

The Nishida Enigma: “The Principle of the New World Order” (1943)¹

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I. Introduction

As Japan commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Pacific War, the issue of how to account for its colonial activities in Asia attracted renewed interest in the public sphere. Although the stories of atrocities are no longer a secret, the once-sloganized justification, the “liberation of Asia from Western imperial powers,” still enjoys considerable support among the conservative sector of society today, as witnessed by a series of recent remarks made by government officials in preparation for the formal statement on Japan’s role in the war in Asia.² Although Prime Minister Murayama finally issued an apology on August 15, 1995, the event was shrouded in controversy and resistance; the issue is far from settled.³ We can detect three currents of thought underlying such resistance: that Japan’s *intent* to liberate Asia was noble; that war (and its associated atrocities) is simply a part of history; and that Japan should not be “singled out” for its violent actions. Critics on the left are weary of the use of inert historicism to evade responsibilities and worried about the re-affirmation of nationalist sentiments that its resurgence implies.

This climate brings into focus the on-going debate among intellectuals concerning the claims made during the 1930s and 1940s by scholars who tried to theorize Japan’s place in Asia *vis-a-vis* the West. One such attempt was the infamous “Overcoming of [Euro-American] Modernity” (*kindai no chōkoku*) debate of 1942,⁴ in which a group of leading intellectuals of the time--chiefly the “Kyōto School” philosophers (*Kyōto gakuha*)⁵ and literary figures of the “Japan

¹ I would like to thank Yusa Michiko for an extensive review of an earlier version of the translation, from which I have learned a great deal; Andrew Feenberg, Kazashi Nobuo, John Maraldo, Ôhashi Ryôsuke and Amie Parry for comments; and Yutani Eiji for help with research. All of the Japanese names are listed with their family names first.

² See, for instance, the two criticisms in *The New York Times Magazine*, July 2, 1995 issue: “Coloring History Their Our Way” by David Sanger and “Denying History Disables Japan” by Ôe Kenzaburô.

³ For numerous articles on this issue see *Japan Times*, August 15th and 16th, 1995. I thank Thomas Dean for bringing this material to my attention and for discussion.

⁴ The debate was initially published in the September/October issue of *Bungakukai (Literary World)* in 1942. It has been republished, with the well-known critical commentary by Takeuchi Yoshimi, as *Kindai no Chōkoku (Overcoming of Modernity)*, Kawakami Tetsutarô et. al. and Takeuchi Yoshimi, Fuzanbō Hyakka Bunko, Tokyo: 1990. For a good secondary source, see also ‘*Kindai no Chōkoku*’ *Ron (The Theory of ‘Overcoming of Modernity’)* by Hiromatsu Wataru, Kōdansha, Tokyo: 1989. Discussions in English include H.D. Harootunian, “Visible Discourses/Invisible Ideologies,” *Postmodernism in Japan*. M. Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian, eds., Duke University Press, Durham: 1989, 63-92; and Minamoto Ryōen, “The Symposium on ‘Overcoming Modernity,’” *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*. James Heisig and John Maraldo, eds. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu: 1995.

⁵ The broad rubric of “Kyōto School” includes Nishida Kitarō and his colleagues and students--Tanabe Hajime, Watsuji Tetsurō, and more specifically, Nishitani Keiji, Kōyama Iwao, Kōsaka Masaaki, Shimomura Toratarō, Hisamatsu Shinichi, and Suzuki Shigetaka. Nishitani, Shimomura, and Suzuki Shigetaka attended the “Overcoming

Romanticist School” (*Nihon Rôman ha*)⁶--discussed the possibility of a specifically Japanese form of modernity which would remedy the defects of a Euro-American model driven by rationalism, technocentrism and materialism. The Kyôto School philosophers argued that Japan was uniquely suited to develop such an alternative form of modernity, as it was the only Asian nation able both to modernize and to retain “Eastern” spirituality. As such, it was Japan’s responsibility to “free Asia from Western colonial powers” so that it could develop a modern culture equal to or even better than that of the West. After the War, progressive intellectuals sharply criticized and ridiculed the debate for its reactionary agenda, its complicity with nationalism, and its justification of the Greater East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere (*dai tôa kyôei-ken*). The debate thereby acquired a frequently used designation, “infamous” (“*akumyô takaki*”)⁷, and was forced into oblivion, at least for the years following the War.

Beginning in the late 1960s, however, as the Japanese economy and industry flourished and Japan became a world-power, it again gained self-confidence and the leading elites began to represent “Japan” again as a distinctively “non-Western” cultural form capable of surpassing the West. Various theories of Japanese exceptionalism (*nihonjinron*) became popular, and the educated public once again turned its attention to the themes of the interwar debate.⁸ The new interest was not so much to rekindle the old debate, but think anew the possibility of “overcoming” the West by studying some unique features of the “Japanese mind and behavior” which purportedly gave the Japanese a special cultural advantage. Without much actual study of the old debate, the phrase “*kindai no chôkoku*” was resurrected and popularized again in the renewed atmosphere of cultural nationalism.

This tendency continued to grow during the 1970s and 1980s, this time with the idea that Japan is the genuine “post-modern” nation.⁹ The underlying reverse-orientalist claim is still that Japan is somehow positively “different,” the real “Other” of the West, and that this accounts for Japan’s amazing civilizational recovery since W.W.II, an event unprecedented in world history. According to this reasoning, what makes Japan so special culturally are the supposedly indigenous notions of “emptiness” and “harmony.” Because of its emptiness, Japan is able to absorb advanced technologies readily, and it is also perfectly suited for the internationalized “information society” which is to prevail in the coming century vis-a-vis the material industrial civilization of the past. As the “post-Western” world arrives in the late-20th Century with its multiple global power-centers, Japan will be able to offer a leading paradigm of world-civilization for the next millennium. This sort of rhetoric was consciously promoted by the Ôhira and Nakasone cabinets during the early to mid-1980s, with their optimistic portrayal of Japan as the leader of the “internationalization” movement.¹⁰ Thus, as Asada Akira notes, far from being an embarrassing

of Modernity” debate. Sometimes Marxists Miki Kiyoshi and Tosaka Jun are also considered as members of the Kyôto School. Conventionally the designation refers to the students of Nishida who continued the study of his thought, with emphasis on the religious dimensions, especially the Zen Buddhist strain. Today, although there is no longer a “Kyôto School proper” as it was, students of Nishitani--most notably Ueda Shizuteru--and Ôhashi Ryôsuke, though somewhat from a different angle, follow the legacy of Nishida’s philosophy in Kyôto.

⁶ For a discussion of the Japan Romantic School and its nationalism, see Kevin Doak, *Dreams of Difference: The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity*. University of California Press, Berkeley: 1994.

⁷ Takeuchi Yoshimi, 275. Hiromatsu uses the adjective “legendary” (*densetsu-teki ni yûmei*).

⁸ For discussions and critique of the theories of Japanese exceptionalism, see *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* by Peter Dale, St. Martin’s Press, New York: 1986, 1990, and Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry*, Routledge, New York: 1992.

⁹ For a critique of Japanese “postmodernism,” see Alan Wolfe’s “Suicide and the Japanese Postmodern,” in *Postmodernism and Japan*.

¹⁰ For a discussion of Ôhira’s idea of the “new age of culture,” see H.D. Harootunian, “Visible Discourses/Invisible Ideologies.” For discussions of Nakasone’s efforts at the *nihonjinron*-esque representation of Japan, see Arif Dirlik, “Past Experience, If Not Forgotten, Is a Guide to the Future”: or, What Is in a Text? The Politics of History in Chinese-Japanese Relations,” in *Japan in the World*, Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian, eds., Duke University

memory, today the issues raised in the “Overcoming of Modernity” debate are “ideologized and revived like ghosts” in contemporary Japan’s “groundless self-confidence.”¹¹

In this context, attention inevitably turns to Nishida Kitarô (1870-1945), generally regarded as the founder of modern Japanese philosophy. While Nishida himself did not participate in the “Overcoming of Modernity” debate, his philosophy of “nothingness” (*mu*) and his conception of a new “world history” were the theoretical foundations of the Kyôto School.¹² As such, Nishida is often harshly criticized as a symbol of the debate and all its associated nationalist and *nihonjinron* ideologies.¹³ But apart from these unfortunate political associations, Nishida also became the focus of appreciation again in recent years in the spirit of renewed cultural affirmation. He is considered the first Japanese thinker to master the Western philosophical tradition and combine it with insights from Japanese culture to devise a “world-class” philosophical system of his own. Recent authors have found some affinities between his theory of “*basho*” (“Place,” “topos,” or “chora”) as the empty field of contradictions, and “deconstruction,” showing the relevance of his thought to contemporary debates.¹⁴ Thus, Nishida is back in the limelight again, as an object of both critique and positive reevaluation.

At this historical juncture, it seems all the more fitting therefore to re-assess one of Nishida’s most controversial political writings, “The Principle of the New World Order” (*Sekai Shin-Chitsujo no Genri*).¹⁵ This short essay contains his philosophical reflections on world history, the project of World War II, the Japanese Imperial House (*kôshitsu*), and Japan’s role in the Greater East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. It is one of the most frequently cited and mentioned essays in discussions of Nishida’s politics, both from the left and the right; the interest in it has not died down at all in the last fifty years. Before examining the essay and the controversy surrounding it, let me first turn briefly to its background.

II. Historical Background of the Essay

Nishida spent his prolific life producing works on metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, religion, logic, mathematics, and science.¹⁶ He was initially influenced by such thinkers as

Press, Durham: 1993, 49-78, and Marilyn Ivy, “Critical Texts, Mass Artifacts: The Consumption of Knowledge in Postmodern Japan,” in *Postmodernism and Japan*, 21-46. I have also learned from James Fujii’s manuscript, “Internationalizing Japan: Rebellion in Kirikiri and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies,” regarding the connection between Nakasone’s efforts at internationalizing Japan and the inauguration and operation of the Research Center.

