

Introduction

The first aim of this book is to read the philosophy of Japan's Kyoto School *as philosophy*. As I shall explain in greater detail below, such a project is not without precedents. However, those who have read Kyoto School work as philosophy have tended to introduce a divide between philosophy as such and politics, often to avoid being critical of the Kyoto School or to redeem its philosophers. In contrast, in reading Kyoto School philosophy as philosophy, I hope to provide a more detailed account of the political implications of its intellectual project, neither to dismiss nor to redeem it, but to open up questions about the project of modern philosophy more generally. As such, the second aim of this book is to explore the *politics* of Kyoto School philosophy *as philosophy*.

The Kyoto School was a group of Japanese philosophers who were under the tutelage or influence of Nishida Kitarō, the school's founder. Nishida is often regarded as the first Japanese philosopher who tried to express religious insights from Zen Buddhism through the medium of Western philosophy in order to establish a mode of philosophy unique to East Asian cultural traditions. Although some Japanese scholars still identify themselves as members of the Kyoto School, or descendants of Nishida's philosophy, the school was at its zenith before and during the Second World War, when Nishida was still alive. In postwar Japan, the Kyoto School philosophers' involvement with Japan's wartime situation as famous intellectuals aroused much controversy: in the prewar and wartime periods, some of Nishida's disciples frequently made statements supporting wartime policies, and even had meetings with military authorities. While not as active as his followers, Nishida published works in line with the ideology of the wartime regime, and also offered his work to military authorities who asked for his advice.

In contrast, when the Kyoto School's philosophers first became known in Europe and North America, their involvement with Japan's wartime situation was not brought to the public's attention. The ways in which the Kyoto

School's thinking was received went through gradual changes until issues surrounding their wartime involvement started to draw notice. In the preface to *Rude Awakenings*, a 1995 anthology that was intended to “examin[e] the relationship between Japanese nationalism and intellectuals in the Kyoto school” (vii), James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo give a short overview of these changes. According to these two scholars, the Kyoto School philosophers' ideas began to spread through translated texts in Western countries in the 1980s. At the time, they were warmly welcomed as Zen thought, which, as specific to Oriental culture, had gained some popularity in the West. However, since Heidegger's association with the Nazis had drawn substantial attention within academia in the late 1980s, people also started to scrutinize the Kyoto School's commitment to the wartime politics (*Rude Awakenings* vii–viii).

In 2011, Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth published *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, which addressed intellectual dialogues between the Kyoto School and continental philosophers. In the introduction to this collection, they review the reception of the Kyoto School's philosophies and emphasize the fact that “the members of the Kyoto School thought of themselves first and foremost as *philosophers*, rather than as religious, cultural, or political theorists” (*Japanese and Continental Philosophy* 2). From this standpoint, the three editors intended their volume to be “the first anthology to be fully committed to developing *philosophical exchanges* between the Kyoto School and modern and contemporary Western philosophers in the Continental tradition” (*Japanese and Continental Philosophy* 2). What is expressed here is concern about the Kyoto School thinkers' inquiry into philosophy as such that goes beyond mere introduction to or interpretation of their thought, which formerly tended to be understood in the context of politics or Eastern religions.

Even before this, the increasing interest in philosophical approaches to the Kyoto School had manifested itself in its study. In the introduction to *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy* in 2008, Christopher Goto-Jones describes this anthology as “the search for the politics of the Kyoto School *qua* philosophy” and explains its goal as “shifting scholarly priorities *away* from ‘historical evaluation and assessment of socio-political implications’ at a specific point in history and *towards* the quest to ‘apprehend philosophical architectonic and conceptual coherence’ in philosophical texts” (11). While addressing the Kyoto School's political thought by following the general trend of scholarship since 1990s, Goto-Jones emphasizes the importance of philosophical inquiries, rather than socio-politico-historical investigations that have previously been carried out. For example, seven years before the publication of this anthology, Heisig, who wrote the forward of *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*, published his book, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay*

on the *Kyoto School*. Heisig's 2001 work is an extensive study of three major philosophers of the school, namely Nishida, Tanabe Hajime, and Nishitani Keiji. Other similar examples, such as Goto-Jones's 2005 *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School, and Co-Prosperity* and Robert Wilkinson's 2009 *Nishida and Western Philosophy* point to a kind of "philosophical turn" that has been going on in Kyoto School scholarship, so to speak.

