Reading Kyoto School Philosophy as a Non-western Discourse: Contingency, Nothingness, and the Public

Kosuke Shimizu

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  1．A Tradition of Religious and Cultural Studies
  2．Expertise in Participatory Research/ Inter-Civic Relation Studies
  3．Expertise in Asian and Africa Studies
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  5．New Approaches to the Understanding of Other Cultures in Japan
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Introduction

Regarded generally as a form of existentialism, the philosophy of the Kyoto School had an enormous impact on religious philosophy in the post-war era in both East and West. Nishida Kitaro's concepts, such as the 'place of nothingness' and the 'eternal present', are obviously the main philosophical focus in this respect, referring to a transcendent state of mind based on Buddhist philosophy. Despite the high regard in which this philosophy is held, however, there is a dark side to the School's history, and this is particularly important in the context of international relations (IR) as an academic discipline because it provides a cautionary tale for those engaging in the 'non-Western' thought.

The story of the Kyoto School reveals the ambiguous and sometimes hazardous relations between philosophy and power politics, but also between the international and the imperial, theory and practice, the abstract and the concrete, and the symbolic and the real. What is at stake here is the applicability of the philosophical idea of international order to the politics of power relations and violence. It is in the case of Nishida's philosophy of nothingness in relation to World War II that the confrontation between philosophy and power politics comes to the fore. While Nishida argued that his philosophy based on the 'place of nothingness', which was presumably tolerant of 'others' and thus inherently multicultural at the abstract level of contemplation, had been reified in Japan, Japan as a nation-state shamelessly invaded other nations in Asia with brutal violence in the name of the struggle against the domination of the West (Shimizu, 2011).

The gap between a Japan based on his philosophy and Japan the nation-state, the Japan of pragmatic power politics, is closely related to the gap between what Sakai (2007) calls the international order and the imperial order. He explains that the international order here means the relationship among 'civilized' nations that guarantees equal membership and the principle of non-intervention in other nations' domestic affairs. By contrast, the imperial order is an order through which the 'civilized' nations control and exploit the less civilized by means of violence. While these orders were supposed to reside in different realms and were thus detached from each other in the context of Western IR, they are different sides of the same coin (Sakai, 2007, p. 6). This is precisely what Suzuki (2009) tries to explain. Suzuki argues, in criticizing the English School's Euro-centric perception of International Society, that English School scholars 'do not sufficiently acknowledge the fact that European imperialism was at its height when the Society expanded into East Asia and to date they have not adequately considered the possibility that both (Japanese and Chinese) states may have been exposed to the darker side of the Society' (Suzuki, 2009, loc. 525). This darker

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side of the international order is also taken up, although at a different level of analysis, by Hannah Arendt in the name of the dichotomy between the public and private. According to Arendt, the public realm, in which equal and rational members participate, becomes possible only when their private lives are supported by slavery, which she thinks of as inherently violent. This violence is pre-political, resides 'outside the *polis*', and is despotic (Arendt, 1958, p. 26) but in fact the freedom of the public realm cannot exist without the violence exercised in the private. Similarly, when the international order becomes unstable, this is described as a 'crisis' by commentators in the West, or as the emergence of a 'new world order' by others (Kosaka et al., 1943, p. 11), but the reality is that the imperial order is a permanent 'crisis' for the colonized regions.

This paper strives to clarify the Kyoto School's involvement in the wartime regime—and Nishida's in particular—and to draw a cautionary tale for contemporary non-Western IR theory (IRT) while paying special attention to the two orders referred to by Sakai, Suzuki, and Arendt. The primary theme to address here is the influence of the two orders on Nishida's political action. This inevitably leads us to the question of language, particularly the term 'Japan' in the context of the international and imperial orders before and during World War II. It is also important here to investigate how the Kyoto School's philosophers attempted to philosophically evade the influence of, and transcend, the two prevailing orders.

