, which posits a religious reawakening as the solution to these fragmentary forces.

Looking deeper into Nishida’s thought by turning to his conceptualization of reality can be helpful in further grasping his critique of rationality. It should go without saying that Nishida’s conception of reality is thoroughly linked with his conception of pure experience. Reality, according to Nishida, is that which like pure experience is directly experienced, prior to the split between subject and object. As Nishida states, “In direct experience (synonymous with pure experience) there is only an independent self-sufficient event with neither a subject that sees nor an object that is seen... true reality presents itself in the moment of direct experience.”⁵⁷ He goes on to suggest that “true reality is not found outside of phenomena of consciousness, and the true reality realized in direct experience always comes forth in the same mode... Reality is a succession of events that flow without stopping.”⁵⁸ Nishida’s conception of true reality is thus nearly synonymous with his conception of pure experience, and one can also see the Hegelian influence which depicts history as the self-ascending realization of an absolute. As Nishida prefaces later in the text when discussing *seishin* (spirit), “[a]ll reality is established through unity, and in spirit the unity emerges as a clear fact. It is only in spirit that reality becomes a perfect reality [...]”⁵⁹ Likewise, because true reality occurs within this realm of pure experience

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

it occurs at an unconscious level, and therefore it cannot be accounted for empirically or rationally. On this point Nishida again exhibits a ‘fascist moment’ that critiques rationality by arguing that “[t]he world described by physicists, like a line without width and plane without thickness, is not something that actually exists. In this respect, it is the artist, not the scholar, who arrives at the true nature of reality.”⁶⁰

Though *Zen no kenkyū* predates the rise of fascism in Japan, one cannot help but point to some of the shared aesthetic similarities with Japanese fascism that took Nishida’s position to the extreme. Considering one of the Japanese Imperial government’s most infamous propaganda pieces, the Ministry of Education’s *Fundamental Principles of Our National Polity* (*Kokutai no hongī*) published in 1937, the shared critique of rationality is evident. The document begins by stating:

The various ideological and social evils of present-day Japan are the result of ignoring the fundamental and running after the trivial, of the lack of judgment and the failure to digest things thoroughly. This is because since the days of Meiji, so many aspects of European and American culture, systems, and learning have been imported and too rapidly... The views of the world and of life that form the basis of these ideologies are rationalism and positivism, lacking in historical views... Consequently, importance is given to human beings and their groupings, who have become isolated from historical entreties, abstract and independent of one another.⁶¹

Both in *Zen no kenkyū* and this document, rationality is something that is seen as obscuring true reality and ultimately causing an inauthentic existence. However, in the *Kokutai no hongī* the critique of rationality is taken further, being overtly equated with Western modernity and is considered responsible for the “season of ideological and social confusion and crisis [...]” that

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶¹ “Fundamentals of Our National Polity” (*Kokutai no hongī*), *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 968.

marks not only Japan but the whole of the globe.⁶² Furthermore, one can also see another important similarity with Nishida's thought in the critique of the abstract individual that comes at the end of this passage. Within modernity the individual is isolated, and thus the foundation of modern society is taken to be this isolated individual. In contrast, there was a concerted effort in Japan beginning at the end of the nineteenth century to reconfigure this view by stressing the relations between individuals as the foundation of a true society. In light of this problem of modernity, both Nishida and the *Kokutai no hongī* call for the individual self to sacrifice and overcome individual selfishness by connecting to a higher order for the purpose of harmony. Before looking towards the sacrificial element in both Nishida's thought and fascist ideology, it is imperative to consider the religious dynamic of *Zen no kenkyū* that has so far eluded our analysis.

Zen no kenkyū was very much an effort to revitalize Eastern religious principles, notably those of Zen Buddhism, by synthesizing them with Western philosophical methodology. As mentioned previously, it is the concept of pure experience that really separates Nishida from the predominant intellectual currents of the period in Japan as it was in this concept that he articulated his Hegelian reading of Zen Buddhism. Furthermore, this aspect of his thought, sharing with a romantic fascist aesthetic, was both contradictorily old and new. Nishida was offering a reconstitution of Buddhist ideals that he perceived to have been corrupted or withering away within modernity. Religion, according to Nishida, had strayed from its true purpose by being utilized as a means of gaining personal profit or benefit. Thus, in order to restore true or traditional religious values, Nishida reaffirmed them as new within the language of Western

⁶² *Ibid.*, 969.

philosophy. Like the fascist aesthetic, Nishida was not simply restoring or returning to the past, but making the past new again.

In restoring the true purpose of religion Nishida challenges those who had come to use religion as a means to something else, asserting that the religious demand is that which “[...] concerns the self as a whole, the life of the self. It is a demand in which the self, while perceiving its relativity and finitude, yearns to attain eternal, true life by uniting with an absolutely infinite power.”⁶³ The religious demand is thus indistinguishable with the demand of life itself, and it is ultimately sought for the purpose of achieving harmony through disavowing the self and sacrificing oneself to something greater. Something greater was for Nishida, God, which he regards as the foundation of the universe. As the foundation of the universe, Nishida is articulating a conception of God that runs contrary to the Judeo-Christian one. God is not something that exists outside of the universe, nor should the world be regarded as something that was created by God for humans. On the contrary, the universe itself is a “manifestation of God.”⁶⁴ God therefore does not transcend reality, but serves as the base of reality. As such, God is infinite, as Nishida argues “[...] God is no thing, there is no place where God is not, and no place where God does not function.”⁶⁵ God is absolute nothingness. Expressed in this way, Nishida’s conception of God is close to that of Spinoza, who asserted that God is a “substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence [...]”⁶⁶

Furthermore, much like all the concepts articulated in *Zen no kenkyū*, God is intrinsically linked with pure experience, for pure experience can also be articulated as the unity that is

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁶ Benedictus de Spinoza, “Ethics,” *The Essential Spinoza: Ethics and Related Writings*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Michael L. Morgan, ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2006), 8.

achieved from sacrificing oneself and uniting with God.⁶⁷ God should therefore be regarded as not only a unity, but the ultimate unity, the unity of all things. This expression of God distances it from our subjective spirit, as God, like pure experience, exists prior to the distinction between the self and other things.⁶⁸ From this, Nishida takes religion to be the unity that exists between God and human beings. What is evident from Nishida's conceptualization of God and the religious demand as outlined in this thesis is that there is a strong call for the individual to renounce the self and unite with something greater, a theme shared with the fascist aesthetic. Before digging deeper into this shared theme it is worth first considering Nishida's conception of the Good, which he considers to be the standard determining the value of one's conduct as it further elaborates the sacrifice of the self.

Given the title of the work *Zen no kenkyū* (An Inquiry into the Good), the concept of the good plays a fundamental role in the purpose of Nishida's text. Recall that one of Nishida's critiques of Hegel was that his theory lacked praxis. In the concept of the good Nishida is thus trying to add this element of praxis to his thought. As noted earlier, Nishida considers the good to be the standard to which the value of one's conduct is determined, and it is found in the internal necessity of consciousness.⁶⁹ This distinction immediately distances his conception of the good from what he labels heteronomous theories of ethics, such as Thomas Hobbes, who regard good and evil as existing outside of the individual. By positing a conception of the good that exists outside of the individual, Nishida argues that this perspective is unable to account for why one ought to do the good.⁷⁰ Furthermore, given the link to the internal necessity of consciousness and the critique of rationality that is exuded throughout the text, Nishida is also

⁶⁷ Nishida Kitarō, *Zen no kenkyū*, 164.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

critical of utilitarian theories that seek to establish the good based off of rationality and scientific principles.⁷¹

Nishida's own conceptualization of the good, which places it deep in the recesses of one's own consciousness, is met when one has realized the internal demands of the self by fully developing and completing the will. However, Nishida is not constructing a selfish theory of the good, as the good is linked with pure experience and is realized by completing the self which only can occur by disavowing oneself in the name of a greater power, an ultimate unity. From the perspective that Nishida has developed, the good has been aestheticized and is nearly synonymous with his conception of beauty. As Nishida states,

[...] the concept of the good approaches that of beauty. Beauty is felt when things like ideals are realized, which means for things to display their original nature... the good is beauty. No matter how valueless conduct might appear when seen in light of the great demands of human nature, when it is truly natural conduct emerging from the innate talents on the person, it evokes a sense of beauty.⁷²

Thus we see again that Nishida's thought is, as Karatani asserted with respect to Japanese philosophy in general that it was largely aesthetic, and particularly influenced by the romantic tradition that equated beauty as the foundation of judgment. In Nishida's case, beauty is equated with existence and experience more broadly through concepts like the good and truth. Moreover, by conflating the good with the sacrifice of the self to a greater power one can claim that Nishida has in a sense aestheticized the sacrifice of the self to a higher power, it becomes an aesthetic act. On this point it is worth considering one final 'fascist moment' related to this theme in Nishida's discussion of perfectly good conduct:

⁷¹ With respect to utilitarianism as espoused by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) Nishida has the following to say: "[...] it lacks a clear explanation of why the greatest happiness of the majority, rather than that of the individual, must be the highest good." (117)

⁷² *Ibid.*, 125.