¹¹ “‘Kindai no Chôkoku’ to Nishida Tetsugaku” (“Overcoming of Modernity” and Nishida Philosophy), a roundtable discussion with Hiromatsu Wataru, Asada Akira, Ichikawa Hiroshi, and Karatani Kôjin, *Kikan Shichô*, vol.4, 1989, 10. Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Japanese are mine.

¹² For a discussion of the connection between Nishida’s philosophy and the debate, see Hiromatsu, 202-229.

¹³ With the recent publication of *Rude Awakenings*--the first comprehensive collection of essays on the topic of the Kyôto School and nationalism in English representing both criticism and defense--interest in Nishida’s politics will likely reach a larger audience.

¹⁴ For instance, Karatani Kôjin remarks: “in the context of the economic development of the 1970s, the fact that a self did not exist was highly valued. It is precisely because of this fact that Japan was able to become a cutting-edge super-Western consumer and information society. Indeed, there was no self (subject) or identity, but there was a predicative identity with the capacity to assimilate anything without incurring any shock or giving rise to any confusion. This is what Nishida Kitaro read as ‘predicative logic,’ or ‘the logic of place,’ in which he identified the essence of the emperor system.” (“The Discursive Space of Modern Japan,” *Japan in the World*, 298.) Other notable scholars who place Nishida in contemporary contexts are Nakamura Yûjiro and Kimura Bin.

¹⁵ Because the Japanese lacks definite and indefinite articles, the title, “Sekai Shin Chitsujo no Genri,” does not specify whether it is “a” principle of “a” new world order, or “the” principle of “the” (or “a”) new world order. The use of definite articles reflects my interpretation. For an interpretation which favors indefinite articles, see Ueda Shizuteru’s “Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question” in *Rude Awakenings*, (hereafter “Question”) 77-106.

¹⁶ Nishida’s corpus is published as *Nishida Kitarô Zenshû* (*The Collected Works of Nishida Kitarô*), Third Edition, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987-1989, hereafter abbreviated as *NKZ*; references will be followed by a volume number and page numbers.

Bergson, Royce, Wundt, and especially William James whose theory of “pure experience” he adapted in his own maiden work of 1911, *An Inquiry into the Good (Zen no Kenkyū)*.¹⁷ During the 1920s and 1930s his theories reflect elements of German Idealism, in particular Fichte and Hegel, Neo-Kantians, British Hegelians, and Marx. During this period Nishida developed his signature theory, the “Logic of Place” (*Basho no Ronri*), and other influential theories of history and human action.¹⁸ He taught at the Kyōto Imperial University from 1910 to 1928 and was professor emeritus from 1929. His followers came to known as the “Kyōto School.”

Nishida was writing some of his most mature philosophical work in the volatile political climate of the mid 1930s to early 1940s. After the take-over of Manchuria in 1931-32, the Sino-Japanese War erupted in 1937; by then the whole country was swept by nationalist sentiments and the military government was becoming increasingly authoritarian. Nishida was a leading intellectual of the time; his books were widely read and he was a public figure. However, up until this time, his writings had concentrated primarily on highly abstract metaphysical and epistemological theories, with little reference to politics or history. Because of this, his theory was attacked by Marxists for lacking real historical significance. Tosaka Jun, a Marxist student of Nishida’s, for instance called Nishida’s philosophy an “academic, bourgeois philosophy of idealism” that is “trans-historical, formalistic, romantic, and phenomenological.”¹⁹

Nishida’s letters during this period indicate that he became involved, though somewhat reluctantly, in politics partly in response to such criticism but also to show his concern for the great issues of the day.²⁰ In 1936 he wrote a liberal statement on education in connection with the government’s Committee for the Reform of Education (*Kyōgaku Sasshin Hyōgikai*),²¹ and in 1939 he served as an advisory board member of the Shōwa Academy (*Shōwa Juku*), a subsidiary of the Konoe government’s Shōwa Research Association (*Shōwa Kenkyū Kai*), which organized a series of discussions with university students.²² He also lectured and wrote several essays on such topics

¹⁷ *Zen no Kenkyū*, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo: 1987, also *NKZ 1*, 3-200. For English translations, see *An Inquiry into the Good*, Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, trans., Yale University Press, New Haven: 1990, and *A Study of Good*, V.H. Viglielmo, trans. Japanese Government Printing Bureau, 1960.

¹⁸ The major works of this period include *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness (Jikaku ni Okeru Chokkan to Hansei)*, 1917, *NKZ 2*, English translation by V.H. Viglielmo, with Toshinori Takeuchi and Joseph. O’Leary, SUNY Press, 1987), *From the Acting to the Seeing (Hataraku Mono kara Miru Mono e)*, 1927, *NKZ 4*), and *The Fundamental Problem of Philosophy (Tetsugaku no Konpon Mondai)*, 1933, *NKZ 7*, English translation by David Dilworth, Sophia University Press, Tokyo: 1970).

¹⁹ Fujita Masakatsu, “Nihon ni Okeru kenkyūshi no Gaikan to Genjō” (“An Overview of the History of Research [of Nishida] in Japan”) in *Nishida Tetsugaku: Shin Shiryō to Kenkyū e no Tebiki (Nishida Philosophy: New Resources and Guide to Research)*, Kayano Yoshio and Ōhashi Ryosuke, eds. Minerva Shobō, Kyōto: 1987, 118. At that time, Nishida accepted this criticism (see his letter to Tosaka, #749, *NKZ 18*, 460), though he later developed a more thorough criticism of the naturalistic tendencies in Marx’s dialectical materialism.

²⁰ For the discussions of Nishida’s involvement with government organizations, see Pierre Lavelle, “The Political Thought of Nishida Kitarō,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 49:2, 1994: 141-162, and Yusa Michiko, “Nishida and Totalitarianism: A Philosopher’s Resistance,” [hereafter “Totalitarianism”] *Rude Awakenings* 107-131.

²¹ On Nishida’s defense of liberal education see Yusa Michiko and Pierre Lavelle, “Correspondence.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 49:4, 1994: 524-529.

²² On the Shōwa Research Association in general, see William Miles Fletcher III, *The Search for a New Order: Intellectuals and Fascism in Prewar Japan*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill: 1982. Shōwa Research Association, originally formed by Gotō Ryūnosuke and Rōyama Masamichi in 1933, aimed for a comprehensive political reform of the existing government, by way of promoting “statist” or “unionist” policies. The Association consisted of journalists and academics (among them Miki Kiyoshi, a Marxist student of Nishida’s) who discussed the designing of a new national polity for Japan. Pierre Lavelle suggests that it was an ultranationalist organization, but Yusa Michiko disagrees. The Association was not “ultranationalist,” in the sense that its “revisionist” agenda tried to reform the existing bureaucratic government. However, this group was not at all on the side of the liberals, since it did support the unity of Japan’s national polity and the construction of the Greater East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. Fletcher classifies it as “fascist,” insofar as it mimicked the European model in its support of a “corporativist” or “unionist” state and dictatorial politics (Fletcher 104).

as W.W.II, nationalism, Japanese national polity (*kokutai*), the East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, and the Imperial House (*kôshitsu*).²³ One of the best-known among them is “The Principle of the New World Order” (*NKZ 12*, 426-434).

This essay was first conceived in early 1943 at the request of the Tōjō military government, which sought a philosophical theory of the Greater East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere to be presented at a Greater East Asia Meeting later that year in November.²⁴ Japan had lost its fleet at Midway a year earlier and in February of 1943 its ground forces had been defeated at Guadalcanal. In this atmosphere of intense emergency, Japan was shifting its policies toward giving more independence to its colonies in order to “win support from their inhabitants in an essentially defensive struggle”; the Greater East Asia Meeting was planned in order to consolidate this strategic move and to “reaffirm their [the leaders of the Co-prosperity Sphere] unity and their will to victory.”²⁵

Despite his consistent dislike of the military government, Nishida agreed to meet with some of the top government officials to discuss his ideas. Unable to understand Nishida’s views fully, the government officials requested that he write an essay on the topic. Nishida initially refused the request, but eventually he wrote a draft of “The Principle of New World Order” in the hope that the government officials might learn something from him. The officials still found it too difficult, so an edited version was produced by Tanabe Juri, a sociologist acquaintance of Nishida’s.²⁶ The edited version, which was circulated as a text by Nishida, contained many of Tanabe’s own pro-military ideas. To clarify his own view, Nishida returned to his draft and revised the essay. The circulation of the three different manuscripts (the original draft, Tanabe’s version, and the final version) created some post-War confusion regarding Nishida’s stance on the issues.²⁷ The first draft cannot be located today, and the final version became the official essay, published for the first time in the Collected Works (*NKZ 12*) in 1966.²⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all reference to the “New World Order” essay will be made from the official version.

But even without the existence of different versions, the essay’s ambiguous language is enough to yield quite a diverse range of interpretations. Unlike Heidegger’s political writings which

²³ See “The Problem of Japanese Culture” (*Nihon Bunka no Mondai*) which was originally delivered as a lecture in 1938 (*NKZ 14*, 389-417) and later turned into a longer essay and published as a book by the same title in 1940 (*NKZ 12*, 277-394); “The Problem of the Basis/Reason of Nations” (*Kokka Riyū no Mondai*, 1941, *NKZ 10*, 265-337); “On the Philosophy of History,” which was a speech presented to the Emperor (*Rekishi Tetsugaku ni Tsuite*, 1941, *NKZ 12*, 267-272); and the essays in “Supplement to the Fourth Collection of Philosophical Essays” (*Tetsugaku Ronbunshū Dai-yon Hoi*, 1943-44, *NKZ 12*, 397-434). “The Principle of New World Order” belongs to this Supplement.