In order to pursue these goals, this paper starts by describing the background to non-Western IRT and its connections to the political application of Kyoto School philosophy. It concentrates on the context of the emergence of both, particularly the domination of the West over other regions, the decline of world hegemony, and the destabilization of the international order. Next, it provides a brief description of the Kyoto School's philosophy, explaining why this philosophy accepted widely in fields that range from pure logic to history, science, and religion. The paper then focuses upon the Kyoto School's political philosophy and its discourses on history and culture, based on the 'place of nothingness' and the 'eternal present'. This focus is chosen because the political arguments that relate directly to the involvement of the Kyoto School in military government were mainly found in the historical and cultural writings. The paper then examines the relationship between the Kyoto School's abstract concepts that treat Japan as a distinct culture, such as the 'place of nothingness' and the 'eternal present', and Japan as a nation-state. In the process, cautionary tales will be drawn from the Kyoto School's experience for contemporary non-Western IRT literature.

Non-Western IRT, the National Schools, and the Structural Changes in World Affairs

Kyoto School philosophy has recently come to be seen as one of the sources of the original formulation of IR. Chris Goto-Jones's prominent work on Nishida's philosophy (Goto-Jones, 2005) and Graham Gerald Ong's application of 'emptiness' to IRT (Ong, 2004) are good examples. Chih-Yu Shih's examination of Nishida's philosophy is also worth noting here because it attempts to put Nishida's 'place of nothingness' into the context of contemporary IR (Shih, 2012).

Although their understanding and explication of Kyoto School philosophy in contemporary IR are remarkable, what is commonly missing in these works is the contextualization of the Kyoto School's politics. Historical contextualization of the School is essential in situating Kyoto School philosophy in contemporary IR discourse because it clearly reveals the ambiguous relations between the international and the imperial.

This task is vital to contemporary IR, which can be characterized by the emergence of the non-Western national 'schools', such as Chinese, Korean, and Japanese schools (Cho, 2013). It seems that some features are shared by the Kyoto School and these national 'schools'. For instance, both the Kyoto School and

the contemporary national schools develop discourses of the world on the basis of a nation-based perception of culture. Like the philosophy of world history formulated by the Kyoto School philosophers, these national schools frequently refer to the cultural distinctiveness of their nation, such as its long history, and often employ abstract concepts about the ideal state of affairs. Both also strongly insist that this ideal state of affairs should be applied to the international context and will lead to a stable and enduring global order. Underlying this assertion is the assumption that the world is becoming unstable largely because of the rapid restructuring process of the prevailing order as the hegemon loses its power over the rest of the world. They also contend that this instability can be explained by the limitations of Western modernity and rationalism, which should be replaced by Eastern conventions and political thought. In fact, Nishida's philosophy has often been interpreted as a 'post-modern' discourse (Araya, 2008, p. 10) and has regularly been referred to as an attempt to 'transcend' Western intellectual deficiencies in the same way as contemporary non-Western IRT discourses have strived to provide an alternative to Western IRT. Thus, revealing and clarifying why the mainstream Kyoto School philosophers were involved in the wartime regime will benefit current non-Western IR literature by revealing the hidden risks and dangers such a literature might face.

As an academic discipline, contemporary IR is, as explained in the introduction, characterized by the emergence of non-Western IRT literature. Criticism of Western modernization and civilization in non-Western regions, a criticism that is presented exclusively in terms of appearance rather than philosophical principles, permeates the literature. Thus, modernization and civilization in the 'rest' of the world ostensibly took place in the form of physical objects, such as buildings, roads, and airports, as well as in the form of Western concepts through the introduction of such institutions as political representation and the market economy (Khatab, 2011; Nakano, 2011). In this sense, the technologies and sciences introduced into non-Western societies in the name of civilizational development were exclusively instrumental in their orientation. The importation of instrumental technology led many non-Western scholars to put an emphasis on the different soul, spirit, culture, and history of the non-West, with supposedly distinctive inherent characteristics (Kang, 2007; Zhao, 2012).