Our true self is the ultimate reality of the universe, and if we know the true self we not only unite with the good of humankind in general but also fuse with the essence of the universe and unite with the will of God—and in this religion and morality are culminated. The method through which we can know the true self and fuse with God is our self-attainment of the power of the union of subject and object. To acquire this power is to kill our false self, and after dying once to worldly desire, to gain new life.⁷³

This ‘fascist moment’ is perhaps the most interesting of all as he not only shares a similar theme of calling for the sacrifice of the self, but he makes use of violent rhetoric. While at the time of its publication in 1911 *Zen no kenkyū* would not have served any nefarious purposes, either intentionally or unintentionally, given the benefit of hindsight it is possible to see how moments such as these evoked throughout the text would have played into the hands of the ruling ideology in the interwar and wartime period helping establish the ideological foundations of the movement through a shared aesthetic vision of sacrificing oneself for the purpose of harmony and authentic life. To further render this point, let us again consider some of the fascist propaganda of the period, first returning to the *Kokutai no hongī*.

The *Kokutai no hongī*, like *Zen no kenkyū* made a similar call for the sacrifice of the self. However, whereas in Nishida’s philosophy it was referred to an abstract rendition of God, in the *Kokutai no hongī* it was concretely linked with the state, though in the name of the Emperor who was reified as a God-like, supra-historical figure.⁷⁴ It followed that if all were to submit themselves to the state, harmony would be achieved and the antinomies of Western capitalist modernity overcome. As the document states: “Harmony as in our nation is a great harmony of individuals, who by giving play to their individual differences and through difficulties, toil, and labour, and converge as one. Because of individual differences and through difficulties, this

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁷⁴ The reification of the Emperor as a supra-historical figure was written in *The Constitution of the Empire of Japan* (*dainippon teikoku kenpō*), and is most clearly evident in articles one and three. Article One states: “The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal.” Article Three solidifies the God-like status stating, “The Emperor is sacred and inviolable.” As quoted from “The Constitution of the Empire of Japan,” translated by Ito Miyoji. [<http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c02.html#s1>].

harmony becomes all the greater and its substance rich.”⁷⁵ Not only are there aesthetic similarities with Nishida’s vision of connecting with a high power evident in this passage, but they also share a similar Hegelian influence that sees history as a self-ascending realization of the absolute. Moreover, when the *Kokutai no hongī* declares “[t]his spirit of self-effacement is not a mere denial of oneself but means living to the great, true self by denying one’s small self,” one may have thought it was Nishida himself who wrote the piece as it is nearly identical to Nishida’s view that maintains that only by disavowing the self can one realize their true self.⁷⁶

Another propaganda piece that exhibits a number of similar aesthetic themes, but takes them to a more extreme position is the essay *Nihon no shindō* (*The Way of the Japanese Subject*) written in 1943. The document, written by an affiliate of the Kyoto School Watsuji Tetsurō, served as a sort of commentary and bolstering of the aforementioned *Kokutai no hongī* as the Pacific War intensified.⁷⁷ Watsuji is an interesting figure to consider with respect to assessing Nishida’s relationship with fascist ideology. Though Watsuji’s thought was original, he had been greatly influenced by *Nishida tetsugaku* and his thought shared a number of significant theoretical similarities with Nishida. He was also greatly involved in the politics of the wartime period having worked extensively with the Ministry of Education in the 1940s. Though one must be apprehensive about conflating the two thinkers when considering Nishida’s influence in order to ensure that one is not committing the ‘guilt by association’ that has been problematized in studies of Nishida’s relationship with fascism, Watsuji does provide a useful source for

⁷⁵ *Kokutai no hongī*, 971.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 972.

⁷⁷ Though not considered as part of the Kyoto School in the same way as others such as Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji, or Miki Kiyoshi, Watsuji was deeply influenced by Nishida and his thought shared a number of similar overarching themes and characteristics. As a result, he is largely considered, like Kuki Shūzō, to be a peripheral member of the Kyoto School. Watsuji’s success and popularity was somewhat indebted to Nishida, who in 1925 invited Watsuji to teach on the subject of ethics at Kyoto Imperial University. After studying in Germany and returning to Kyoto in the early 1930s, Watsuji would later move to Tokyo Imperial University where he would serve as a professor of philosophy until his retirement in 1949.

considering how certain aspects of Nishida's early thought were influential in the work of other, more fascist thinkers, thus drawing attention to his influence on the foundations of fascist ideology.

Nihon no shindō traced the historical development of the Japanese character, and sought to reconstitute themes of sacrifice and loyalty found in early Japanese traditions in modern philosophic language for the purpose of political action. Like *Zen no kenkyū*, the call to sacrifice the self to a higher power for the purpose of harmony and authentic existence were similarly echoed and were also linked with Zen Buddhism (though Watsuji attempts go even further back than this to the deepest foundation of Japanese culture). However, Watsuji mobilized these notions and concepts for the benefit of war by fuelling them with fascist rhetoric and an overt critique of the West. Watsuji is able to link Zen Buddhism to the war by utilizing an almost pure experience like description of the Japanese warrior resulting in an aestheticized conception of violence and death whereby killing became a sort of aesthetic evocation of beauty. In Watsuji's words,

[f]or example, it was Zen that permeated their art of swordsmanship. Because the art of swordsmanship is a discipline of killing an enemy, a Westerner might think that it was totally unconnected with religion. But as a matter of fact, the Japanese samurai experience the consummation of their art of the sword precisely in the teachings of Zen. Hence the literature is replete with such phrases as "the unity of Zen and the word." [...] [t]he consummate art of swordsmanship consisted in penetrating to an absolute state.⁷⁸

The similarities with Nishida's pure experience are evident as Watsuji has described the true swordsman, and by extension the warrior, as one who is able to transcend the self and become one with the weapon.

⁷⁸ Watsuji Tetsuro, "The Way of the Japanese Subject," *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy*, 280.

The aesthetic similarities with some of the ‘fascist moments’ that are found in Nishida’s thought are also evident in the sacrifice of the self to a higher order, for Watsuji the state. Watsuji champions the samurai of feudal Japan who came “[...] respect the sheer act of courage in itself entailed in sacrificing their lives without personal regrets.”⁷⁹ Watsuji further maintained that during this period of Japanese history honour was more valuable than wealth, and even a poor samurai could be richer than someone who was materially rich.⁸⁰ By historicizing the spirit of sacrifice in the spirit of the Japanese from time immemorial Watsuji attempted to reinvigorate in the name of the state a point that Nishida had made already in *Zen no kenkyū* by suggesting that authentic existence is achieved by submitting oneself to a greater power. As Watsuji states near the end of the essay,

[...] in order to destroy the self and serve the Emperor, one should not regret giving up one’s own life [...] The true destruction of the self is certainly not realized in a standpoint wherein one thinks of the private interests of one’s class, party, or group. A task ordered by the Emperor is a public task, a national task [...] In carrying out such a public task, destruction of the egoistic self involves thoroughly realizing a condition that transcends death and life. The most important matter is that the duty of the subject is a public duty which stands above the people and governs them.⁸¹

Although highly politicized and made to fit the particular historical circumstance of the Pacific War, the similarities with Nishida’s thought are noticeable. Like Nishida, Watsuji sees the true destruction of the self as something that occurs from a standpoint that transcends one’s own interests. He even evokes a language that is nearly identical with Nishida’s when he states later “[...] when it (the experience of transcending death and life) permeates every aspect of one’s life and is lived as the constant pure and clear mind of one’s entire being—this indeed is the absolute

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

state of mind to which I refer.”⁸² The concept of pure experience has thus been taken further and given new life by Watsuji as a means of serving the interests of the state by aestheticizing death and glorifying the actions of the military.