²⁴ Detailed discussions of the circumstances of the writing of the essay are found in Yusa Michiko, “Fashion and *Aletheia*” [hereafter “Fashion”], *Hikaku Shisō Kenkyū* (*Studies in Comparative Philosophy*) 16, 1990: 281-294; Furuta Hikaru, “‘Sekai Shin Chitsujo no Genri’ Jiken-kō” I and II, (On the Incident Concerning “The Principle of New World Order”), *NKZ 14 and 19*, Inserts. 1979, 1980; and Ueda Hisashi, *Zoku Sofu Nishida Kitarō* (*My Grandfather Nishida Kitaro, II*), Nansōsha, Tokyo: 1983, 227-244.

²⁵ W.G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism: 1894-1945*. Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1987, 242. For the transcript of the official declaration and discussion, see Satō Kenryō, *Dai Tōa Sensō Kaikoroku* (*Memoirs of the Great East Asian War*), Tokuma Shoten, Tokyo: 1966, 318-322. The participants of this meeting were, besides Tōjō, the leaders of China, Manchukuo, Thailand, the Philippines, and Burma.

²⁶ Tanabe’s first name is listed as “Suketoshi” in Sanseidō’s 1993 edition of *Nihon Jinmei Jiten* (*Japanese Biographical Dictionary*), but according to Yusa it should read “Juri.”

²⁷ For instance, in 1954 Ōya Sōichi read the second (Tanabe’s) version and accused Nishida of “selling his soul to the military” (Yusa, “Fashion,” 289). For a discussion of the difference between the Tanabe’s and the final version, see Yusa, “Fashion,” and Ueda H, 232-233.

²⁸ Since the 1966 edition of *NKZ*, the essay has been incorporated as “Appendix 3” to the “Supplement to the Fourth Collection of Philosophical Essays.” (*NKZ 12*, 397-416). The “Supplement,” without the appendices, was originally an essay called “National Polity” (“*Kokutai*”), but according to Shimomura, in order to avoid harassment from the military government, Nishida published it under an inconspicuous title in 1944. See Shimomura Toratarō, “Kōki” (“Postscript”), *NKZ 12*, 470-473.

cannot reasonably be used to show that he was an anti-Nazi, Nishida's suggestive essay has been used by both the defenders and opponents of his politics to support their case. To this day there is no consensus on Nishida's political stance, and the representation of his position ranges from "anti-nationalist liberal" to "ultranationalist," and everything in-between.

III. The Controversy

As with any political discourse, the positioning of the "Nishida's case" in intellectual history can be a reflexive process in the sense that the very representation of the case situates the speaker in a particular political position from which the discussion of the debate is projected. The commentators' use of the "New World Order" essay illustrates this point well; some of the same passages are interpreted in completely opposing terms depending on who is presenting the case. In this sense, the representation of the essay is itself a testimony to the political views of the commentator.²⁹

The essay should also be read against the historical background of the controversy surrounding the Kyôto School. From the 1930s to the present, Nishida and the Kyôto School have been attacked from both the right and the left. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Nishida barely escaped arrest by the ultranationalist "thought police" for espousing "liberal" academic views; in the postwar period, "progressive intellectuals" attacked them for their "ultranationalist" views. Today the participation of North American and European scholars in the debate has made the situation more complex. Among intellectual historians of Japan, especially in the U.S., by far the most common reading of Nishida and the Kyôto School places them as thinkers complicit with wartime nationalism. However, Nishida's "Zen" philosophy entered the U.S. academia via a different route when the discourse of "bridging East and West" became popular in the mid to late 1950s. His thought became well known in the disciplines of comparative philosophy and religion, but without any reference to politics. As exemplified by scholars such as Nishitani Keiji, a common portrayal depicted Nishida as a philosopher who synthesized elements of rational Western philosophy and Eastern spirituality. Like present-day Kyôto scholars, Nishida and the pre-war Kyôto School have been portrayed apolitically as primarily religious thinkers.

In this climate, the debate is not simply between Nishida apologists and opponents. It has to be understood also in the context of U.S.-Japan relations in terms of the understanding of the Pacific War, of postwar experience and today's environment. Obviously, the understanding of the history of the Pacific War is not the same for Japanese and American scholars. Many Japanese scholars have memories of the defeat and humiliation and of the American occupation during the postwar period; and they have experienced Japan's economic growth since the 1960s. During the 50s and 60s, some Western scholars romanticized Zen mysticism, which was subsequently re-exported to Japan. To roughly break down the different groups with respect to the debate: There are Japanese scholars who defend Nishida, Japanese scholars who criticize Nishida, non-Japanese scholars who criticize Nishida, non-Japanese scholars who defend Nishida, and Japanese scholars who are educated outside Japan who defend or criticize Nishida, not to mention Japanese-American scholars who are interested in the debate. The assessment of the debate may also be made in the context of broader issues such as "Eurocentrism," "orientalism," "reverse-orientalism," "Japanese essentialism," "Japan bashing," and present-day nationalisms.

A. Nishida: An Ultranationalist?

To begin the survey from the critics' end, Ben-Ami Shillony states that the Kyôto School philosophers "justified the Pacific War as a legitimate response by Asia to Western Imperialism,"

²⁹ As John Maraldo warns, "When making a case against the self-righteous assertion of nationalism in a concrete form, one should remain aware of the possibility of being infected with the same malady. Simply retreating to the high ground of supposedly disinterested analysis is no guarantee of immunity. The process of criticism must somehow remain present before the eyes of the critic." "Questioning Nationalism Now and Then: A Critical Approach to Zen and the Kyoto School," *Rude Awakenings*, 335.

and in his discussion of Nishida he cites passages from Tanabe's version of the "New World Order" essay:

The Great East Asia War is a sacred war, because it is the culmination of the historical progress of Asia. For a long time, the Anglo-Saxon imperialists have opposed the peoples of East Asia and exploited their resources. The task of the liberated peoples now is to win the war and establish the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, in co-operation with the Germans, Italians, and other peoples in Europe, who are engaged in a heroic struggle to create a new order in Europe...Japan will win this war because her people are determined to sacrifice their lives for it...Japan's victory will save Asia and will offer a new hope for mankind.³⁰

Shillony does not mention the existence of different versions of the text of the "New World Order" essay but presents the passage as Nishida's words. Such unabashed pro-war rhetoric is certainly absent from Nishida's version, but one should also remember that Nishida read Tanabe's version and did not object to it strongly.³¹ He seems to have regarded it as still containing the general idea, and according to Ueda Hisashi, Nishida's grandson and biographer, Nishida thought the Tōjō government would not fully grasp his point anyway and he let Tanabe's version pass in the spirit of resignation.³²

Other strong critics include John Dower who claims that "the Kyōto School also made it clear that the current conflict represented Japan's ascension as the leading 'world-historical race.' To them as to all other Japanese patriots, the war in Asia and the Pacific was a 'holy war,' and represented an unprecedented struggle for the attainment of a transcendent Great Harmony (Taiwa)."³³ Tetsuo Najita and H.D. Harootunian assert that "no group helped defend the state more consistently and enthusiastically than did the philosophers of the Kyōto faction, and none came closer than they did to defining the philosophic contours of Japanese fascism."³⁴ Peter Dale and Robert Sharf accuse Nishida of being a quintessential *nihonjinron* philosopher and relate his thesis of the "unity of subject and object" to fascist ideology.³⁵ Bernard Faure asserts that "Nishida eventually placed the formulas borrowed from Western philosophy and Buddhism in the service of nationalism, apparently espousing the *kokutai* ideology," and that the "ideological

³⁰ Ben-Ami Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan*, Oxford University Press, New York: 1981, 112, 197. Shillony's citation refers not to the version found in *NKZ* but to various sources in Japanese on intellectual history: Arakawa Ikuo and Ikimatsu Keizō, eds. *Kindai Nihon shisō-shi*, Yatsugi's *Shōwa dōran shishi*. Ueda Hisashi notes how Nishida abhorred terms such as "holy war."

³¹ In a letter to Shimatani Toshizō, Nishida writes, "Enclosed is a pamphlet which summarizes my discussion with the chief of the bureau of military affairs. This is written by someone else and is 'moderate'. It seems that the leaders of the Army understand it" (#1841, *NKZ* 19, 268; Nishida writes 'moderate' in English).

³² Ueda H, 233.

³³ John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, Pantheon Books, New York: 1986, 227. See also 216, 350 n28, 351 n46. Dower's focus is on a so-called "*Chūōkōron*" (*Central Review*) roundtable discussions held by Nishida's students in 1941-1942, subsequently published in the journal in 1942-1943. The participants were Kōsaka Masaaki, Suzuki Shigetaka, Kōyama Iwao, and Nishitani Keiji: Suzuki and Nishitani also participated in the "Overcoming of Modernity" debate. The debates contained some of the most ardently pro-war statements made by these thinkers. The translation of some of the discussions in English has been prepared by James Heisig. See also Naoki Sakai, "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism," *Postmodernism and Japan*. For a defense of these discussions, see Horio Tsutomu, "The *Chūōkōron* Discussions, Their Background and Meaning," in *Rude Awakenings*. For passages omitted by Horio, see Maraldo's essay in *Rude Awakenings*. Nishida kept close contact with his students and the letters show that he did not disagree with their ideas, although he warns Kōsaka, for instance, to stay away from certain political groups (see his letters, #1815, 1818, 1822, *NKZ* 19, 257, 259, 261). The participants never made a public apology after the War.

³⁴ See their "Japanese Revolt against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century," *The Cambridge History of Japan*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1988. 6:741.