The adherence of scholars to the difference between Western civilization and non-Western nations and regions is closely related to their ontological perception of the world. Because non-Western nations, and Asian nations in particular, purportedly have different cultures and histories to those of the West, they have a unique ontology of world affairs. One example of such a non- or anti-Western ontology is the 'Chinese School' discourse, which places a special emphasis on the tributary system (Kang, 2007, 2010), a system of ancient Chinese governance (Zhao, 2006; Yan, 2011), or the Chinese concept of relationality, *guanxi* (Qin, 2010, 2011). There are many who are engaging with this new academic enterprise that comprises the Chinese version of IR; the most influential among them is Zhao Tingyang, who recently developed the theory of *tianxia*. *Tianxia* is the traditional Chinese concept of 'the whole world under heaven' (Zhao, 2012; Yan, 2011). By applying this ancient Chinese concept to contemporary international affairs, his framework comes close to what is traditionally called World Society theory, in that it transcends the borders of nation-states (Buzan, 2004, p. xviii). *Tianxia* embraces all people and communities 'under heaven' because there is no concept of foreign countries; they are 'theoretically taken-in sub-states' (Zhao, 2006, p. 35). This is because Zhao's interpretation of Chinese philosophy is based on a specific ontology of 'relations' rather than on individual agents (Zhao, 2006, p. 33). This relationality, which will be touched upon shortly, is the reason why the Chinese political system focuses more on social order than on individuals, the main ontological subject of Western philosophy.

The Chinese School's articulation of the world order is not just theoretical but also (and always) practical because, as Zhao contends, theory in this context is not just about what is but also about what is expected (Zhao, 2006, p. 30). In this way, this perception and interpretation of the world is tremendously different from those of Western IR, and Chinese School thinkers insist that this different perception of China should form the core of the future of world affairs.

A similar argument can be found in David Kang's assertion that there was a long-lasting peace under the Chinese tributary system from the fourteenth century to the nineteenth century. He argues that East Asia had enjoyed peace and order before the violent arrival of Western imperialism. In contrast to the Westphalian system of interstate relations, which was defined by its formal equality and incessant interstate conflict, the East Asian tributary system was characterized by formal inequality and 'centuries of stability among the core participants' (Kang 2010, p. 201). This logic is closely connected with a Sinocentric view, asserting that what is good for China is good for East Asia, and when China is strong and stable, order has been preserved (Kang, 2007, p. 201; Callahan, 2012, p. 41).

Qin Yaqing (2011) focuses on the context of *guanxi*, relationality. He argues that Asian IR is better explained by relationality than by formal rules and institutions. Qin illustrates Western individualism as 'bundles of rice straws in the paddy fields', while he describes the Chinese social structure as 'continuous circles of ripples on the lake', each of which 'is connected in one way or another' (Qin, 2009, pp. 7–8).

What permeates these scholars' non-Western version of IRTs is the persistent contradiction in their arguments between the purpose of transcending the Westphalian system and their insistence on a Sinocentric formulation of future IR. They are understandably enthusiastic in criticizing the violent character of Western modernity, which can be divided into international and imperial orders, while they articulate an allegedly new system of world order based on *tianxia* as a superior system to the Westphalian order, on top of which, implicitly, resides China, as the rising nation-state. In this sense, their version of IRT shows little difference from Japan's Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Area (Chen, 2012, p. 477). In fact, the concept of *tianxia* comes close to Nishida Kitaro's theory of world history, which was deployed by Japan's imperialist government for the justification of its invasion of the Asian continent (Nishida, 1950a; Shimizu, 2011).