In conclusion, though written in 1911 and predating the rise of fascism in Japan, Nishida’s major text *Zen no kenkyū* exhibited many moments that shared themes and characteristics with the fascist aesthetic, exemplified in the propaganda pieces the *Kokutai no hongī* and *Nihon no shindō*, which would come to dominate the atmosphere of the late 1920s to the end of the war in 1945. Some of the most cogent examples have been identified in the critique of rationality, reconstituting tradition thus making new what was once old, and most important and effective calling for the individual to sacrifice themselves to a greater power for the purpose of harmony. They reveal that Nishida’s influence on ideological foundations of fascism is not found exclusively in his later works (which will be examined in the next chapter) but is evident in some of his earliest works through these shared aesthetic themes. Both Nishida and the propaganda of the wartime period was distinctively romantic modernist anti-modernist; however they failed to grasp their own conditions of possibility in the very modernity they were critiquing. Therefore, while not a fascist text in itself, *Zen no kenkyū* must be considered as part of the history of fascism in Japan (along with many other works such as the Imperial Rescript of Education) as it ultimately helped sow the seeds for the emergence of fascism.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Chapter 3: Philosophy at War: Nishida and the Fascist Aesthetic, 1923-1945

As Nishida gained popularity in the early 1920s following Kurata Hyakuzō's praise and endorsement of his thought, the philosophical and ideological landscape of Japan, as well as throughout the globe, was undergoing a significant transformation. We have already discussed some of the changes that marked Japanese society following the transformation to a modern, capitalist mode of production in the first chapter of this thesis, such as the emergence of a modern labour force, urbanization, and the erosion of traditional values and way of life. The changes that accompanied the process of modernization, by the early 1920s, had created a distinct 'cultural crisis' that permeated the atmosphere of the period, and was reflected and reproduced in numerous cultural productions of the period. By the end of the decade, the discontent that had fomented started to radicalize, and the right wing groups that had risen previously increasingly began to make use of overtly fascist rhetoric to articulate their ideology.

Thus, the ‘cultural crisis’ that had emerged transformed into a ‘culture of fascism’ that continued until the end of the war with Japan’s catastrophic defeat in the Pacific theater.¹

Given Nishida’s increasing rise in popularity, and the dynamic events of the period both inside and outside of Japan it is a somewhat curious feature of the existing literature that many of his writings from this period have been overlooked when engaging his relationship with fascist ideology. Those asserting that Nishida influenced fascist ideology have tended to jump from *Zen no kenkyū* to one of his final works, the infamous *Sekai no shinchitsujo no genri* (The Principle of the New World Order) written in 1944 to draw attention to a turn in his thought. Or, they have ignored his earlier thought altogether and focused primarily on this later work. However, focusing on one of his final works, especially one that was initially met with resistance from right-wing ideologues has so far proven to be problematic as it ignores a great deal of his interwar thought. One of the intentions of this chapter will therefore be to attempt to overcome this lacuna in the existing literature by considering some of Nishida’s work during this important period. This will not only serve to highlight the continued evocation of ‘fascist moments’ that can be found in his writing, but also serve to grasp a more complete understanding of the foundation of his thought which will allow for a better informed analysis of his later works that have come under considerable debate in the discourse over his relationship with Japanese fascism.

Once this has been completed, attention will then turn to Nishida’s later works where the analysis will primarily focus on three important themes and elements of his later works: his logic of nothingness, the increasing emphasis of the uniqueness and superiority of the Japanese spirit,

¹ This is not to say that fascism disappeared in the postwar period, but rather that fascism as the dominant cultural ideology ends with the defeat. Given the link between fascism and modernity the possibility for its existence in the postwar period remains.

and his support for a Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. In approaching these aspects of his later works it is possible to see that his later thought is marked by an ever increasing shift to the right. This shift is in itself quite interesting as Nishida's philosophical trajectory represents a sort of microcosm of the ideological atmosphere in Japan during this time, which in parallel was radicalizing towards the right, as fascism became the dominant cultural ideology. Despite this shift Nishida's relationship with fascist ideology remained in their shared romantic critique of modernity that posited a transhistorical ideal, represented concretely in the Emperor and Imperial Household that could withstand the social abstractions of modernity, rather than in any overt political support. In fact, as scholars have shown, and as this chapter will draw attention to, there are many instances in his later writings that run against some of the ideas and actions of the imperial government. However, far from revealing that Nishida's thought was politically liberal, or represented some form alternative position, amounting to a multi-faceted attack against and resistance to both Western and Japanese imperialism, this chapter will assert that Nishida's thought was fascist, just not necessarily identical to that of the government. As a result, his thought contributed to and legitimized fascist ideology whether he supported all the actions of the government or not.

Before the Rise of Fascism: Nishida's Geijutsu to Dōtoku and the Aestheticization of Morality

Serving as the point of departure for this chapter is one of Nishida's most overlooked works with respect to not only his relationship with the fascist aesthetic, but his overall thought in the English language historiography, *Geijutsu to dōtoku* (Art and Morality). Published in 1923, *Geijutsu to dōtoku* was the last of Nishida's attempts to directly engage the intersection of

the subjects of aesthetics, the good, and morality that had been the primary source of his analysis since as far back as *Bi no setsume* in 1900.² After this Nishida would go on to focus on and further develop a ‘logic of the East,’ expounded as his ‘logic of *basho*’ (referred to by Nishida as the place of absolute nothingness) that would form part of the foundation of his mature thought. Given that this work is considered to have marked a turning point in his philosophy it is somewhat strange that it has not been given further attention.

However, it is this very aspect of the work that is suitable for the purposes of this thesis. The ‘fascist aesthetic,’ as we have already discussed, is crucial in grasping the very structure of the fascist movement as its power lies in its ability to turn subjects like politics, everyday life, morality, and death into nothing more than aesthetics. Cultural productions thus become absolutely paramount in empowering and reproducing the movement be it their intention or not. That Nishida continued to espouse a philosophy that was primarily aesthetic, oriented as a romantic critique of modernity, is significant as it reveals that his early thought, including his seminal text *Zen no kenkyū* and enduring in works like *Geijutsu to dōtoku* had already contained the possibility for a fascist reading and thus the aforementioned shift to the right need not represent a distinct break from his earlier philosophical endeavours. What makes *Geijutsu to dōtoku* particularly interesting to study is the performative morality and theorization of a ‘moral

² In the preface to the English translation of *Geijutsu to dōtoku* renowned Nishida scholar David A. Dilworth notes turn in his thought and the significance of the work with respect to Nishida’s overall thought arguing that “[a]t the same time, *Art and Morality*, is important as a witness to the fact that Nishida’s later breakthrough to a “logic of the East,” which he claimed was neither a subjective idealism nor an objective mystical pantheism was achieved only by virtue of his own long odyssey through the language of Western philosophy.” David A. Dilworth, “Translators’ Preface,” *Art and Morality*. Translated by David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i, 1973), x. Other scholars place the emphasis of the shift in Nishida’s thought a little later than Dilworth, arguing that the turn in his philosophy really manifested around 1931. As Woo-Sung Huh has noted, “The extension of his forms from acts of self-consciousness to the historical epoch occurred about 1931 and is the most decisive shift in Nishida’s philosophy, because it paved the way for his return to a world which he had once rejected and called transitory [...] it also reflects Nishida’s own critical stance toward his earlier religious-soteriological philosophy.” Woo-Sung Huh, “The Philosophy of History in the “Later” Nishida: A Philosophical Turn,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Jul., 1990), 343-374.

society' that are further developed. Both of these points shared similarities with themes espoused in fascist ideology and could be found in numerous propaganda pieces and government decrees, playing a major role in legitimizing Japan's actions overseas in the expansion of their empire, as actions that were committed in the name of the Emperor were considered moral through the inherent virtues of the Japanese. Morality thus became a sort of creative act. However, let us now turn to the text itself.

In the opening of the text Nishida states that his intentions are to discuss the 'mutual relationship' between art and morality.³ For Nishida, both morality and art, which depicts the essence of the beautiful, are universally valid in and of themselves. Treading close to the position he had already articulated in *Zen no kenkyū*, Nishida maintains that though universally valid, morality and the beautiful are closely tied to the subjective state. As he asserts at the beginning of the text, "[...] an aesthetic object is qualitatively similar to a moral object. There can be no moral judgement apart from motive, character, and action; similarly, there can be no aesthetic judgment apart from a subjective state and creative act."⁴ There are several interesting points that this passage reveals. Immediately recognizable is the conflation of aesthetics and morality, whereby morality is fully aestheticized. While similar to his earlier works, Nishida will take this argument further than he had previously by extending it to society in an attempt to frame a conception of a 'moral society.' There is another, though more subtle, point of interest that sticks out in this passage in his use of the term 'action' and 'creative act.' These terms indicate the performative aspect of his thought that will be developed throughout. As performative, morality becomes dictated by action, and for this action to be considered authentic,

³ Nishida Kitarō, *Art and Morality*. Translated by David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i, 1973), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7. It should be recalled that Nishida's subjective state is not a simple individualism, but is rather conceptualized as the unity of the self to a greater totality. For, only in a state of pure experience can the pure self emerge.

or pure, it must occur in a state of pure experience. In order to gain a better understanding of this aspect of Nishida's thought let us first return to the continued aestheticization of the subjects of morality and society.