³⁵ Dale, 35, 37, 194, 218. Sharf says, "Nishida was himself guilty of the most spurious forms of *nihonjinron* speculation." "Zen and Japanese Nationalism." *History of Religions*, 33:1, 1993, 23.

component of Nishida's philosophy is so explicit that philosophers can no longer overlook it."³⁶ Hiromatsu Wataru, a Japanese philosopher, holds Nishida theoretically responsible for the "pro-war philosophy" of the Kyôto School: "the themes developed in the theories of 'Overcoming of Modernity' and 'the philosophy of world history' which the second generation Kyôto School advocated are a legitimate consequence of developing the intentionality immanent in Nishida's philosophy."³⁷

Perhaps the most sustained demonstration of Nishida's theoretical complicity with nationalist ideology is presented by Pierre Lavelle. He argues that "Nishida's political ideas belong to the common base of ultra-nationalism"³⁸ in the sense that he endorsed "religious traditionalism which was intrinsically nationalist," exemplified in his *Tennô* [Emperor]-centrism, his endorsement of the national polity, and his support for the construction of the Greater East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. Lavelle's strategy consists in comparing a number of passages from Nishida with ultranationalist doctrine, including its official manifesto, *Kokutai no Hongi* (*The Cardinal Principles of the Japanese National Polity*).³⁹ For Lavelle the "New World Order" essay provides ample evidence that Nishida's political thought was ultranationalist.

For example, Lavelle cites Nishida's conclusion from the "New World Order" essay that the "solution to the present world's problems will come from those principles of our *kokutai* [national polity]. It seems that not only Britain and America must submit to these principles, but also the Axis powers too must follow them"⁴⁰ This line of thinking typifies the nationalist agenda which justified Japan's "mission" in Asia.⁴¹ Although Lavelle notes Nishida's antagonistic relation to the government, overall he claims that Nishida "supported Japanese military expansion" and he "came closest to ultra-nationalism in his vision of world history, and more particularly Japan's role in it."⁴²

Lavelle further cites a number of passages from the "New World Order" essay to show Nishida's fundamental agreement with the ultranationalists' geopolitical conception.⁴³ Regarding

³⁶ Bernard Faure, "The Kyoto School and Reverse Orientalism," *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*. Charles Wei-shun Fu and Steven Heine, eds. State University of New York Press, Albany: 1995. 253, 249.

³⁷ Hiromatsu, 202. However, two months before his death, Hiromatsu issued a striking statement which seemed to endorse the very idea he criticized earlier: "Let us call for a new East-Asian structure which centers on Japan and China! A new world order based on this! Time seems ripe that this can be a slogan of the anti-establishment left, as containing a fundamental re-evaluation of Japanese capitalism itself." "Tôhoku Ajia ga Rekishi no Shuyaku ni (Northeast Asia [plays] the Leading Role in History)." *Asahi Shimbun*, March 16, 1994, 16. I would like to thank Noe Shinya for calling my attention to this material and for our discussion.

³⁸ Lavelle, 163-164.

³⁹ For a striking similarity of terminologies between Nishida's words and *Kokutai no Hongi*, see Lavelle 146-148. For an English translation of *Kokutai no Hongi*, see *Kokutai no Hongi: Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*, R.K. Hall, ed. Crofton, Newton: 1974.

⁴⁰ Lavelle, 158-159; *NKZ* 12, 434.

⁴¹ In his collection of essays *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics* (Ivan Morris, ed. Oxford University Press, London: 1963), political scientist Maruyama Masao explains that Japanese ultranationalism also contained an internal logic for expansion. According to the doctrine "absolute values are embodied in the person of the Emperor himself, who is regarded as 'the eternal culmination of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful throughout all ages and in all places'" (Maruyama 8). This "eternal virtue" moreover is fully realized only when it "starts to spread out in waves from its central entity, the Emperor, to the rest of the world" (Maruyama 9). So in order for Japan to spread the imperial virtue--the "just cause"--it is necessary to act; "when the nation acts, it is *ipso facto* in the just cause" (Maruyama 9). As Maruyama argues, this thinking justified the ideology of "spreading the just cause throughout the world" and "the Empire of Japan as the culmination of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful." By its very nature Japan was "unable to do wrong; accordingly the most atrocious behaviour, the most treacherous acts, could all be condoned" (Maruyama 9). Ueda Shizuteru, however, disputes that Nishida ever considered the Emperor as absolute. See Ueda S, "Question," 95 n4.

⁴² Lavelle 156.

⁴³ For instance, "The present world is living in an era of increasing awareness of the world. It is an era when, as each state realizes its world mission, an entirely new world must be formed" (Lavelle 159, *NKZ* 12, 427). This

the idea of regional power blocs--a central thesis of the ultranationalists--he quotes one of the most frequently cited passages from the essay:

Each state must go beyond itself in order to first build a particular world unified *in accordance with regional traditions*. And the union of these distinct worlds built on such historical bases will form a mondialized world that embraces the entire world...Such must be the principle of the new world order, the establishment of which is the goal of the present World War. Such is the meaning of our country's concept of 'eight corners, one world.'⁴⁴

Lavelle calls this idea "imperial doctrine in its most ultra-nationalist phase, in particular with its vision of the new world order as a kind of end of history."⁴⁵ While the apparent respect for regional particularity seems to indicate Nishida's implicit objection to Japan's colonial actions in Asia, it was still ambiguous since "the most extreme expansionists, military included, used the same language."⁴⁶ In conclusion, Lavelle states, "Nishida's political ideas belong to the common base of ultra-nationalism--his support for the theory of blocs and for the project of Japan's world politico-cultural preeminence."⁴⁷ His opposition to the extreme right was not sufficient to place him outside the category of ultranationalism, as there were several ultranationalist factions which opposed the extremists.⁴⁸

B. Nishida: A Liberal?

On the other end of the spectrum, defenders Yusa Michiko and Ueda Shizuteru argue that Nishida was straightforwardly opposed to Japanese nationalism and imperialism.⁴⁹ Their general strategy is to focus on the historical circumstances and Nishida's personal writings--letters and diaries--to show his antipathy toward the military government.⁵⁰ Their claim rests on Nishida's *intent* as evident in his writings, which they believe shows his anti-imperialism and cosmopolitanism. In their view Nishida re-interpreted wartime slogans and gave them a philosophical meaning contrary to the spirit of nationalism, even in the "New World Order" essay.

One of the strongest criticisms of Nishida's political writings concerns his support of the Imperial House. To counteract the accusation that Nishida subscribed to ultranationalist *tennô*

"new world order" consists of power blocs formed around great powers: "In the case of East Asia today, [the central element] is no other than Japan" (Lavelle 160, *NKZ 12*, 429). Lavelle also notes Nishida's allusion to the direction of world civilization after the East Asian War in comparison to the ancient Persian War's legacy in the development of European history (Lavelle 159 n124, *NKZ 12*, 429).

⁴⁴ Lavelle 160; *NKZ 12*, 428; emphasis in the original. One of the items of the declaration at the Great East Asia Meeting reads: "Each nation of the Great East Asia should respect each other's tradition and each people should promote each other's creativity in order to enhance the culture of Great East Asia" (Satô 318).

⁴⁵ Lavelle 160.

⁴⁶ Lavelle 161. Lavelle cites the pre-1935 war minister and the leader of the Imperial Way Faction Araki Sadao: "It is entirely superficial to consider Japan a militaristic or imperialistic country. Such an idea can only be had by someone who does not know Japan takes up arms only in the struggle for peace" (Lavelle 161, n138). Even Tôjô Hideki, the leader of the expansionist policy, stated in his war crimes trial that "Japan had set itself to create in Greater East Asia 'governments which would be in accordance with the desires of the inhabitants, as was the government of Manchukuo'" (qtd. Beasley, 241).

⁴⁷ Lavelle 164.

⁴⁸ The dominant military ultranationalists were the army's Control Faction (*Tôsei ha*) which included Tôjô Hideki. Opponents to this faction included Araki Sadao's Imperial Way Faction (*Kôdô ha*), the twice prime minister Konoe Fumimaro's moderate group, and the reformist right (*kakushin uyoku*), including fascists.

⁴⁹ Ueda S, "Question," and Yusa Michiko, "Fashion," "Totalitarianism," and "Nishida and the Question of Nationalism," [hereafter "Nishida"] *Monumenta Nipponica* 46:2, 1991, 203-209. See also Ueda's "Nishida Kitaro--'Ano Senso' to 'Nihon Bunka no Mondai,'" and Yusa's "Amerika de Nishida Kenkyu o Kangaeru," both in *Shisô vol. 857*. November 1995. 107-133, 221-235. For other defense see the articles in *Rude Awakening* by the present-day Kyôto scholars. See also Ôhashi Ryôsuke, *Nihon-teki na mono, Yôroppa-teki na mono (Things Japanese, Things European)*, Shinchô-sha, Tokyo: 1992, Chapter 7.

⁵⁰ For the numerous citations of letters, see Yusa's essays.