Underlying these theories is a claim that both have to a concept of inclusiveness, of an open system for all nations and cultures. They were designed to be multicultural from the beginning of their theoretical articulation. For the sake of multiculturalism, they see the nation-state as the main obstacle to the application of their theories to practical politics. In fact, they both cast doubt on the concept of the nation-state, claiming that it is a product of Western civilization. Consequently, they try to provide a different framework of governance for Asia (Nishida, 1950a; Zhao, 2006).

However, the story does not stop there. Both of the theories rely on the concept of particular nations, China in the case of the Chinese School and Japan in the case of the Kyoto School, as subjects in depicting the future world order, despite their critical attitude toward the Westphalian system. In fact, both theories are based on a presumption of hierarchal order, and their own nation is granted sole responsibility for the maintenance of order (Nishida, 1950b; Zhao, 2006). Although we have to wait and see in the case of the Chinese School, the Nishida case resulted in a tragedy in which the subtle and somewhat ambiguous balance between multiculturalism and Japan's role as supposed leader of the region in Nishida's discourse of world history was completely destroyed by the military government as the latter overwhelmed the former. As a result, Nishida was regarded as an apologist for Japan's war against the West in the post-war era, despite

his initial intention of contributing to world peace (Shimizu, 2011).

This contradiction between the idealized harmonious future world without borders and the powerful influence of the concept of the nation-state over scholars' perceptions is not limited to the Chinese School. The 'Japanese School' (Chen, 2012) and 'Korean School' (Cho, 2013) are no different. Because they articulate the world in terms of the nation-state, despite their enthusiastic engagement in renewing IR, they take the West as their only reference point (Chen, 2012, p. 477). This means that the discourses of non-Western IRT should be understood in the context of unceasing confrontations and incessant competition among nation-states.

Kyoto School Philosophy, the Place of Nothingness, and the Eternal Present

While the political meanings and political consequences of the emergence of the Chinese School are still unclear, the Kyoto School's case is by no means ambiguous. Its members supported the military government and provided justification for Japan's aggression toward the Asian continent. In order to comprehend the reason for their involvement, it is necessary to investigate the philosophy of the Kyoto School. Nishida Kitaro was the leading philosopher of the School, but his philosophy has been analyzed and interpreted differently by scholars from various disciplines, of which religious philosophy has been the most prolific. Some scholars have argued that the philosophy of the School is exclusively Eastern, whereas others contend that Nishida's philosophy is hybrid in the sense that it is based on Western philosophy in conjunction with Buddhist thought (Arisaka, 1997, p. 546). Either way, those who analyze the philosophical discourses of the Kyoto School from the perspective religious studies equate them with some sort of mysticism (Kosaka, 2008).

While the mainstream arguments of the Kyoto School regularly focus on such concepts as 'pure experience' and the 'place of nothingness', recent Japanese literature on Nishida has tended to focus on Nishida's concept of time (Nishizuka, 2010; Kobayashi, 2013). As is the case for literature on the Kyoto School in general, non-Western IR literature has hardly focused on the concept of time. This is partly because the concept does not appear in Nishida's early writings, such as *The Inquiry into the Good*, the text on which most IR researchers into the Kyoto School rely in their investigations, and partly because Nishida himself did not put much emphasis on this concept in his political writings even in his later years.

So, what is time in Nishida's philosophy? Time is obviously a confusing concept. Nishida argues that the present is eternal and will never be past or future; it is neither determined by past incidents nor controlled by future plans. Time is generated in the form of the self-determination of the eternal present. It appears ubiquitously and disappears everywhere (Nishida, 1948, p. 342; Nishizuka, 2010, pp. 107–8). Thus, his eternal present seems to have a remarkable discontinuity from the past and the future. Nevertheless, time appears to be continuous, from the past through the present to the future, in the form of history. Consequently, Nishida defines time as the 'continuity of the discontinuity' (Nishida, 1948, p. 342).