As we briefly saw in the last chapter when discussing Nishida's Kantian influence, the concept of a 'moral society' is pivotal to his later formulation of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere. Here it is worth distinguishing what is meant by 'society' and 'moral society.' According to Nishida, society is the 'matrix in which persons relate to one another' and the "dialectical union of persons."⁵ It is only in society that the pure content of the will of a person can be fully expressed and thus society takes the form of the 'greater unity' to which the self is submitted, as expressed in his earlier thought. Society thus serves an important function in Nishida's thought, as it is the place for which the self is negated and can reach its infinite potential through the unity of acts.⁶ Achieving the unity necessary for reaching one's full potential is thus the 'moral society' of which Nishida speaks. What is evident from the conceptualization he does provide is that it is obvious that he gives primacy to society, which is synonymous with the state, as it serves as a sort of vehicle towards reaching one's authentic self.

One can gain a deeper understanding of Nishida's theory of the state by considering his 1941 essay *Kokka riyū no mondai* (The Question of State Reason). In that work Nishida distinguished between two forms of the state, a 'simple state' and a 'real state.'⁷ A 'simple state' becomes a 'real state' by becoming "[...] a creative force of eternal values, a subject of the historical creation of the world... That is what I call sovereignty... It signifies precisely a divine

⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 54. Nishida states, "Society is the place wherein personal acts become forces functioning manifestly. Just as spiritual acts include infinite potentials as pure acts, we can think that the background of personal activity, which is the unity of these acts, includes the infinite potential of the person."

⁷ Pierre Lavelle, "The Political Thought of Nishida Kitarō," *Monumenta Nipponica*. Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer, 1994), 149.

will exercised over territory.”⁸ Though further developed and detailed in this later essay, the overarching structure of the notion of a ‘simple state’ and ‘real state’ are nearly identical to the concepts of ‘society’ and ‘moral society’ that he presented in the earlier *Geijutsu to dōtoku*. The state remained the site for which one could realize their infinite potential. Furthermore, in this later formulation, the state was seen as the only place for which one could really act morally. In Nishida’s words, “[t]he mode of existential being of the individual self is necessarily statist. It is within the state that being and morality are united.”⁹ With such primacy given to the state, it is difficult to see how his thought, having shared so many other aspects of the romantic fascist aesthetic, would not have contributed to or reinforced fascist ideology. Furthermore, what this, and further analysis of his philosophy will show, is that to consider Nishida’s relationship with fascism, one need not find a break from his earlier philosophy, but on the other hand similarities can be found from even some of his earliest texts.

Returning to the aesthetic element of his conception of moral society articulated in *Geijutsu to dōtoku* and against the backdrop of his later theorizations on the state, particularly that it is only within the state that being and morality are united, it is evident that Nishida had essentially already maintained this view in this earlier work. As Nishida writes, “[...] the content of the free self—pure personal content itself, which is the foundation of reason as the unity of infinite acts—is expressed in the real world as moral society. Moral society is reason’s work of art.”¹⁰ The state was the site for which one could reach their full potential, but it also was the manifestation of this potential, articulated as ‘moral society.’ One of the shifts in Nishida’s thought that occurs after this work, which was evident in his text on the state, was not

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Nishida as quoted in Pierre Lavelle, “The Political Thought of Nishida Kitarō,” 149.

¹⁰ Nishida Kitarō, *Art and Morality*, 58.

an abandonment of any of his earlier ideas but a shift in analysis and approach, where his earlier concepts are applied to the state, the emperor, amongst other topics. Despite this shift Nishida's philosophy remains largely romantic, and aesthetic. Sacrificing oneself to society, or the state, is much like it had been in *Zen no kenkyō* when he calls for one to connect with a higher power, or greater spirit, an aesthetic act.

The performative aspect of Nishida's morality presented in this work is also of interest for grasping his relationship with Japanese fascism. For Nishida, moral behaviour is itself a creative act, "[...] both artistic creativity and moral behaviour are creative acts of personal content—that is the, functioning of the free self—and consequently are one in essence."¹¹ By both venerating the state (the 'real state' or 'moral society') and positing a performative morality, Nishida's thought comes close to espousing a similar position as fascist ideology that saw its actions in Asia as a moral project, part of their world historical mission. When he makes statements like "Action itself becomes consciousness," he has opened the possibility for his thought to defend the actions of the state, no matter how heinous, for as long as they occurred in a moment of 'pure experience,' in a 'moral society' they would be considered moral.¹² From the perspective of performative morality, truth is in a sense intuitive. This was not only shared with fascist ideology, but this aspect of his thought can also help contextualize Nishida's thought with respect to the history of the philosophy ethics and morality that had preoccupied Japan since the Meiji Restoration.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59

¹² *Ibid.*, 80.

The debate over ethics took center stage as intellectuals weighed in on the moral or ethical direction Japan would take as it started to modernize.¹³ Emerging from these debates was a new discipline, *ringrigaku*, which was the study of moral philosophy.¹⁴ While some *rinrigaku* scholars reaffirmed traditional Buddhist, or Confucian morality, many others such as Inoue Tetsujirō sought to adopt a more modern foundation of ethics that would be suitable for the ‘new’ Japan. Inoue had noted that “[n]owadays Buddhism is collapsing, Confucianism declining, the bushidō without energy. The old morals of our country are gradually going to the end [...],” however he was also hesitant to strictly adopt the morals of the West, which he argued that Japan had been “completely overwhelmed” by them.¹⁵ In response to this perceived problem Inoue put forth a new theory of ethics in the work *Rinri shinsetsu* (New Theory of Ethics, 1883), which was prompted by these changing dynamics afflicting Japanese society evident in the opening section of the text,

I was met by a ceaseless traffic of samurai, peasants, artisans [...] all milling about in every direction. Some were shouting, others kicking up dirt, or in a blaze of emotion over gains and losses, consumed with thoughts of luxury [...] They behaved as though they were birds and beasts in a struggle for food. On the street, I alone stood still [...] “Ah! Is this indeed the way of life? What squalor and ugliness!” After returning to my room, I leaned against a table below the window. I arbitrarily took books from the shelf, wanting to know the foundation for ethics.¹⁶

Inoue’s analysis of the foundation of ethics in this work was done in a scientific and systematic way that resulted in a fusion of East and West. Thus, long before Nishida had begun articulating his conception of ethics and moral society the debate on how to make a moral society and what

¹³ The debates over ethics in Japan during the Meiji period (1868-1912) are covered extensively in Richard M. Reitan’s book *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan*, which was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter.

¹⁴ *Rinrigaku* literally translates as the study of ethics (or morals), with *rinri* meaning ethics (or morals) and *gaku* meaning study (or learning).

¹⁵ Inoue Tetsujirō, quoted in Eddy Douformont, “Is Confucianism Philosophy? The Answers of Inoue Tetsujirō and Nakae Chomin,” *Whither Japanese Philosophy? II Reflections Through Other Eyes* (Tokyo, JP: University of Tokyo Center of Philosophy, 2010), 84.

¹⁶ Inoue Tetsujiro quoted in Richard M. Reitan, *Making a Moral Society*, 3.

one would look like had long existed in Japan, in a language that was not entirely different from Nishida's own and his thought was thus part of a longstanding tradition in Japan since at least the Meiji. This is not to call into question his originality as a thinker, or position within the history of modern Japanese philosophy. However, it does show that Nishida, like the others, was shaped by larger historical dynamics, which were structured by global capitalist modernity.

Returning to the performative aspect of Nishida's morality it is possible to see that this aspect too had already existed in the discourse over ethics in Japan in pieces like the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) that was discussed in the previous chapter. Recall that the rescript grounded morality innately in a reified trans-historical character of the Japanese and thus like Nishida's morality, it was largely performative rather than being tied to any specific actions. For as long as one's actions were done in the service of the state they were considered moral. Having given primacy to the state over the individual, it is possible to see how this conception, in the later wartime period would have helped contribute to and legitimize the dominant fascist ideology. Another work previously discussed that shares the performative aspect of morality is Watsuji's *Nihon no shindō*. In the wartime propaganda piece by Watsuji, the warrior had essentially been turned into an artist, whereby the battlefield became the canvass. The samurai of feudal Japan were seen as embodying a superior level of consciousness, one that "transcended death and life."¹⁷ The way of the warrior, *bushido*, was thus regarded as the living embodiment of a superior morality. Within Watsuji's philosophical framework, brutality, murder, and other violent acts were essentially aestheticized and were considered moral as long as they were done in the service of the nation. Defending Japan and East Asia against the encroaching Western powers was thus more than reason to defend the actions of the military. While Nishida did not

¹⁷ Watsuji Tetsuro, *The Way of the Japanese Subject*, 977.

go as far as this in *Geijutsu to dōtoku* (or his later works for that matter by explicitly supporting the actions of the military), he did share a number of aesthetic similarities with fascist ideology that can be found throughout his writings, in ideas and concepts like performative morality, ‘moral society,’ just to name a couple. Nishida’s thought took a softer approach, less direct, but equally powerful. What this shows again is that Nishida’s thought did not have to be distorted by fascist ideologues and supporters to legitimize fascism, but on the other hand, his romantic aestheticization of concepts like morality and society show that he had always contained the possibility for a fascist interpretation should the intellectual and ideological atmosphere provide the right conditions.