(Emperor)-centrism, Yusa and Ueda explain that Nishida's "cordial sentiments" toward the Imperial family were due to the fact that he grew up in the Meiji Era.⁵¹ For the Meiji generation the emperor was "a symbol of the new experiment in national unification," a symbol for the end of Japan's feudal era.⁵² Nishida "maintained throughout his life warm feelings toward the Imperial family, just as many Japanese felt affectionately toward the Emperor Meiji."⁵³ This was a common sentiment among Nishida's generation and it should be distinguished from the ideologized Emperor worship of the period. In fact, Ueda points out that Nishida considered the alliance of the reactionary ideology and the imperial family "extremely dangerous" and consequently the Japanists charged that his philosophy was not "in line with the empire of Japan."⁵⁴

Yusa and Ueda's strongest defense of Nishida stresses the universalist implications of his philosophy. They believe his concept of the "formation of a global world (*sekaiteki sekai, or sekaishi-teki sekai*)" developed in the "New World Order" essay testifies to his anti-nationalism, because this notion takes into account the autonomy of regional worlds and argues for a peaceful co-existence of a multiplicity of nations. Curiously, for support Yusa cites the passage Lavelle uses to argue for Nishida's complicity with the imperialist doctrine: "Each nation should develop its unique tradition *in accordance with its heritage and tradition*, but at the same time, it should go beyond itself [that is, its national interests] in order to form a global unity."⁵⁵ Ueda and Yusa appeal to Nishida's idea that "the principle of the formation of the global world does not negate the individual uniqueness of each nation. On the contrary. Each nation fully lives its historical existence, and yet the world concretely realizes its unity."⁵⁶ This "dialectical" vision preserves both the uniqueness of individual and national "moments" (individual in relation to a nation and nations in relation to the world) and the whole (a nation with respect to its people and the world with respect to nations). Yusa claims that Nishida's cosmopolitan views actually oppose imperialist nationalism which merely negates the other in order to assert itself. In Ueda's view, Nishida's phrase, "nations transcending themselves while remaining true to themselves," signifies "his continued respect for the historical life of specific people with specific cultural traditions."⁵⁷

Regarding Nishida's apparent endorsement of the East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere and other wartime slogans such as "The Eight Corners, One Roof," Ueda and Yusa claim that Nishida was actually engaged in a "tug-of-war over the meaning of the terms," a "semantic struggle" in which he gave different meanings to conventional political slogans.⁵⁸ For example, in the "New World Order" essay Nishida states:

[E]very nation/people is established on a historical foundation and possesses a world-historical mission, thereby having a historical life of its own. For nations/peoples to form a global world through self-realization and self-transcendence, each must first of all form a particular world *in accordance with its own regional tradition*. These particular worlds, each based on a historical foundation, unite to build a global world. Each nation/people lives its own unique historical life and at the same time joins in a united global world through carrying out a world-historical mission. This is the ultimate Idea [principle] of human historical development, and this is the principle of the New World Order which

⁵¹ Ueda S, "Question" 94; Yusa, "Fashion" 292.

⁵² Ueda S, "Question" 94.

⁵³ Yusa, "Fashion" 292.

⁵⁴ Ueda S, "Question" 94.

⁵⁵ Yusa, "Nishida," 206.

⁵⁶ Yusa's translation, cited in her "Nishida," 206: Original in *NKZ 12*, 428. See Ueda S, "Question" 89.

⁵⁷ Ueda S, "Question" 89.

⁵⁸ See Ueda S, "Question" 90-96. Yusa, "Totalitarianism," 126-131.

should be sought in the current world war. It seems that our country's principle of the "Eight corners, one world" [*hakkô iu* or *hakkô ichiu*] expresses this idea.⁵⁹

This culturalist interpretation of the phrase has nothing to do with the militarist use of the slogan. In Yusa's view, "the ideal of 'bringing everything under one roof' is not a nationalist slogan for Nishida, but the expression of a principle aimed at realizing a global unity of independent countries."⁶⁰

With respect to the idea of the East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, Nishida was trying to articulate a vision of a positive union of Asian nations forming a "particular world" or a co-prosperity sphere among other co-prosperity spheres, to bring about a peaceful new world order.⁶¹ Such geographically organized "particular worlds" were viewed as a necessary mediation between an individual and global unity. Yusa also stresses the positive aspect of such an Asian union against the Western imperial powers. She refers to the passage in the "New World Order" essay where Nishida compares the East Asian war's possible contribution to world history to the ancient Persian War's contribution to European history. Regarding Japan's leadership in Asia, she notes that given his criticisms of the military regime, "it is more logical to read these lines as a call for Japan to return to the humaneness and morality of its original national spirit, to lay down its arms and only then to presume to guide its Asian neighbors into a new era."⁶² Thus, in their view, Nishida's understanding of the notion of East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere was not at all the same as the military's expansionist notion. "By twisting the phrase 'Greater East Asian Prosperity Sphere' to his own purposes, Nishida set up a kind of 'war over words' with the Army and the Japanists."⁶³

To show Nishida's objection to the military, Yusa summarizes the conclusion of the "New World Order" essay: "Merely self-centered nationalism is but an 'ethnogeocentrism,' which is not free from invasionism and imperialism...Only by discovering 'globality' and 'universality' within the Japanese tradition, could Japan play a leading role in East Asia."⁶⁴ This point, according to Yusa, is "Nishida's carefully stated criticism of Japanese imperialistic activities overseas" to the extent that he could express it: "given the fact that voicing any criticism at all could cost a person's life, the aging philosopher put up a remarkable resistance."⁶⁵ Ueda also characterizes the essay as a "clear critique of the Japanists and an unmistakable warning to the Army."⁶⁶ He stresses Nishida's culturalist thesis which relativizes one's own culture in favor of an interactive, pluralistic model.⁶⁷ Because Japanese culture is dialectically related to all other cultures--retaining its own specificity as well as negating itself in relation to its "other"--it cannot be absolute as the Japanists claimed, let alone justify the expansionist agenda.

In sum, Ueda and Yusa appeal to Nishida's universalist theory and his good *intentions* as evident in his re-interpretations of ultranationalist notions. Because he had a parallel philosophical story to tell about the language of the official doctrine, as it were, his writings cannot be read as endorsing nationalism. As Yusa concludes, "When he locked horns with nationalistic ideologues, he did so in the language of the day. Rather than invent a new vocabulary that would rise above

⁵⁹ *NKZ 12*, 428. Compare with Lavelle's translation above.

⁶⁰ Yusa, "Totalitarianism," 127-128.

⁶¹ See Ueda S, "Question" 88-89.

⁶² Yusa, "Totalitarianism," 128-129.

⁶³ Ueda S, "Question" 91.

⁶⁴ Yusa, "Fashion," 286; *NKZ 12*, 432-433. The term "universality" does not occur in the original.

⁶⁵ Yusa, "Fashion," 286 and "Nishida," 207. But "anti-ethnocentric and universalistic" views were also endorsed by Tôjô. One of the items of the declaration for the Great East Asia Meeting reads: "Each nation of Great East Asia should appreciate amity among all nations, eliminate racial prejudice, promote a wide range of cultural exchange, open resources, and thereby contribute to the advancement of the world" (Satô, 319).

⁶⁶ Ueda S, "Question" 90.

⁶⁷ Ueda S, "Question" 99-106.

the fray, he took up the jargon and slogans of the day and sought to redeem them from their petty provincialism by opening them up to a more universal perspective.”⁶⁸ In Ueda’s words, “criticisms depicting Nishida as a nationalist, a promoter of the ‘Japanese spirit’, a supporter of the war, an ideologue of the Greater East Asia War, an absolutizer of the emperor, and so forth cannot be substantiated either in Nishida’s own writings or in their actual historical context.”⁶⁹

The disagreement between the critics and defenders revolves around the relative importance of Nishida’s personal agenda and beliefs as opposed to the objective role of his philosophy within the ultranationalist political milieu. As Lavelle makes clear in his reply to Yusa, his emphasis is not the intellectual biography of Nishida but situating his philosophy, which was designed for the public, in the history of political ideas.⁷⁰ The debate also turns on what is referred to as “ultranationalism.” In Yusa’s and Ueda’s reading, the term specifically designates the Tōjō government’s militarism. In Lavelle’s wider usage, it describes an ideology which is aligned with the imperial doctrine in general. For the critics the fact that Nishida personally opposed the military government--evident in private writings--is not sufficient to show that he was opposed to nationalism, since, as Lavelle points out, anti-government views were also standard within many ultranationalist groups (professional patriots, agrarianists, state Socialists, fascists, and even genuine social revolutionaries).⁷¹

What interests the critics is the level of *theoretical complicity* with the ultranationalist doctrine that Nishida’s writings exhibit, regardless of his *intent*. As a result, critics often overlook the significance of the “semantic struggle,” that is, Nishida’s culturalist or philosophical re-interpretation vis-a-vis the government’s imperialistic doctrine, and focus only on the similarities. He does indeed suggest that it was precisely *because* Japan was able to embody a “world-historical” or cosmopolitan kind of nationalism that it should lead Asia. All was of course said in a tone of hope and good will for the peaceful coexistence of nations on a global scale. In that context, it is true that the construction of the Asian bloc was believed to be necessary to counteract Western imperialism as a stepping stone to the realization of such a global vision. But it is on *this* point that the critics consider Nishida a nationalist; he could not have been so uninformed or naive as to be ignorant of the Japanese invasion of Korea, Manchuria and China in the construction of the Greater East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. The fact that his philosophical re-articulation implicitly criticized the military government is hardly a source of comfort, in the face of colonial brutality which was taking place in Asia under Japan’s “leadership.” It is true that he could not have written anything which openly opposed the government, but he could have chosen to be silent had he fundamentally disagreed with its expansionist policies.

C. Nishida: An Ambiguous Legacy

The “moderates” in the debate are aware of the difficulty involved in sorting out the problem of how to discuss Nishida’s apparent personal opposition versus the ideological complicity of his writings, as well as how to understand his “nationalism.” Jan Van Bragt, for example, distinguishes three levels at which a particular thought system can align itself with nationalism: First, “nationalism is *the* fundamental inspiration of a thought system” (as might be the case with Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*); second, though nationalism may not be fundamental, it is “one of its main determinants”; and third, “the nationalistic elements are found in at least *some* of the

⁶⁸ Yusa, “Totalitarianism,” 131.

⁶⁹ Ueda S, “Question” 96.

⁷⁰ Yusa and Lavelle, 527. Jan Van Bragt also suggests that “the judgment that is ours to make is not on the Kyōto philosophers as persons--whether they were nationalists or not--but only on the relationship of their philosophy to nationalism.” “Kyōto Philosophy--Intrinsically Nationalistic?” *Rude Awakenings*, 242.