The definition of time as the 'continuity of the discontinuity' is not easy to comprehend. He began his philosophy with the concept of 'pure experience' and later developed it into the 'place of nothingness'. In the later years, his focus shifted to the 'eternal present'. It would seem that even his thinking encountered some discontinuities during his philosophical life. What is essential to Nishida's thought on time is the idea that the present appears in the form of discontinuity, and this is open to coincidentality. What characterizes Nishida's thought here is his relentless pursuit of openness to others and his willingness

to accept coincidentality. The 'eternal present' is, by definition, remote from the past and the future, and is never controlled or determined by them. This means that the present is open to anything unexpected, and thus ready for coincidence. Thus, the present is presumably inclusive of anything while exposed to anything. In other words, it is the moment in which 'pure experience' takes place, and this is the core of his multiculturalist discourse.

Obviously, this concept of time may appear to those familiar with the Kyoto School as presenting an unavoidable contradiction with his political writings, which many Kyoto School researchers regard as conservative and nationalistic. If he was willing to develop such an open-minded and multiculturalist philosophy of inclusivity, how could Nishida have become an advocate of Japan's imperial and expansionist government? The military expansion of Japan was clearly exercised on the basis of a planned strategy, and this surely meant that the present was controlled by the future, aimed at becoming a member of the international world order, while limited by the past, in which the violent imperial order of the West exploited the rest of the world. Thus, Nishida's political involvement in the wartime regime can only be understood if his political writings are interpreted as being exclusively prescriptive, expressing a desire for the expansion of an international order to the rest of the world that would avoid power relations among the member nation-states. For him, this becomes possible only when such an expansion is put into practice by non-violent means. In other words, he intended to replace Japan's policy of violent military expansion into a more inclusive and multicultural foreign policy by giving new meanings to the country's war slogans, such as 'Eight Corners Under One Roof' (Yoshida, 2011, p. 17).

That his political contention was exclusively prescriptive means that he saw that the contemporary world was far from what he thought the ideal to be. His description of the new world order shows his concern about inequality among the member states in the contemporary international order. To him, the international order was anything but that presented by the English School. Rather, it was violent and exploitative. Nishida saw the international system throughout his life as embodying the imperial order of the West, and it can be said that he tried to replace this with an order of equal sovereign states through his concept of the eternal present.

Transcending the International

In order to transcend the imperial order and establish a truly international sphere consisting of equal members, someone must take charge and carry out this change, argues Nishida. He and his disciples focused on the concepts of history and the culture of Japan in this context. The reasons for their conviction that it should be Japan that took responsibility can be derived in part from their understanding of the self-definition of the Japanese as non-European, the victory over Russia in 1905, and the unprecedented pace of civilization. But what is more important, in Nishida's case, is the view that Japan is a reification of the place of nothingness.

What characterizes a world order based on nothingness is relationality. Western IR, based on state sovereignty, presumes independent and pre-given subjectivities. In this context, nation-states are assumed to exist before the interactions among them take place. By contrast, in the case of perceptions based upon relationality, nation-states are constituted through their relations. Thus, the nation in this context is constructed at every moment, the eternal present.

However, the place of nothingness does not have a definite, substantive pre-given existence. What

constitutes this alleged place of nothingness is the continuity of discontinuity. Nishida contends that this is to be found in the imperial household (Nishida, 1950b).

> In the case of the Japanese national polity, the imperial household is the beginning and the end of the world. The imperial household embraces the past and future, it becomes the center of evolution as the self-determination of the eternal present, and this is the quintessence of Japan's national polity. (Nishida, 1950c, p. 409)

The imperial household is, in this way, supposed to prove Japan to be continuity of discontinuities.

The place of nothingness in world history appears in the form of concentric circles. The world therefore consists of a number of concentric circles, and the world itself appears in this mapping as a larger concentric circle still, that embraces all the others. In this mapping, the concentric circles do not have clear boundaries, which contrasts sharply with the Westphalian system based on the principle of mutual exclusion. This overlaps with what Qin Yaqing (2011) calls 'ripples', mentioned earlier, and this perception of the contemporary world comes close to the *tianxia* system of ancient China. In fact, Nishida and his disciples often referred to the *tianxia* system as one of the ideal models of the world order of the next generation (Nishida, 1950e; Kosaka et al., 1943, pp. 340–341).