Up until this point, the analysis of Nishida’s relationship with Japanese fascism has been primarily examined through the subtle, yet powerful aesthetic similarities that he shared with fascist ideology. Careful attention has been made in order to suggest that the texts themselves were not fascist, but rather that the possibility for a fascist reading rested in the manifestation of various ‘fascist moments’ that can be found throughout his early works like *Zen no kenkyū* and *Geijutsu to dōtoku*. These moments were a sort of crystallization of the romantic critique of modernity, pulling together a sense of longing for past traditions, aestheticized, performative morality, and a transhistorical idealism that could withstand the social abstractions of capitalist modernity. Yet, Nishida’s relationship with fascism, at this point, remains largely tangential. There are two important factors for this that still required to be dealt with. First, because the texts analyzed thus far have predated fascism, or at least the emergence of fascism as the dominant cultural ideology, more analysis of Nishida’s later work from the fascist period is required in order to fully grasp his relationship with and influence on Japanese fascism. Though not identical to the fascist position of the government, the subtle similarities that had existed in

Nishida's earlier works became far more apparent as he touched upon some of the pillars of Japanese fascism, namely the superiority and uniqueness of the Japanese spirit and the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. Secondly, there is the issue that Nishida's thought also equivocated non-, or even anti-fascist positions, which is made all the more evident in the postwar revival of his thought, for which scholars from various backgrounds and ideological positions attempted to develop his thought in different directions. Thus, let us consider these important factors as a means of fully coming to terms with Nishida's relationship with Japanese fascism, through an examination of his later works.

Nishida tetsugaku in the Wartime Period

As mentioned previously, there is a shift in Nishida's thought following the publication of *Geijutsu to dōtoku*. However, as we earlier drew attention to, this shift was not an abandonment of his previous philosophical categories and concepts, but rather it marked a turn towards new subjects, whereby he came to theorize on a uniquely Eastern logic, the Japanese spirit, and the Co-prosperity Sphere. By taking on these new subjects, Nishida's thought moved increasingly to the right as he started to take on subjects that were paramount to the official doctrine of Japanese fascism, if this shift was not intentional in its support for the official doctrine, Nishida was at least swept up in the times, ultimately revealing that his thought, despite exhibiting certain differences, contributed to and legitimized the official ideology by making use of a similar underlying logic. Thus, one can argue that Nishida's thought was indeed fascist, but that it was different from that of the government. With respect to Nishida's approach to these subjects there are three works that will serve as our primary focus: *Nihon bunka no mondai* (The

Problem of Japanese Culture, 1940),¹⁸ *Sekai shinchitsujo no genri* (The Fundamental Principles of the New World Order, 1943), and *Kokutairon* (On the National Polity, 1944). Before turning to these works, let us first consider the importance, and structure of the Co-prosperity Sphere, within the official doctrine of Japanese fascism.

Saving Asia from the West: the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere and Japanese Fascist Ideology

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the concept of a Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere was a major component of Japanese fascism. The Co-prosperity Sphere was presented as a means of liberating Asia from the confines of the West, an alternative to Western modernity that was championed as a means of shedding the contradictions of capitalism and the racism of Western imperialism and modernity.¹⁹ In reality, it was a thinly veiled justification for Japanese militarism and expansionism in Asia as they required the resources for which they needed to compete with the modern Western powers, evident in phrases of the time like “Japan is the fountain source of the Yamato race, Manchukuo is its reservoir, and East Asia is its paddy field.”²⁰

The idea of the co-prosperity sphere had in fact only started to take shape in the late 1930s, after Japan had already invaded Manchuria in 1931 following the Mukden Incident beginning their prewar military expansion.²¹ One of the most famous articulations of the

¹⁸ This work was originally given as a series of lectures in 1938, and was put together for publication in 1940.

¹⁹ Ken C. Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Works in Interwar Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 22.

²⁰ *Shinmin no michi* (The Way of Subjects), *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 1002.

²¹ An excellent overview of the history of Manchuria under Japanese occupation is given in Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), pp. 41-86.

concept came from the Foreign Minister of the time, Arita Hachirō, who gave a radio address entitled “The International Situation and Japan’s Position,” on June 29th, 1940.²² Against the backdrop of the war that had started in Europe less than a year before, Arita reasons that “[t]he causes of strife mankind has hitherto experienced lie generally in the failure to give due consideration to the necessity of some such natural and constructive world order and to remedy the irrationalities and injustices of old.”²³ In order to rectify these errors a new world order must be formed from which international peace will follow. To reach this point, regional spheres of co-prosperity must come together to create peace within these areas first. With respect to East Asia, Arita further elaborates that:

[t]he counties of East Asia and the regions of the South Seas are geographically, historically, racially, and economically very closely related to each other. They are destined to cooperate and minister to one another’s needs for their common well-being and prosperity and to promote peace and progress in their regions. The uniting of all these regions under a single sphere on the basis of common existence and insuring thereby the stability of that sphere is, I think, a natural conclusion.²⁴

Of course, he, like others who espoused the construction of a co-prosperity sphere, such as Nishida, saw Japan as the only country in East Asia as capable of leading such a historical mission.

The co-prosperity sphere presented in Arita’s radio address was further elaborated and outlined in a number of works by the government that followed, such as the Ministry of Education’s *Shinmin no michi* (The Way of Subjects, 1941) and an unpublished, secret planning paper outlining the goals of the war written by the Total War Research Institute in 1942.²⁵ The Ministry’s document was widely disseminated and served as one of many official papers that

²² The radio address was published in the *Tokyo Gazette* under the same title in August 1940.

²³ Arita Hachirō, “The International Situation and Japan’s Position,” *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 1006.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1006-1007.

²⁵ *Shinmin no michi* was written prior to the war at the beginning of 1941.

attempted to counterbalance the influence of Western ideas permeating Japan.²⁶ The text begins by reinforcing the importance of the state, concretely embodied in the Emperor of Japan. In a language not completely unfamiliar with Nishida's writings, and his conception of a 'moral society' as a means of reaching one's infinite potential, the document notes the need for "national solidarity," and "[...] discarding the self-centered and utilitarian ideas" in order to achieve "the unprecedentedly great tasks."²⁷ The great task in question was the creation of a new world order, of which the East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere was paramount in order to save the future of Asia. The new order would eliminate the old, which had "been placing world humanity under individualism, liberalism, and materialism."²⁸ Naturally, it was only Japan that could lead this historical mission.

Not long after the Pacific War had started at the beginning of December in 1941, the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere was articulated by the Total War Research Institute as the ultimate goal of the war in a January 1942 document. The plan was articulated in the following way:

The Japanese Empire is a manifestation of morality, and its special characteristic is the propagation of the imperial way [...] It is necessary to foster the increased power of the empire, to cause East Asia to return to its original form of independence of co-prosperity by shaking off the yoke of Europe and America, and to let its countries and peoples develop their respective abilities in peaceful cooperation and secure livelihood.²⁹

What is interesting about all of these conceptions of the Co-prosperity Sphere, and that is also reflected in Nishida's articulation, is one of the often overlooked aspects of Japanese fascism,

²⁶ Other documents were identified earlier, such as the Imperial Rescript and the *Kokutai no hongu*.

²⁷ "The Way of Subjects," *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 999.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ "Draft of Basic Plan for Establishment of Greater East Asia Co-Proprosperity Sphere," *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 1010.

namely its reliance on humanism as a system of reasoning evident in the last sentence of the above cited passage.³⁰

Despite the deep seeded racism of fascist ideology, the justifications for the actions committed were always found in humanistic reasoning. War must be fought to bring about peace, the occupation of Korea and Manchuria are defended as a means of bringing about further co-operation and prosperity, to name just a few examples. Though it initially comes across as antithetical to fascism, as historian William Haver has suggested, because fascism is not a “teratological exception to historicist humanism, a kind of bloody syncopation in the rhythm of modernity; it is in fact, *one* of the possibilities of modern humanism. Modern historicist humanism is the condition of possibility for totalitarian fascism [...]”³¹ This is of course not to say that all humanism necessarily descends into fascism, but rather that the two are connected and intrinsically related. In order to better inform the relationship between humanism and Japanese fascism it is worth looking briefly at the concept of humanism.

At the core of humanism lies the notion that there is such thing as a true, or authentic human being. Borrowing from Michel Foucault’s critique of humanism can also be helpful and revealing as to what the concept entails when he states, “[h]umanism serves to color and to justify the conceptions of man to which it is after all, obliged to take recourse.”³² However, what is crucial to consider is that like romanticism and fascism, humanism must be understood in its relation to capitalist modernity. This is because Modern humanism is reconstituted from

³⁰ Ken C. Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble*, 159.

³¹ William Haver, *The Body of this Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of Aids* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 43. Emphasis in the original.

³² Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” *The Foucault Reader*. Edited and Translated by Paul Rainbow (New York, NY: Random House, 1984), 44.

its premodern form, taking the form and structure of capitalist modernity. Thus, despite positing itself as something transhistorical, it is very much historically specific.

One of the primary features of modern humanism is that envisages a transhistorical totality, which takes the form of a community of humans. However, what it is to be a human is universalized, it therefore necessarily erases the differences that make up the individual. As Haver describes, “[o]ne is accepted into the community of the “we” only insofar as one accepts one’s essentially passive objectness... only in so far as one rejects one’s difference, one’s singular otherness.”³³ In this respect, one can begin to see just how humanism, with its vision of a human community, helps open the space for which fascism is able to emerge, taking humanism to a much more extreme position. In fascism, the totality is replaced with a more specific and concrete national community, the *volk*, or *minzoku*. The standard for what it is to be human, the authentic human being is found in specific ethnicities and races. The use of humanistic reasoning in Japanese fascist ideology, evident in the calls for cooperation and co-prosperity, is thus not as contradictory as one might initially have assumed. It is the ultimate goal of forming a universal humanity, a world community that opened the space for which Japan could be posited as the only nation that could lead East Asia in the realization of this historical mission. Now, with the importance of Co-prosperity and its place in Japanese fascism recognized, let us turn to Nishida’s writings on the subject to fully grasp his relationship with fascist ideology.

³³ William Haver, *The Body of this Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of Aids*, 19.

Nishida and the Wartime Ideology: the Myth of Japanese Uniqueness and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere

Nishida's writings on the Japanese spirit and the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere made use of a similar language and structure as that of the official ideology on these issues. These similarities have prompted some to suggest that this is a clear indication of his support of the wartime regime and their policies. However, Nishida's supporters have also come to his defense on this issue, arguing that instead of showing support for the fascist program they were a skilful means of using the very language and structure of the fascist aesthetic and ideology against itself.³⁴ Those maintaining this position further leverage their argument by drawing attention to some of the challenges to the official doctrine that are evident in these writings, especially in his conceptualization of the Japanese spirit. Thus, in the analysis that follows attention will be given to not only the similarities between the two positions on the Japanese spirit and the Co-prosperity Sphere, but to the existence of seemingly non-, or anti-fascist sentiment in his thought, which distances him from the official doctrine. However, in consideration with Nishida's earlier thought, it will be shown that at least in his philosophical writings, Nishida's thought did share a fascist aesthetic, and the differences between the politics of Nishida and that of the wartime regime were in degree, rather than kind.

In his essay on the Japanese spirit, *Nihon bunka no mondai*, there are some noticeable differences between his conception of the Japanese spirit and that proposed by the official doctrine and fascist ideologues. These differences are evident right from the beginning where he

³⁴ Christopher Goto-Jones makes this type of argument suggesting that Nishida had to use the language of the period "[...] not only because this is the very nature of language but also, in the particular circumstances of wartime Japan, because of the extensive activities of the Special Higher (Thought) Police operating under the increasingly strict terms of the Peace Preservation Law... the philosophical space became the only possible space for political discourse." See Christopher Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan*, 76.

challenges what he perceives to be a common flaw in the literature, the primarily emotional investigation of the Japanese spirit. He clarifies what he means by this, arguing that “[g]oing to the true facts, however, does not mean following tradition out of the mere force of custom or acting in direct response to subjective emotions.”³⁵ This challenge was likely in response to the growing anti-intellectual atmosphere of the period, and reveals an inner tension in Nishida’s philosophy. As identified in Nishida’s earlier works, he is critical of rationality, and the individualism and selfishness common to Western society, yet as evident here, he was by no means an anti-intellectual, nor was he completely anti-Western. Nishida instead stressed the limitation of rationality, and expounded on the differences between Eastern and Western logic, but did not dismiss them outright.

In response to the emotional investigation, Nishida offered a slightly more humble approach, which “[...] should mean following the true facts of things at the expense of the self.”³⁶ Contrary to his earlier writings which challenged the applicability of the scientific method to garnering truth, Nishida even suggests that any investigation requires the use (though not exclusively) of a ‘scientific spirit.’³⁷ It is obvious from the outset that there are instances in these writings that Nishida exhibited certain ideas and characteristics that ran contrary to the official doctrine, which during the period even attracted the attention of some fascist ideologues who considered Nishida too pro-Western.³⁸ However, despite these differences, upon further examination of this essay it is evident that his ideas do not run as contrary to the discourse as one might think. In fact, in certain respects, he was espousing positions that were in some ways even more extreme than that of the fascist ideologues.

³⁵ Nishida Kitarō, “The Problem of Japanese Culture,” *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (First Edition, 1958), 859.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Michiko Yusa, “Nishida and the Question of Nationalism,” 204.

One such example can be found in Nishida's specific critique of the philosophical scholarship of the Japanese spirit, which he saw, perhaps inadvertently, as problematically approaching the subject using primarily Western forms of logic. In Nishida's words,

Leaving aside those who are studying the special character of Oriental culture from the historical point of view, do not the majority of those who treat Oriental culture from the philosophical point of view deal with it in Occidental terms? [...] Is "logic" in general nothing more than the mode of thought and way of looking at things which underlies Western culture today? Must we assume Occidental logic to be the only logic, and must the Oriental way of thinking be considered simple a less-developed form?³⁹

Thus, according to Nishida, much of the scholarship had unintentionally posited Western logic as a universal logic. Nishida instead conceptualized a dialectical notion of logic, whereby Eastern and Western logic were both recognized independently, yet they were both considered as part of the same historical trajectory. They were two modes of the same overarching logic, but had developed in different directions.⁴⁰ Whereas Nishida saw Western logic as one that emphasized the categories of 'being' and the 'form,' he maintained that Eastern logic emphasized the categories of 'nothingness' and the 'formless.' For Nishida, it was this logic that one must use to adequately comprehend the unique characteristics of the Japanese spirit and to construct the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.

Looking back to *Zen no kenkyū*, it is possible to see that Nishida's emphasis of an Eastern logic can already be found in concepts like pure experience, which evolved over the course of his writings into the concept of the place of absolute nothingness. The differences between the two concepts were minor, and were the result of his attempt to articulate more

³⁹ Nishida Kitarō, "The Problem of Japanese Culture," 862.

⁴⁰ "I am not saying that logic is of two kinds, Occidental logic and Oriental logic. Logic must be one; it is only as the form if the self-formative function of the historical world that it has taken different directions in the course of its development." (863)

clearly his concept of pure experience. Thus, even in his later philosophy, the world of historical reality remained the world of pure experience, simply proposed in different terms.⁴¹

It is important to note that despite being two modes of an overarching logic, Nishida does not make the claim that the two are necessarily equal, and in fact he is very much challenging what he perceives to be the primacy given to Western logic. Thus, Nishida, attempting to revitalize Eastern logic claims “I believe that underlying the Oriental view of the world and of humanity there has been something equal, if not superior, to Occidental.”⁴² Within the framework of an Eastern logic, Nishida is thus equipped to adequately approach the subject of the Japanese spirit, which is then shown to rise above its Eastern counterparts. In Nishida’s words,

[u]nderlying both Chinese and Indian cultures there was something truly great, but they lacked a spirit of resolutely seeking out the true facts and therefore become rigid and fossilized. That the Japanese alone in the Orient though sharing in these cultural influences have gone forward to absorb Occidental culture and have also been considered the creators of a new Oriental culture [...]⁴³

Therefore, while there are instances that point to Nishida distancing himself away from the official fascist doctrine, he is ultimately challenging it from an equally, though different, fascist framework. Nishida never challenges the superiority, or uniqueness of the Japanese spirit, revealing that his fascism was different in degree rather than kind. To further appreciate the essence of Nishida’s conception of the Japanese spirit, and some of the instances where it exhibits striking similarities with the official doctrine, let us consider some points from his essay on the *kokutai*, *Kokutairon* (On the National Polity, 1944).

⁴¹ Hans Waldenfels, “Absolute Nothingness: Preliminary Considerations on a Central Notion in the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō and the Kyoto School,” *Monumenta Nipponica*. Vol. 21, No. ¾ (1966), 356.