⁷¹ For a discussion of various ultranationalist groups, see Maruyama; Hiromatsu, Chapter 5. For Hiromatsu’s indirect criticism of Nishida apologists see Hiromatsu, 205-206.

texts in question.”⁷² He claims that it is clear that Nishida and other Kyôto thinkers do not belong to the first group, as their fundamental philosophical preoccupation was not social or political but rather metaphysical, religious, or aesthetic. He does not explicitly state whether they belong to the second or third group, but he asserts that their philosophy was “intrinsically nationalistic” in the sense that the basis tenet of their religious philosophy--the notion of “absolute nothingness”--was conducive to nationalism.⁷³

John Maraldo also points out the danger of over-politicization in reading Nishida’s texts. He carefully examines the reasons for such politicization and separates the pernicious aspects of Nishida’s thought from the positive contributions his philosophy can make in today’s intellectual context. With respect to Nishida’s involvement in state politics, Maraldo claims: “He thought he was saying or doing one thing; his audience took his words for something else. He thought he was borrowing their language to convince them of alternative possibilities; they missed the gist of the alternatives or missed the point altogether.”⁷⁴ Maraldo argues that Nishida was not intentionally complicit with Japanese state nationalism, although he was complicit “more by effect than intention” and thereby should still be held responsible.⁷⁵ Although we must dismiss certain aspects of Nishida’s thought--his nationalism, cultural “Japan-centrism,” and “reverse orientalism”--Maraldo points out that other aspects of Nishida’s insight regarding world culture have universal import and should be positively re-evaluated in today’s multicultural and multinational contexts.

Andrew Feenberg, also a moderate, raises issues regarding the “New World Order” essay on a philosophical level.⁷⁶ He acknowledges that Nishida was “critical of racist and totalitarian interpretations of official policy” and that “it is important to distinguish Nishida’s rather complex dialectical universalism” from the particularism of the ideologies of Japanese exceptionalism.⁷⁷ Like Ueda and Yusa, Feenberg also grants that Nishida did have a universalist philosophical system which would vindicate cultural expressions of each regional tradition in opposition to ethnocentric imperialism.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, in Feenberg’s view, overall Nishida held a nationalist position which was rather conventional at least until late 1944. He argues that after that point, as defeat seemed inevitable, Nishida radically shifted to a strictly non-militaristic, “cultural” nationalist discourse.⁷⁹ The general idea of Japan as a nation able to contribute to global culture did not change, but the new expression focused exclusively on the cultural contribution without militarism. Feenberg points out that Nishida shifts his point of comparison from the Greeks to the story of the ancient Jews who maintained their “spiritual self-confidence” even after their defeat by the Babylonians.⁸⁰

The connection between his philosophy and wartime ideology, Feenberg argues, has to do with two elements in Nishida’s writings: one is the philosophical preeminence Nishida attributes to the notion of the emperor, and the other has to do with *how* the Japanese self-assertion is to be realized vis-a-vis the West and as a leader of Asia. In Feenberg’s reading, “for Nishida the

⁷² Van Bragt, 243.

⁷³ For this argument see Van Bragt, 245-252.

⁷⁴ John Maraldo, “Sekai Bunka no Mondai: Nishida no Kokka to Bunka no Tetsugaku no Taitoku e,” *Shisô*. Vol. 857. November 1995. 172.

⁷⁵ Maraldo, “Sekai,” 174.

⁷⁶ Andrew Feenberg, “The Problem of Modernity in the Philosophy of Nishida,” *Rude Awakenings*, 151-173.

⁷⁷ Feenberg, 151, 154.

⁷⁸ Feenberg uses the quote: “Each people stands on its own historical ground and has its own world mission, and that is how each nation possesses a historical life...In such a world each national culture expresses its own unique historical life and, at the same time, through their world-historical missions they all unite to form one world” (Feenberg 165, *NKZ* 12, 428).

⁷⁹ This reading is contested by defenders who maintain that from the beginning Nishida’s discourse had been purely culturalist.

⁸⁰ Feenberg 172.

imperial house lay at the center of both the political and cultural systems. As such, he called it the ‘identity in contradictions’, situating it mysteriously beyond the reach of his own concept of action as a system of reciprocities.”⁸¹ Indeed, as Nishida explains in the “New World Order” essay, the true imperial will would guarantee the benevolent new world order, since it embodies a principle of “world-historical” realization which would emancipate all nations. What is problematic in this formulation is to treat the imperial house--a “particular” because it is a historical entity--as if it were a metaphysical universal, a “place of nothingness” which transcends all particularities and embraces the world in its emptiness.⁸² Had Nishida not subscribed to the state nationalist view of the imperial house as transcendental presence, he would have seen the problem in his own formulation.⁸³ As it stands, his theory of the imperial house conforms to the conventional state nationalist agenda that the imperial will ought to spread throughout the world because it is just. Here cultural nationalism becomes imperialistic.

With respect to the theory of self-assertion, while the claim for cultural co-mingling seems innocent enough, “Nishida’s conception of cultural self-affirmation seems to have gone well beyond the search for a fruitful dialogue and embraced military struggle as a positive moment.”⁸⁴ Feenberg sees no evidence that Nishida rejected the orthodox Hegelian defense of wars as a means for modern nations to affirm themselves spiritually. This was a common view held by many Japanese who were enthusiastic about the War, which was interpreted as an important historical moment in Japan’s struggle for recognition in a new global community. Feenberg acknowledges that “Nishida opposed war with the U.S. and he emphasized the importance of cosmopolitan cultural interaction to an unusual degree,” but nevertheless “his occasional comments on world politics appear to follow the conventional opinion of the day.”⁸⁵ Regarding the “New World Order” essay, Feenberg says it is “telling the old Hegelian story of national identity.”⁸⁶

What is worse, Nishida “did not explain why Japan would have to mimic Western colonialism to achieve [the] laudable goal” of creating the new global community, and “his understanding of events appears strangely anachronistic.”⁸⁷ Feenberg refers to a passage from the “New World Order” essay comparing the legacy of the Persian War for European culture and the East-Asian War for Asian cultures, also mentioned by both Lavelle and Yusa.⁸⁸ This passage implies that Japan’s defeat would signify the destruction of the very possibility of what Nishida calls a “world-historical” cosmopolitan culture; consequently, Japan would have to win in order to secure a peaceful new world order.

The main problem, in Feenberg’s view, is that even though Nishida seems to have been aware that the actual Japanese presence in Asia was just another Western imperialism in disguise, he still tried to give it an alternative philosophical articulation as a cultural program. At the very historical moment Europeans were giving up on colonialism, Japan was beginning to establish an

⁸¹ Feenberg 168.

⁸² Augustin Jacinto Zavala argues that “the emperor’s mythical, religious quality as a divine epiphany god is rather better associated with the Throne [*kôshitsu*] than with a particular individual or group of individuals. This is the sense in which he [Nishida] sees the emperor system as a microcosm that mediates a wider historical macrocosm, perhaps even *the* macrocosm.” Zavala distinguishes the Imperial Throne [*kôshitsu*], which he sees as the “place” of the emperor, from the emperor as a particular individual. “The Return of the Past: Tradition and the Political Microcosm in the Later Nishida,” *Rude Awakenings*, 143. According to Van Bragt the notion of “immanent transcendence” in Mahayana Buddhism facilitated the identification of the Absolute and the state. (Van Bragt 251)

⁸³ As Feenberg notes, “in Heideggerian terms, this is to ignore the ontological difference and to identify Being itself with a particular being” (Feenberg 168 n49).

⁸⁴ Feenberg, 167.

⁸⁵ Feenberg, 168.

⁸⁶ Feenberg, 170

⁸⁷ Feenberg, 170.

⁸⁸ Feenberg, 170: *NKZ 12*, 429.

Asian empire. As a serious thinker who criticized Western imperialism, he should not have supported the construction of the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere in any form. To the extent he supported it (regardless of the fact that his reformulation of its meaning differed from the official story), Nishida was complicit with the conventional state nationalism of the time.

Other moderates include Takeuchi Yoshitomo, a Japanese Marxist, and Shimizu Tarô, a sociologist.⁸⁹ They both agree that Nishida's philosophy was not in itself theoretically conducive to the imperialist doctrine, and that his support of the Emperor was not ultranationalist.⁹⁰ However, they believe that Nishida nevertheless did not go beyond the conventional nationalism of the time, a problem chiefly due to his lack of realistic political consciousness.⁹¹ For instance, in Shimizu's view, the re-interpretation of political slogans in the "New World Order" essay represents a "philosophy which ratifies the status quo," because it fails to provide "appropriate criticisms of current situations" which are concretely founded on the "understanding of the world based on empirical facts."⁹²

The moderates reviewed here all agree that for better or for worse Nishida's political writings are genuinely ambiguous; they contain elements which resist support for the ultranationalist doctrine as well as claims which could be construed as endorsing the ultranationalist agenda. The moderates thus reject the critics' straightforward representation of Nishida as an ideologue of ultranationalism. However, the signs of cosmopolitanism are not sufficient to make of Nishida a liberal opposed to the war, since the ambiguity in his writings do contribute to ideological complicity.⁹³

IV: Conclusion

This survey of the controversy demonstrates the *Rashômon-esque* nature of representing Nishida's politics. Nishida died on June 7th, 1945, at the age of 75, two months before Japan's ultimate surrender. We thus have no testimony of his own postwar self-reflection regarding his political essays. It is important to keep in mind that the debate should not be understood in terms of attacking or defending Nishida. It should rather be approached as an attempt in how to responsibly evaluate a piece of highly ambiguous political writing and to assess its continued significance in today's politico-philosophical milieu. One must remember that in addition to the difficulty of imagining what the world was like for Nishida, the whole process of reconstructing the narrative of his views and of historical contextualization is itself political. Our task is to

⁸⁹ See Takeuchi Yoshitomo, *Nishida Kitarô to Gendai (Nishida Kitarô and the Present)*, Regulus Library, Daisan Bunmeisha, Tokyo: 1978, 100-101; and Shimizu Tarô, "'*Rekishiteki Keisei Sayô no Ronri*' no Hikari to Kage: Nishida Kitarô no 'Kindai no Chôkoku' ron Saikô" (The Bright and Dark Sides of 'the Logic of Historical Formation': Rethinking Nishida Kitarô's theory of 'Overcoming of Modernity'), *Gendai Shisô* 21:1, 1993: 120-136.