However, this philosophical turn cannot be celebrated without reserve, since it seems to include some problematic tendencies, depending on how "philosophy" is understood. If one assumes, even if tacitly, that only Western philosophy is philosophy in the exact sense, from this standpoint, the Kyoto School's philosophy, which was created outside the region called "the West," could be judged as not properly philosophical. In *Nishida and Western Philosophy*, Wilkinson seems to take this stance. What matters is not that Nishida's philosophy is compared with Western philosophy, but rather how this comparison is conducted.

For example, annexing the proviso that, "It is a mistake, of course, to regard either East or West as monolithic," Wilkinson insists "there are general tendencies of the kind" between them (158). Then he discusses what he believes to be a main difference between them with regard to rationality, which in his view consists of "working out rigorously the consequences of one's foundational beliefs, the beliefs in turn being dependent on equally foundational experiences":

Rationality manifests itself in the same way both in the East and in the West. The chief difference (if one may simplify so complex a matter) lies in the centrality given to non-dual or mystical experience in the East by comparison to its relative non-centrality in the West. (Wilkinson 159)

Although Wilkinson may seem to simply present his idea of a general difference between the East and the West here, his further statements on Nishida suggest, although avoiding explicit mention, he reduces this difference to a matter of degree to which thought is worth being called philosophy. For example, Wilkinson states:

The fact that Nishida's philosophy rests on experiences of the kind described is not in itself a problem. From the *philosophical* point of view there is a greater problem in the fact that he does not try to argue that the insights which he tries to conceptualize are veridical. (159)

To sum up Wilkinson's claim here in his own terms, Nishida intended his account of his Zen experience to be "a philosophy in the western sense, not an account of a mystical world-view beyond the reach of logic," aiming at "giving a coherent and systematic conceptual rendering of experience in the western manner" (102). Yet, Wilkinson concludes Nishida could not accomplish this, and so his thought was assimilated to mysticism as a result (160). In thus judging that Nishida did not provide a sufficiently logical account of his Zen experience and mystified it, Wilkinson describes Nishida's thought as the exemplary of the aforementioned Eastern tendency, in which the centrality is given to mystical experience. When Wilkinson denounces Nishida's allegedly mystical account as a problem viewed "[f]rom the philosophical point of view" (159), he tacitly assumes that Eastern tradition has something which, at its core, prevents thought from becoming philosophy, and that philosophy proper is basically Western philosophy. In the same vein, Wilkinson betrays his belief that rationality proper is the Western style of rationality when he states that Nishida "had to accept that reason could be used in this endeavour or he would not have set out to do western-style philosophizing at all, but this is not to be taken as implying that he was a thoroughgoing rationalist in all respects (which, as has been seen, he was not)" (155).

Furthermore, Wilkinson stretches his conclusion on Nishida and his implied failure in being thoroughly rational and philosophical in the Western sense to a matter of Eastern systems of thought: he asserts the incommensurability of Eastern and Western cultures, namely, "the more general *décalage* . . . between those central oriental systems of thought aiming at nirvana or one of its close analogues and those western philosophies" (161). Through this statement, Wilkinson practically affirms monolithic stereotyping of the East and the West, which he professed to deny. His selective and inconsistent usage of the term "philosophy" for Western thought illustrates his assumption that philosophy proper is Western philosophy and as if, strictly speaking, Oriental or non-Western philosophy did not really exist.