The Kyoto School philosophers contend that the concept of a Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere (GEACS), which has been commonly understood in the post-war era as the justification for Japan's imperialist territorial expansion, should be the reification in the world system of the place of nothingness. This system also contrasts sharply with the Westphalian system, according to the Kyoto School philosophers, in that the former is based on morality whereas the latter is based on instrumental reason. This is the reason why the GEACS is morally superior to the imperialism of the West.

But what guarantees the moral superiority of the GEACS? The Kyoto School contends that morality in the contemporary world resides in the human capacity to materialize world history. Human beings are born in history and, in turn, create it. Individuals are destined to perform the crucial role of world creation and should try to fulfill this destiny. Although there are some differences in interpretation of morality and human existence among the Kyoto School philosophers, the simplest interpretation of it states that the most essential feature of human beings in world history is 'obedience' (Koyama, 2001). Obedience in this context should not be understood in the way that it is frequently intended in contemporary IR. It is far from despotism or totalitarianism. Rather, it is obedience to nothingness. The Kyoto School philosophers firmly believed that Western morality is based on being whereas Japan's morality is based on the concept of nothingness, and this is the key to transcending the international order prevailing under imperialism.

In the cases of both Nishida and his disciples, it is clear that what they strived to do was hijack the meanings of the concepts frequently used in the discourses of total war between Japan and the West. Unfortunately, they failed. What went wrong?

The Cautionary Tale of the Kyoto School

Nishida's effort to hijack Japan's foreign relations policy and to change its direction toward a more harmonious and peaceful world ended in disastrous failure, as did the efforts of his disciples. An article that Nishida wrote specifically for Prime Minister Tojo's speech on the Great East Asian Co-prosperity

Declaration was substantially edited without Nishida's permission and used in solely to justify the aggression of the Japanese army toward the Asian continent. Nishida was extremely disappointed to hear Tojo's speech and later died in sorrow. The reputation of Nishida and his disciples remains tarnished to this day, and they are generally regarded as intellectual war criminals. So what possible explanation can we find for this miscalculation?

One possible explanation can be found in Kobayashi's analysis of Nishida's personality (Kobayashi, 2011). Kobayashi argues that it was unexceptional among the Japanese of Nishida's generation to hold the emperor in high regard, and Nishida was apparently no exception. It was his adherence to the Emperor system, Kobayashi maintains, that explains why Nishida wrote the draft (Kobayashi, 2011, pp. 335–356). In fact, there are numerous writings of Nishida's on the emperor and his predecessors that show his extraordinary attachment to the emperor.

There is another reason for Nishida's particular focus on the Emperor system in his political writings, however. Nishida believed that the unbroken line of the imperial household had a symbolic existence, and this resonated with his philosophy of the 'place of nothingness' and the 'eternal present'. By definition, the 'place of nothingness' does not have any shape or frame before it is established. It is like a container without any boundaries or walls. In this sense, the 'place of nothingness' can hardly have a continuous identity. By contrast, the 'eternal present' is the continuity of discontinuities. If the concept of time is inherently discontinuous, how can a person maintain his/her identity through time? This is a question with which Nishida wrestled unceasingly throughout his life.

If something identical persists through in every discontinuous moment, then the place of nothingness does have a shape, though it is only in a retrospective sense. This is the case for the unbroken line of the imperial household of Japan. Japan had absorbed numerous cultures from abroad in many fields, including philosophy, thought, religion, technology, and science. Nishida considered Japan's history of absorption and the imperial household to guarantee Japan's character as the 'place of nothingness' (Nishida, 1950b).