⁹⁰ As Shimizu notes, on theoretical level, Nishida's philosophy "does not have the character of supplying an ideological basis for nationalism or totalitarianism." This is in contrast, for instance, to Tanabe Hajime's *Logic of Species (Shu no Ronri)* or Watsuji Tetsurô's theory of *aidagara*, or "Being-between," both of which could theoretically support fanatic nationalism (Shimizu 128). In Takeuchi's words, "Nishida's philosophy was not designed to found the imperial doctrine; there is no logical necessity which would internally connect them. The adherence came from Nishida's subjective sentiments" (Takeuchi 101).

⁹¹ Takeuchi notes that Nishida's theory of nationhood "did not go beyond Hegel," that "his understanding of the national polity was utterly conventional," and that he "expected the imperial house to guarantee the universality and creativity of Japanese culture to contribute to humanity as such" (Takeuchi 100). Shimizu calls Nishida's *Nihon Bunka no Mondai (The Problem of Japanese Culture)* a "dishonorable work" because of its "obvious weakness in the understanding of reality" (Shimizu 128).

⁹² Shimizu, 129. He continues: "But if I may add, the isolation of theoretical notions due to the weakness in grasping reality is not limited to Nishida. It is a big structural weakness of the discussions of this period, common among many of the philosophers who studied under Nishida, such as Miki Kiyoshi, and political theorists such as Rôyama Masamichi."

⁹³ As Van Bragt states, "establishing links with nationalism was not a necessary consequence of the ideas of the Kyôto philosophers, and yet that the bonds that did eventually formed are not as surprising, unnatural, or illogical as they perhaps should have been" (Van Bragt 250).

understand the phenomenon of “Nishida’s case” from a perspective that is sensitive to such multiple inflections.

Nishida Kitarô

The Principle of the New World Order (1943)
[*Sekai Shin-Chitsujo no Genri*]⁹⁴

Translation by Yôko Arisaka

Each world-epoch possesses its own project. As each epoch seeks to realize its project, it passes into the succeeding epoch. For instance, the project of 18th Century Europe involved self-realization at the level of an individual, i.e., individualism and liberalism. It was not yet time for nations to oppose other nations in a single historical world. Roughly put, England ruled the seas and France dominated the land.

[427]⁹⁵ However, in the 19th Century, Germany and France came into conflict in a historical world called “Europe.” Ultimately, the two great powers--Germany and England--came into conflict in global space. This is the cause of World War I. The 19th Century involved self-realization at the level of nations, i.e., imperialism. Each nation considered its historical mission to be strengthening itself by subjugating others.

However, this is still far from the *self-realization of the nation's world-historical mission*.⁹⁶ Since the 19th Century, imperialism as well as class struggle have dominated the world.⁹⁷ So long as a nation lacks awareness of its world-historical mission and therefore remains in the imperialist standpoint, class struggle too will continue. Communism is totalistic⁹⁸, but its principle still derives from the 18th Century abstract conception⁹⁹ of the world based on individualism. It can be seen as an opposition to 19th Century thought, based on 18th Century thinking. However, like imperialism, it too belongs to the past.

Today's world, I believe, should be considered the epoch of global self-realization. Each nation must realize its own world-historical mission, and together they must constitute [what I call]

⁹⁴ This English translation is prepared with kind permission from Iwanami Shoten, Publishers, Tokyo.

⁹⁵ The original pagination in *NKZ*, as well as interpolations and Japanese terms, are added in square brackets. The pagination appears at the beginning of a full sentence in each page in the original.

⁹⁶ The term, “world-historical” (*sekai-shi-teki*) is a translation of a German expression “*weltgeschichtlich*,” introduced by Hegel. Nishida's language is Hegelian to the extent that he conceived the historical development of the world in terms of successive self-realizations of consciousness--from the more abstract to the more concrete and inclusive (individuals, to nations, to global consciousness). The progression roughly follows Hegel, for whom the order of politico-historical development begins with the Greek *polis* in which an individual consciousness is swallowed up in the whole (through the dark ages), to the awakening of individual consciousness during the Enlightenment, to the realization of national and ethical life, to the realization of the “concrete universal” in which individuality is fully preserved in the whole (Cf. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*). While adopting the dialectical method, however, Nishida rejects Hegel's conclusion that the ultimate realization of world history culminates in modern European civilization. Nishida's vision includes non-European spheres as full participants in the realization of global history.

⁹⁷ This sentence occurs after the next one in the original.

⁹⁸ The Japanese term is “*zentai-shugi teki*,” which may also be translated as “totalitarian.”

⁹⁹ The term here is “*rinen*,” an “idea” in the sense of the Hegelian “*Idee*.” It might also be translated as “ideal.” The historical development of the world is understood as the self-realization of the absolute Idea (as opposed, for instance, to explanations based on naturalism or materialism). The “18th Century thinking” is “abstract” because individual consciousness as an autonomous entity (the basis of liberalism as developed in the Enlightenment) understands itself as the “universal I,” without any concrete mediation of socio-historical factors such as national life.

the “world-historical world” [*sekai-shi-teki sekai*], i.e., the “global world” [*sekai-teki sekai*].¹⁰⁰ This is the historical project of the present. This process [leading to global self-realization] actually began with World War I, but the war ended with this project uncompleted. We had no new principle of world formation besides the old abstract conception of the world from the 18th Century. Consequently, world war has returned today. The current world war most urgently demands the completion of the project [of global self-realization].

As a result of scientific, technological, and economic development, nations/peoples¹⁰¹ today have entered a compact global space.¹⁰² When strong nations come into conflict in a global space, violent world struggle is inevitable. [428] The only way to solve this struggle is for each nation to realize its world-historical mission; each nation must develop itself, yet at the same time it must negate itself and reach beyond itself in order to participate in building a global world. This is what I mean when I say that the contemporary age is the epoch of the global self-realization of nations/peoples.

My idea of the formation of a global world through the self-realization and self-transcendence of nations/peoples differs from the self-determinationism of peoples, which merely recognizes the equality and independence of each people, as in the Wilsonian League of Nations.¹⁰³ Such thinking still belongs to the abstract conception of the world of the 18th Century. The current war proves that a conception of this sort cannot solve today’s historical problems.

Rather, [we must recognize that] every nation/people is established on a historical foundation and possesses a world-historical mission, thereby having a historical life of its own. For nations/peoples to form a global world through self-realization and self-transcendence, each must first of all form a particular world *in accordance with its own regional tradition*. These particular worlds, each based on a historical foundation, unite to build a global world. Each nation/people lives its own unique historical life and at the same time joins in a united global world through carrying out a world-historical mission. This is the ultimate Idea [principle] of human historical development, and this is the principle of the New World Order which should be sought in the current world war. It seems that our country’s principle of the “Eight corners, one world” [*hakkô iu*]¹⁰⁴ expresses this idea. I humbly believe that this view is also expressed by the imperial statement, which proclaims that all nations should understand this principle. [429] This principle can also solve the problems associated with the communist globalism inherited from 18th Century thought.

If the principle of the New World Order and the project of the current world war are as I stated, then they must also generate the principle of the East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere [*Tôa*

¹⁰⁰ Although the expression “global world” is redundant, it is chosen in order to capture the sense of the Japanese phrase “*sekai-teki sekai*,” literally “world-ly world.” Nishida seems to use the terms “world-historical world” and “global world” interchangeably. Both refer to the concrete notion of the world in which all nations realize their fullest participation in world history.

¹⁰¹ The term is “*kokka minzoku*,” literally “nation ethnic-people,” “national peoples,” or “nation folk.” The term “*minzoku*” does not translate to a single word in English. It refers to an ethnic identity which includes notions such as “a people,” “race,” or “folk.” In Japan’s case the self-understanding of the geographical region of the nation also corresponds to the ethnic identity as well as to the sense of racial distinctness.

¹⁰² This sentence occurs after the next one in the original.

¹⁰³ The difference Nishida has in mind has to do with the dialectical elements in his thought: In the Wilsonian League of Nations, each nation was said to be independent and equal to one another, but this atomistic account lacked a rigorous theory of interaction in which nations intrinsically determined themselves historically *in relation to* all others.

¹⁰⁴ “*Hakkô iu*,” or more commonly “*hakkô ichiu*,” consists of four Chinese characters, “eight regions, one universe.” It was a wartime slogan which justified Japanese expansionism. The phrase was taken from *Nihon Shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*, 720 A.D.) It is also translated as “The eight corners of the world under one roof,” “All the world as one family,” “The universal Concord principle,” “The Universe is one,” and “Universal Harmony.” For a discussion of this term, see Yusa, “Totalitarianism,” 126.

kyôei ken]. Up to now, East-Asian peoples [*minzoku*] have been oppressed under European imperialism and viewed as colonies. We were robbed of our world-historical mission. It is time now for the East-Asian peoples to realize our own world-historical mission. Each people [in East Asia] must transcend itself to form a particular world [of East Asia] and thereby carry out the world-historical mission of the East-Asian peoples. *This* is the principle of the formation of East-Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. We the people of East Asia must together assert our principle of East-Asian culture and assume our stance world-historically. But in order to build a particular world [of East Asia], a central figure that carries the burden of the project is necessary. In East Asia today, there is no other country but Japan [that can undertake such a role]. Long ago, just as the victory of Greece in the Persian War determined the direction of the development of European culture up to this day, so the current East-Asian war may determine a direction for world history to come.