⁴² Nishida Kitarō, “The Problem of Japanese Culture,” 859.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Nishida's conception of the *kokutai* does not stray very far from the standard interpretation at the time. For instance he bases the foundation of the Japanese national polity on the Imperial household, stating that:

[...] for us Japanese, Japan's national polity expresses the fact that the Imperial Household is the beginning and end of the world. The Imperial Household is a symbol that envelops the past and future; and thus the fact that, as a self-determination of the absolute present, everything takes the Imperial Household as its center and is vitally developing, is attributable to the glory of our national polity.⁴⁴

It is not the standard interpretation of the *kokutai* that is most revealing with respect to Nishida's relationship with fascism. Rather, it is what follows these passages that begin the essay. Once he presents the standard interpretation, Nishida goes on to put the concept of the *kokutai* into his own abstract philosophical language. For example, Nishida states, "[t]he originality of Japan's national polity, [...] lies in its own form of contradictory identity of immanence and transcendence [...] it lies in its own pure nationhood as a self-formation of the world that takes that reason for its nationhood (its absolute contradictory self-identity) as its very principle."⁴⁵ In considering this example it is possible to see how Nishida's concept of pure experience, his logic of the place of absolute nothingness, is in this essay, reified concretely in the Japanese state. More specifically, it is manifested in the Imperial household, the Emperor. The superiority of the Japanese spirit is found in the Japanese *kokutai*, as it is posited as the only space for which one can achieve a state that transcends both the subject and object, the absolute contradictory self-identity, the moment of pure experience. Furthermore, one can see the obvious connection with fascism, as for Nishida, achieving this true, or authentic state is only possible by sacrificing the self to the totality of the state.

⁴⁴ Nishida Kitarō, "On the National Polity," 85.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

Nishida's belief in the superiority of the Japanese spirit, like fascist ideologues such as Arita and Watsuji, had well positioned him to conceptualize a Co-prosperity Sphere that placed the Japanese *kokutai* at the center, despite, as it will be shown, his use of humanistic reasoning. In his essay *Sekai shinchitsujo no genri* (Fundamental Principles of a New World Order) Nishida draws attention to the fact that modernity had brought East and West into a more compact global space through economic, scientific, and technological development.⁴⁶ Without attacking these advances in themselves, Nishida uses these developments as the catalyst for proposing a new world historical mission, which is posed as the need for "each nation to awaken to its world-historical mission and for each to transcend itself while remaining true to itself, and to construct one "multi-world.""⁴⁷ The Co-prosperity Sphere, is presented as an intermittent stage towards this future 'multi-world,' where similar nation (divided on racial and ethnic lines) come together first, in order to establish spheres of peace and prosperity.

One point that can immediately be taken away from Nishida's essay is that it is already possible to see that he never deviated far from the ideas that he had articulated as far back as *Bi no setsumei* and *Zen no kenkyū*. As identified earlier, in these works he had written of the need of the self to transcend itself, which ultimately negated the self as means of achieving a place of absolute nothingness, where one could reach their full potential through a connection with a higher order. In his later writings, he transposes this earlier views of the self to the state, whereby the state must also transcend its own interests to connect with, and become one world.

Returning to the essay, Nishida claims that because the ideologies of the period are incapable of achieving the ends of the 'multi-world' as they are dominated by individualism,

⁴⁶ Nishida Kitarō, "Fundamental Principles of the New World Order," 73.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

liberalism, and imperialism. Furthermore, these ideologies are blamed for the current historical situation, the Second World War, which has allowed the West to be seen as superior to the East, where they are viewed as nothing more than a colony.⁴⁸ Nishida's response, the aforementioned 'multi-world,' or as he also states, 'world-within-the-world,' is the ideology needed, as it would allow for each nation to become what he had articulated in *Geijutsu to dōtoku* as a 'moral,' or 'true' society. As Nishida defines in this later essay,

[...] what I term "world formation" is the world's becoming concretely one—that is, its becoming a worlds-within-the-world world—by means of each nation and people thoroughly completing its world-historical mission in its respective historical foundation, or again, by means of living its respective historical life.⁴⁹

Nishida's ultimate vision is postulated as something different, and even opposed to imperialism on the grounds that it seeks for each nation to come together, but to follow their respective historical missions. This aspect of his thought has been considered as an example of his anti-fascist sentiment, and against Japan's colonization efforts in Asia.

However, one must not forget the role of the Co-prosperity Sphere in the eventual emergence of a 'multi-world.' Given the war, it was obvious to Nishida that a new world order would take some time to come together, and thus what was needed were common spheres that could first obtain peace, eventually coming together on a global scale. As Nishida suggests, "[n]ow the various peoples of East Asia must awaken to their own world-historical mission as East Asian peoples. This is the basic principle of the construction of an East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere."⁵⁰ Like Japanese fascist ideology, the humanistic reasoning and intentions of Nishida's project should not go unnoticed. It was this reasoning, the need to create a global, 'moral' society that opened up the very possibility of Japan to assume a leadership role in Asia. As he

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 75.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

states in the essay, “[... for such a particular world to be constructed, there must be that which becomes its core and undertakes its task. In East Asia today, that core is none other than our nation, Japan.”⁵¹ By way of conclusion, let us now briefly bring back into the discussion the positions put forth by Graham Parkes and Christopher Goto-Jones with respect to Nishida’s so-called ‘internationalism.’

The position put forth in this thesis, namely that Nishida’s philosophy exhibited a definitive fascist aesthetic, runs diametrically opposed to the views expressed by Parkes and Goto-Jones. Both Parkes and Goto-Jones see Nishida’s opposition to imperialism in his later writings, and his use of humanistic reasoning are completely antithetical to fascist ideology, and thus he cannot be considered as a fascist. For instance, in reference to a quote from *Sekai shunchitsujo no genri*, in which Nishida states that “what emerges from that [racialism that centers only on its own people] cannot but degenerate as a matter of course into aggression or imperialism.”⁵² Parkes argues that “[...] the passage just quoted exposes the absurdity of the accusations of Nishida for complicity with Japanese aggression and imperialism.”⁵³ Thus, in opposition to the fascist reading, both Parkes and Goto-Jones propose that Nishida was an internationalist.

As identified previously, whenever Nishida is espousing the construction of the Co-prosperity Sphere, or the ultimate goal of a ‘multi-world’ order, he makes use of modern humanistic reasoning. Both Parkes and Goto-Jones read in these instances examples of Nishida

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Nishida as quoted in Graham Parkes, “The Definitive Internationalism of the Kyoto School,” 178.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 179. In reference to the same essay Goto-Jones states that “In other words, it was certainly the case that Nishida was against Western imperialism, but this attitude was not the result of anti-Westernism or run-away ultra-nationalism, rather it was part and parcel of a grander anti-imperialism which must logically have encompassed Japanese imperialism as well: never solidarity before critique.” Christopher Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan*, 94.

promoting an internationalist politics, which makes use of both universalism and particularism. In Goto-Jones words, “[a] legitimately moral trans-national grouping must be sensitive to the particular cultures of each constituent nation [...] a unified world-of-worlds—a stage between the particular nation and the world itself.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Parkes states, “[t]he force of calling the goal a ‘multi-world’, or ‘world-of-worlds’, is that the world of each nation will not simply merge into one undifferentiated totality [...]” and that “[...] emphasis on polycentricity also contradicts Nishida’s occasional claims for the centrality of the Japanese ‘national polity’ [...]”⁵⁵ However, as we identified in both the analysis of the official doctrine of the Co-prosperity Sphere and Nishida’s conception, it was the very use of this language that opened the space for which fascism could emerge. Japanese fascism had always been contingent upon this line of reasoning. Parkes and Goto-Jones are right to point out that Nishida’s thought did not share the racism of the official ideology, and also differentiated in some other ways, but ultimately his veneration of emperor and the Imperial Household, the *kokutai*, and the superiority of the Japanese spirit, pushed his thought in a fascist direction. That his earlier thought, which predated fascism, evoked similar aesthetic themes as that of fascism, identified throughout as ‘fascist moments,’ highlights the fact that Nishida’s thought exhibited a continuity between his early and later writings that reveal his thought need not have been misconstrued by his more politically active students to support the wartime regime. His thought, whether intentional or not, should thus be seen as ultimately to have contributed to the ideological foundations, and intellectual justification of Japanese fascism.

⁵⁴ Christopher Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan*, 93. Rather than use the term ‘internationalist,’ or ‘international’ Goto-Jones more often than not uses the term *inter-kokutai*.

⁵⁵ Graham Parkes, “The Definite Internationalism of the Kyoto School,” 179.

Conclusion: Reconsidering Nishida's Contemporary Relevance in Light of his Relationship with Japanese Fascism

In this thesis I have attempted to reconceptualise the way in which Nishida's relationship with fascist ideology have been understood in the contemporary historiography. Meeting these ends required a two pronged approach in which both fascism and Nishida's own philosophy were analyzed and contextualized within the larger historical framework of global capitalist modernity. Beginning with the concept of fascism both generally and specifically to Japan, the effort was made to show that rather than represent an ideology that was antithetical to modernity the very conditions of possibility for the emergence of fascism lay in its relation to modernity, and thus it is contingent upon it. Fascism (at least in its twentieth century form), as a derivative of romanticism, was a movement that sought to solve the antinomies and fragmentation caused by modernity at a more concrete level. It appealed to a reified, trans-historical cultural ideal, one that could withstand the social abstractions of modern society, and restore the connection with the past that had been severed. In Japan, this process took the form of the Emperor and Imperial Household whose existence transcended temporality, connecting the Japanese to the past, present, and future. Fascism was thus both old and new; an alternative modernity that was anti-

modernity, but that never actually challenged the overarching structure. It was all that modernity had to offer without the consequences, a modernist anti-modernity.