There would be plenty of room to explore whether Nishida really failed to "giv[e] a coherent and systematic conceptual rendering of experience" (Wilkinson 102), or if it is in fact an issue of interpretation. Regardless of the East or the West, depending on respective philosophers, such rendering can take a variety of forms, as does rationality, which may not be confined within the sphere of reason in the narrow sense. Generally speaking, scholars work hard to elucidate and explicate such various forms of rendering and rationality. Strangely enough, however arcane Western philosophies are, it is rare that scholars ascribe the difficulties of the texts to the different cultural backgrounds of the philosophers, or blame them for making their philosophies unintelligible due to their cultural nature. On the other hand, such gestures

often go unchallenged in Western scholars' research of non-Western philosophers. What is operative here is again the assumption that only Western philosophy is philosophy proper, and that only Western rationality is rationality proper. This provides a pretext for judging anything that does not meet certain standards of this rationality as non-philosophical, and for abandoning efforts to elucidate or explicate non-Western philosophy as "philosophy" on its own terms. This seems to be nothing but an obstacle to philosophy and its understanding, especially given that the existence of various non-Western forms of philosophy has been claimed for so long.

Considering the perniciousness of Western-centric biases on philosophy, one may expect that taking into account cultural particularities that underlie different non-Western philosophies, with respect for them, would help us to understand them better, and avoid subjecting them to unfair judgments based on Western-centric biases. When this stance is taken, philosophy is understood as an expression of underlying culture, and largely determined by it. Although this approach may promote our understanding to a certain extent, it is also true that excessive emphasis upon such particularities, especially when they are arbitrarily picked up (or even invented), often runs the risk of hindering understanding not only of philosophy, but also of underlying culture. This seems to be the case with Goto-Jones's *Political Philosophy in Japan*.

Taking into account the fact that Buddhist thought constituted significant parts of both the tradition of Japanese political thinking and social discourses in early twentieth century Japan (Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan* 26), Goto-Jones insists "it is not possible to substantiate the existence of a clear-cut break between the sites of religion, politics and philosophy in Nishida's work" (*Political Philosophy in Japan* 27). From this viewpoint, Goto-Jones explicates Nishida's political philosophy as elaborated by using concepts from Japanese Buddhist tradition and, as such, able to relativize and challenge Western political philosophy. In light of Nishida's political philosophy thus explicated, Goto-Jones re-examines Nishida's wartime discourses and discerns in them "the 'civil war' against ultra-nationalist and imperialist interpretations of the state-sanctioned terminology using the tools of his wider philosophical system" (*Political Philosophy in Japan* 1).

In this re-examination, Goto-Jones gives a key role to conditionals, which he believes Nishida must have used based on Nichiren, a Japanese Buddhist monk in the Kamakura period (*Political Philosophy in Japan* 33). Goto-Jones draws out and summarizes a conditional phrase that, for him, seems to play a significant role in Nichiren's teachings: "*buppō* [Buddha's law] is primary and *ōbō* [national law] is only legitimate to the extent that it accords with *buppō*" (*Political Philosophy in Japan* 33). His point here is that national law is legitimate only when it accords with Buddha's law; when national law

does not accord with Buddha's law, people could judge this disaccord and understand the above statement as an implicit criticism of national law, as an allusion to its illegitimacy.

However, doubt arises as to whether it is possible to read the conditional into the texts in which it does not appear, and to find it functioning in the way as Goto-Jones claims. An example, which he uses to attest to the above usage of conditionals in Japanese Buddhist history, rather seems to disprove this claim. Goto-Jones states that Japanese Buddhist monk "Shaku Sōen famously called on the Imperial Japanese Army to seek 'the subjugation of evils hostile to civilization, peace and enlightenment' during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05" (*Political Philosophy in Japan* 35), and adds, in a note, "Sōen also notes that by seeking the destruction of this evil, Japan 'pursues no egoistical purpose'" (*Political Philosophy in Japan* 144). Asserting a tacit assumption of a conditional phrase in these statements, Goto-Jones finds in them the following dual meaning:

On the one hand there is a simple justification of expansion "in the name of the Buddha." But, on the other hand, the justification of war is importantly conditional: war must not be the result of personal ambition . . . (*Political Philosophy in Japan* 35–36)¹

Shaku's original statements, as quoted by Goto-Jones, do not include any conditional clause. Most simply understood, they plainly describe that Japan's war efforts accord with the moral ideal of Buddha's law. Nevertheless, once the author's tacit assumption of the conditional is asserted, the distinction between this moral ideal and the state's actual acts is introduced. Based on this distinction, it becomes possible to read into these statements a criticism of the state's acts in the name of the Buddhist moral ideal. It is questionable whether the author intended this complication in such simple statements. As it is uncertain whether Shaku supposed this distinction in them, there is no guarantee that he meant by them such a criticism. Most likely, he genuinely praised the state's war efforts as consonant with Buddha's law, while assuming the enemy's evilness.²