The moral principle [which should be adopted] on a global scale today is neither the philanthropism of Christianity nor the righteous rule [*ôdô*]¹⁰⁵ of the ancient Chinese. Rather, it should demand the self-transcendence of each nation in order to form a global world; it is for each nation to become a builder of the global world. [430] Japan's national polity [*kokutai*] is not merely totalitarianism. The Imperial House [*kôshitsu*], as the absolute present which embraces the past and the future, is the beginning and the end of our world. The quintessence of the unbroken line of our national polity consists in the completion of the historical world itself with the Imperial House at its center. Our national polity signifies more than a center of an ethnic nation. Our nation's Imperial way [*kôdô*] contains the principle of world formation, i.e., the principle of "Eight corners, one world."

The formative principle of the global world does not deny the individuality of each nation/people. On the contrary. When people think of the world, they are still thinking of it in terms of the 18th Century's abstract, general notion of the world. What I mean by the "formation of the global world" [in contrast] is rather that a concrete unity of the world is attained--or a global world is realized--by each nation or each people realizing its world-historical mission while being grounded in its own historical foundation, i.e., by each living its own historical life. For the world to become a concrete unity, each nation/people must live its own historical life. Like an organic body, for the whole to become one, each part must realize itself [or "become itself"], and as each realizes itself, the whole becomes one. My notion of the world thus contains the unity of individualities. The formative principle of the global world stipulates that each nation should understand this point. Today's nationalism must base itself on this kind of "formative globalism" [*sekai-teki sekai keisei shugi*].¹⁰⁶ It does not mean each nation for itself. In today's world situation, we have no choice but to become a unified world; this is why each nation must become nationalistic [based on formative globalism] in its own way. I believe an intermediary, particular unity of the "co-prosperity sphere" is called for [431] as that which mediates the many [nations] and the one [concrete unity of the world].

[431] Our nation's basic policy on thought-guidance [*shisô shidô*], as well as scholarship and education, must be guided by the true essence of national polity,¹⁰⁷ and it must grasp historical reality and be based on the formative principle of the global world. What we should denounce in British and American thought is their imperialism and sense of superiority which view East Asia as

¹⁰⁵ "*Ôdô*" is literally "king's way." This notion refers to the way in which a benevolent ruler governs without force. Because of the ruler's sheer goodness, the subjects willingly govern themselves and support the ruler.

¹⁰⁶ The term "*sekai-teki sekai keisei shugi*" is literally "world-ly world formation-ism"; "formative globalism" will be used for translating this term.

¹⁰⁷ The reference here is to *Kokutai no Hongi (The Cardinal Principles of National Polity)*.

colonies. Our nation's policy of thought-guidance must avoid partisan totalitarianism and rather base itself on the fair and righteous Imperial Way and its notions of "Oneness of the emperor and his people" [*kunmin ittai*] and "All the people assisting the emperor" [*banmin yokusan*].

Above is the gist of my talk on the issue of the new world order that I gave in response to the request of the Research Group on National Policy [*Kokusaku kenkyû-kai*].¹⁰⁸ The idea of each nation/people realizing itself while transcending itself to form one world does not negate nor slight [the characteristics of] each nation/people. On the contrary, it is by each nation returning to itself and affirming its own world-historical mission, and by uniting with other such nations, that a unified world is attained. By "world" I mean just such unity-as-totality. The abstract world which negates [the particularity of] each nation/people is not actual. It is not the real world. This is why I call [the actual world] a "global world." Up to now the world has been abstract and unreal. But today, the world is concrete and real. [432] Today no nation/people can exist simply by itself. It cannot exist without entering into intimate relations with [the rest of] the world, nay, without occupying its own position within the whole world. The world is not merely "external" [to nations/peoples].

The cause of the current world war is that the world *is* actual today, and if we ignore this fact, we cannot solve the problem of the current war. My idea of the world is as stated earlier, so the formation of the global world would have to be in accordance with regional traditions. Without this, we cannot attain the concrete world. What I mean by "formative globalism" contrasts with Anglo-American imperialism and federalism which colonize others; it represents the globalism of "Eight corners, one world," founded upon the Imperial Spirit [*kôdô seishin*]. Abstract federalism is in fact the flip side of imperialism.

Peoples [*minzoku*] must be the center of the formation of the historical world. They are the driving force of world formation. So in a co-prosperity sphere, the people which would be the central force must be generated historically and not chosen abstractly,¹⁰⁹ as is the case with the League of Nations. Only then do we establish a true co-prosperity sphere. Mere racialism [*minzoku shugi*],¹¹⁰ which lacks true globalism and envisions the world only from its own self-centered perspective, is ethnic egoism [*minzoku jiko shugi*]; only expansionism and imperialism can come out of it. [433] Today, such ethnic egoism is evident in British and American imperialisms. [In contrast,] a people [*minzoku*] becomes a true nation only by realizing the formative principle of the global world within itself. This, in turn, becomes the foundation of morality. We must not confuse simple racialism with true nationalism. What I call "formative globalism" need not contradict nationalism and racialism, however. The formation of the global world must have peoples as its foundation. But only if they are truly global [possessing the principle of formative globalism] are they nations [in the proper sense]. As a member of a nation understood in this sense, each individual has a moral mission. Thus, in formative globalism, each

¹⁰⁸ Founded by Yatsugi Kazuo in 1933 and in operation until early 1940s, this organization examined a broad range of policy issues with the aid of scholars, civil servants, politicians, and military officers, especially the Army. This group and Showa Research Association were founded within a few months of each other.

¹⁰⁹ In his postscript, Shimomura cites a conversation between Nishida and the government officials in which Nishida says: "So long as it is a co-prosperity sphere, every participant must be satisfied. If Japan decided on the nature of co-prosperity sphere without due regard for the other participants and coerced them, that would violate their freedom. That is no co-prosperity sphere...In a true co-prosperity sphere, other participants would plead with Japan to lead them. Only then can we call it a 'Holy War.'" Shimomura Torataro, "Koki." ("Postscript") *NKZ* 12, 470-473.

¹¹⁰ "*Minzoku shugi*" may also be rendered "ethnicism."

individual has his or her own mission and responsibility in a unique historical place and time. The Japanese have their own unique moral mission and responsibility as Japanese, given the historical reality of Japan, i.e., within the current state of affairs.

Just as a people becomes the source of morality when it embodies [the principle of] formative globalism, so too the family becomes the source of morality with the same principle. Mere familialism [*kazoku shugi*] is not in itself immediately moral. [Rather,] formative globalism contains familialism within itself. At the same time, as I said earlier, in a co-prosperity sphere the guiding people should not be “selected” but rather must be born out of the formative principle of the global world. Here lies the fundamental difference between formative globalism and the League of Nations.

[434] According to *The Official Chronicle of the Divine Sovereigns* [*Shinnô Shôtôki*],¹¹¹ Japan is a divine country and its national polity is unlike that of any other nation abroad; it contains absolute historical globality [*zettai no rekishi-teki sekaisei*].¹¹² The idea that our Imperial House extends from the eternal past to the eternal future, as the “Unbroken Imperial succession for ages eternal” [*bansei ikkei*],¹¹³ should not be understood in linear terms; rather, as the eternal present, it is for us the perpetual beginning and the end. The notion that the present is the beginning of heaven and earth stems from this idea. Jihen also says: “The generation of gods exists in the present [*shindai zaikon*] and speak not of the past [*bakui ôjaku*]” (*The Record of the Mystery of Ancient Events; Kuji honki gengi*).¹¹⁴ The true essence of the Japanese spirit asserts that that which is transcendent is immanent and that which is immanent is transcendent.¹¹⁵ Domestically, the formative principle of the global world, i.e., of “Eight corners, one world,” is [equivalent to] the principle of “The sovereign and the subject as one” [*kunshin ittai*] and “All the people assisting the Imperial Way” [*banmin yokusan*]. Our country’s national polity is said to be a family-like nation, but one should not think of this as mere familialism. The radiant quintessence of national polity is rather that the internal is the external and the external is the internal; it is “Sovereign and subject as righteous” [*ginai kunshin*] and “Father and son sharing feeling” [*joken fushi*].

As this is the essence of our national polity, formative globalism does not lose the subjectivity of our nation. Rather, *this* is precisely the principle of subjectivity unique to our country, that it contains others by emptying itself.¹¹⁶ To abide by this principle is to demonstrate to the rest of the world the essence of our national polity. It is fair to say that the principle of our national polity can provide the solution to today’s world-historical problems. Not only should the Anglo-American world submit to it, but the Axis powers too will follow it.

¹¹¹ This work is written by Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293-1354), a medieval court noble and political thinker.

¹¹² Elsewhere Nishida states, “Our national polity is said to be divine, but this is not to be understood in the sense of ‘mystical.’ Rather, it is historical and formatively global, i.e., rational” (*NKZ 14*, 419).

¹¹³ For a comparison of these ideas to those of the *Cardinal Principles of National Polity*, see Lavelle 140, 146-148.

¹¹⁴ Jihen was a medieval Buddhist and Shintoist. Biographical dates unknown. Agustin Jacinto Zavala translates the phrase as “Do not say that antiquity returns. The age of the Gods is now” (Jacinto Z., 144).

¹¹⁵ See Van Bragt’s discussion of “immanent transcendence,” *Rude Awakening* 250-252.

¹¹⁶ According to Nishida (and the religious philosophy of the Kyôto School in general) Japan is uniquely suited to serve as the formal expression of the logic of the global world, because of its notion of “absolute nothingness.” Absolute nothingness transcends all particularity (even that of Japan itself) and functions as the ultimate “place” for all nations to realize themselves through mutual recognition and opposition. For a discussion on this topic see Van Bragt.