However, his configuration of the world of the 'place of nothingness', with the imperial household residing at the center of it, was too naïve. Nishida's philosophical conceptualization of a harmonious world was easily exploited by the harsh reality of power politics and abused in justifying the imperialist aggression of the Japanese military. The emperor was by no means the representation of nothingness or the core of Japan's multiculturalist identity, as Nishida presumed. The emperor was in fact the representation of being—of an aggressive sort—in the Japanese politics of the time (Kobayashi, 2011, p. 341). The emperor represented the reification of the nation-state of Japan, which was naturally constructed upon the notion of the legitimate use of violence granted by the imperial order. Ironically, one could suggest that Nishida's articulation of the emperor was materialized in the form of the imperial household of the post-war period, as a symbolic existence without political power (Kobayashi, 2011, p. 341).

Another possible reason for the Kyoto School's mistakes resides in epistemology. While the philosophers of the School contended that Japan constituted the reification of the 'place of nothingness' and thus should become the leader of the next world order on the basis of morality rather than instrumental reason, the reality of Japan came nowhere near to matching that expectation. Inoue Toshikazu (2011) argues that during the so-called Twenty Years' Crisis (Carr, 1946), Japan was far from being a traditional society constructed upon morality; rather, it showed the typical attributes of a consumer society, coming close to what Arendt (1958) saw in Germany before the advent of Nazism. There are also numerous diaries and letters that Kyoto School philosophers wrote which indeed show that they were disturbed by the prevailing

consumerism in Japan. Thus, in order to understand the failure of their political enterprise, we cannot ignore the way they perceived the world, an epistemological matter.

Their approach is a perfect example of the mistaken belief that the world can be understood in a dichotomized way. The Kyoto School philosophers concentrated too much on the West/East division and never devoted adequate time to the 'in-between', despite their extraordinary emphasis on the relationality of subjects. This is a typical approach to configuring IR, particularly when scholars are driven to seeing it in a confrontational way. In other words, their perception of the world was not based on the 'place of nothingness'. Instead, they made use of Western modernism in depicting the Twenty Years' Crisis. Had they instead chosen to stick to the ideas of the 'place of nothingness' and the 'eternal present', they may have realized that dichotomies such as West/East and US/Japan are themselves human constructs and are far from essential and pre-given entities. In other words, these dichotomies were already institutionalized in the Kyoto School's discourses and thus closed to contingencies that might have changed the philosophers' political perceptions. These discourses were totally self-contained and had no room for coincidentality or different interpretations to take place. Thus, it is safe to say here that the School's narratives were very much Western oriented in their universalism in terms of their perceptions, assumptions, and subjectivities. Indeed, some critical readings of the School frequently insist that its philosophy should be interpreted as an extension of Western philosophy and an attempt to 'pierce' it toward transcendence (Sakai and Isomae, 2010, pp. 23–27). In this respect, their effort was not sufficient to achieve that goal. This interpretation is crucial in the context of the political engagement of the School because it shows that the School's work was incomplete, stopping at a level of universalism in a particularistic disguise.

What can we say about non-Western IRT literature on the basis of our understanding of the Kyoto School's experience? First, the notions of inclusivity and openness are definitely goals worth pursuing. However, it is definitely naïve to say that simply introducing different concepts and ideas at the abstract level will automatically materialize these norms in the substantive world. As Nishida's experience and that of his disciples suggest, knowledge and intellect are always in danger of abuse by the prevailing power. This seems particularly to be the case when romantic ideas of peace and inclusivity are articulated in defense of a particular and existing nation-state. Nevertheless, we are obliged to pursue norms and prescriptions, because, as E. H. Carr suggests, norms and morals are indispensable aspects of IR (Carr, 1946). What we need to do here is to construct a concrete program to realize the ideal state of affairs. Without it, the discourses formulated will be abused by power politics. In order to avoid this, we have to balance realist and utopian understandings of world affairs.

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