By grasping fascism in this way it was possible to turn to Nishida's philosophy and highlight the fact that from the very beginning his thought exhibited a shared aesthetic with fascism, evident in what were identified as 'fascist moments' in his early thought. Nishida's later thought, which approached subjects that were important to Japanese fascism, such as the superiority of the Japanese spirit and the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, was thus not marked by a break from his earlier thought, as has been suggested by some of the critics. Nor does it indicate that he was necessarily supportive of all the actions of the Japanese government. Rather, Nishida's thought, from the very beginning, had always afforded itself the task of overcoming modernity by grasping a place from which the antinomies of modernity could not penetrate. In his earlier thought this was articulated in his concept of pure experience, eventually taking the form of the place of absolute nothingness for which one aspires to achieve. Not necessarily fascist in itself, it is the primacy which Nishida gives to the state, representing a concrete manifestation of his abstract higher power, or spirit, as the site for which one is able to achieve their infinite potential through sacrifice, which allows one to grasp Nishida's relationship to fascist ideology. As these ideas exist without much deviation from their initial formulation, Nishida's thought can be seen as positioned from the beginning to influence fascist ideology, whether he would have intended it to do so or not. Thus, as the analysis provided in this thesis has shown, Nishida's fascism, intentional or not, was different in degree, but not in kind, to that of the government.

Despite what may be regarded as an intention of this thesis, the purpose has not been to present Nishida's thought as fascist, or influencing fascist ideology, for the purpose of

dismissing any contemporary relevance from his philosophy. Given the devastation of the Second World War and the atrocities committed by the fascist regimes of Italy, Germany, and Japan, there is a tendency to dismiss any philosophical or literary work that may have supported or influenced fascist ideology as philosophically and theoretically irrelevant. However, in doing so, one commits two crucial errors. For one, this view tends to give too much personal agency to those who were involved in the actions of the government and wartime ideology. This is not to say that all actors should be exonerated for their actions and support of the fascist ideology, as there were many who committed or helped legitimize some truly heinous and terrible acts. However, placing the sole responsibility on the actors essentially ignores and absolves any responsibility of the overarching system that had created the conditions of possibility for the very emergence of fascism, something that cannot be reduced to any specific person, group, or country, no matter how appetizing this may come across. Secondly, and related to this first point, is that dismissing one's philosophy on account of their links to fascist ideology undermines the very real conditions that they were reacting to. With respect to Nishida, it was his reaction to the transformations of global capitalism that pushed him to posit a philosophy that could overcome the historical situation afflicting Japan. Given that the current historical context remains one of global capitalism, Nishida's contemporary relevance lies in the very aspect of his philosophy that has allowed us to consider him as having influenced Japanese fascism: his romantic critique and attempt to overcome modernity. Nishida's thought should therefore be regarded as taking the right step, it was just made in the wrong direction. To further clarify this aspect, and by way of concluding this thesis, I will offer a final analysis of Nishida's thought in light of his relationship with fascist ideology by historicizing his logic.

Historicizing Nishida's Logic of the Place of Absolute Nothingness in Light of His Relationship with Japanese Fascism

As we discussed throughout the thesis, but primarily in the second chapter when analyzing Nishida's Hegelian influence, Nishida's logic was primarily an attempt to go beyond a Hegelian logic. While Hegel's ultimate construct was 'Spirit,' Nishida posited this as the place of absolute nothingness, which in his earlier thought he had begun to construct through his concept of pure experience. Nishida's logic thus sought to do what he had considered Hegel to have failed to do, grasp a hidden logic that had concealed its own dialectical movement. As identified in some of his later writings, such as *Nihon bunka no mondai*, Nishida argued that there was an overarching logic, but that it had developed in different ways in both East and West. Nishida's logic of the place of absolute nothingness was thus not only an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of Hegel's logic, but to conceptualize a logic that could adequately deal with specificities of the East. This dialectical logic was thus paradoxically and problematically both universal and specific. It was ultimately universal but it had been manifested separately and developed differently in both East and West. The specificity of Nishida's logic is one of the aspects which allows one to grasp his influence on Japanese fascism. Japanese fascism had essentially sought to create, like Nishida's logic, an alternative modernity that was specifically suited for the East and could therefore save Asia from the encroaching West. Nishida's logic, by emphasizing the specificities, and ultimately the superiority of the East, thus offered a means of legitimating Japan's empire as it expanded under the guise of forming a sphere of likeminded people (who were racially and ethnically defined) who would come together in the name of achieving peace and prosperity. That Japan, having adapted some of the strong points of the

West, was the only country in Asia that could satisfy these ends was shared by both Nishida and the dominant fascist ideology.

However, it is ultimately in the overarching universal aspect of Nishida's thought that his contemporary relevance lies. While Nishida attempted to overcome the Hegelian logic by grasping a hidden logic found within, he continued to espouse a transhistorical subject. Hegel's transhistorical subject, 'spirit,' was thus ultimately the same, simply refashioned as the 'place of absolute nothingness.' Marx's critique of Hegel, as alluded to earlier in the second chapter, can also be applied to Nishida on similar grounds. Nishida's logic of nothingness insisted on the contradictory relationship between nothingness and the true self, which came together to form the ultimate construct. On this point, as Maren Zimmerman has noted, Nishida's thought converges with that of Hegel as they both sought to grasp unifying ground from which opposites could maintain their autonomy without being subsumed by a greater totality.¹ Thus, Nishida's new world order, articulated as a world-of-worlds or 'multi-world' was a political manifestation of his logic, which was deeply influenced by Hegel.

There are of course some notable differences between Hegel and Nishida, as Hegel's philosophy does not necessarily espouse a fascist position, as had Nishida's.² Here, both Postone's examination of Marx's critique of Hegel, which can be applied similarly to Nishida, as well as Parkes and Goto-Jones' internationalist reading of Nishida's thought can be helpful in elucidating a difference between the two. Beginning with Postone, he states that "[i]n terms of Marx's analysis, Hegel's concepts of dialectic, contradiction, and the identical subject-object

¹ Maren Zimmerman, "Nishida's "Self-Identity of Absolute Contradiction" and Hegel, 199.

² The question as to whether Hegel can be read as, or having influenced fascist ideology lies beyond the scope of this thesis. This would require a greater analysis than space permits, especially at this juncture of the thesis.

express fundamental aspects of capitalist reality but do not adequately grasp them.”³ Both Hegel and Nishida were unable to grasp the historical specificity of their own thought and concepts. While for Hegel this meant that he was not able to adequately grasp capitalist reality, for Nishida the consequence was that his transhistorical categories were manifested concretely through his veneration of the Emperor and the *kokutai*, which pushed his thought in an increasingly fascist direction. Furthermore, what Parkes and Goto-Jones’ internationalist reading of Nishida reveals is that his thought ultimately propagated a type of ‘alternative’ or ‘multiple’ modernity theory, in which modernity is freed from its Eurocentric origins and each nation can create their own modernity, or to put it into Nishidean terms, able to fulfill their own world historical mission. The problem for Nishida was that his ‘alternative’ modernity, which would be embodied first in the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, was ultimately fascist in its foundation and orientation through his reverence of the Emperor and Imperial household. Moreover, even if Nishida’s thought had not been influential in fascist ideology it would have been problematic as the ‘alternative’ modernity theory is problematic in itself. As Arif Dirlik has commented on the issue, “‘multiple modernities’ suggests a global multiculturalism, that reifies cultures in order to render manageable cultural and political incoherence.”⁴ Ultimately, he notes that the “framing of modernities within the boundaries of reified cultural entities feeds on, and in turn legitimizes, the most conservative claims on modernity.”⁵

Perhaps Nishida’s own efforts to create a Co-prosperity Sphere serves as the perfect example of supporting Dirlik’s claims. Nishida may have taken the right step, in his critique of modernity, but it ultimately was in the wrong direction as it attempted to posit a romantic idealist

³ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, 81.

⁴ Arif Dirlik, “Global Modernity? Modernity in an Age of Global Capitalism,” *European Journal of Social Theory*. Vol. 6, No. 3 (2003), 284.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 285.

alternative to Western modernity, bound to a transhistorical subject. What Nishida's efforts clearly show is that if one seeks to overcome the antinomies of modernity, one must look beyond the problems of modernity in terms of the relationships between nations, and recognize that the problems of modernity are internal to the very constitution of categories such as the nation, as they are reconstituted within, and thus historically specific to capitalist modernity. Therefore, any critique put forth must be directed towards the overarching structure and foundation of society, capitalism. Furthermore, it must be self-reflexive, recognizing its own historical specificity.

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