It is by drawing upon similar tacit assumptions of the conditional that Goto-Jones reads a criticism of the Japanese empire into Nishida's nuanced claim. Formulating a sentence that he believes Nishida would approve of, "*only enlightened states can form genuine transnational groupings*," Goto-Jones interprets it as follows:

. . . *only if/when* (. . . *tara*) states are enlightened will they become able to form legitimate transnational groupings. That is, the Japanese Empire is immoral if Japan (or Korea, or China . . .) is not

an enlightened state. From Nishida's concern about the problems of heteronomous political ethics, we can judge that Imperial Japan (with its state controlled Neo-Shintō-Confucian ideology) was not an enlightened state. Hence, the Japanese Empire was not a genuine or moral particular world. (*Political Philosophy in Japan* 65)

Again, it is uncertain whether a conditional clause is in fact tacitly assumed in Nishida's above sentence. On the contrary, if the accord between ideal and the state's actual acts is taken for granted, especially if it is supposed that it could be achieved exclusively in that very state as Shaku's statements indicate, the sentence at issue would present a different claim than what Goto-Jones presents as "misreading," that is, "Imperial Japan . . . was enlightened *because* it had an empire" (*Political Philosophy in Japan* 65). Here, Japan is enlightened, or at least at an advanced stage of enlightenment compared to other countries. If one were to suppose that, "*only if/when* states are enlightened will they become able to form legitimate transnational groupings," it would follow that only Japan can do so. Based on such assumptions, one might conclude that it is legitimate for Japan to guide other countries that do not have this ability, and to form transnational groupings under its leadership. In other words, the formation of a Japanese empire is not only legitimate here, but also moral. As I will argue later, this seems close to the overall claim expressed in Nishida and his disciples' prewar and wartime discourses, as far as they are read on their own terms, and before thinking about a risk that "such sentences could be *used* by political figures" (Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan* 65).

Goto-Jones's above argument provides an illustration of the difficulty we may face in conducting research on philosophy by taking into account its supposed "cultural background." His strategy is to extract such a logic that would be characteristic of a certain Eastern religious tradition and, in light of this logic, change the interpretations of the works of those thinkers who belong to this tradition. Certainly this strategy, considered in itself, can sometimes contribute to discovering new meanings that have formerly gone unnoticed. However, on the pretext that understanding certain thinkers is linked to understanding their culture, when their works are loaded with too much extrapolation of alleged cultural specificities even if there is no inkling of them, the meanings of texts tend to be distorted rather than elucidated. This is similar to the case in which cultural stereotypes for certain people are so strong that interpretations of their works amount to the applications of these stereotypes.

Thus, not only is the position of insisting on the universality of Western philosophy an impediment, but the position of asserting the particularity of Eastern or Japanese philosophy can also be an obstacle to philosophical investigation, especially regarding cultural stereotypes that both these positions

produce and promote. Then, a hope may be that, if philosophical dialogues are held between the West and the East or Japan, this may help break such stereotypes and remove obstacles to philosophical investigation and mutual understanding. Although this possibility cannot be denied, it seems to depend on the ways in which such dialogues take place. For example, in the introduction to *Japanese and Continental Philosophy*, the editors describe how they believe dialogues between the two cultures could take place:

If one of the gifts that Western philosophy has been able to offer the Japanese is its methods of rational inquiry and critical dialogue, one of the gifts that the Japanese tradition has to offer the West is an existential-religious path that proceeds by way of holistic practice as well as conceptual thought. (14)

The editors here seem to repeat the same dichotomous stereotypes as Wilkinson, namely that Western philosophy represents rationality, while Eastern tradition (not “philosophy” proper) draws upon mystical experience and, as such, is essentially religious. When dialogues are held by taking such stereotypes as unchanged presuppositions, they most likely will end up confirming stereotypes held by both those who claim Western philosophy’s universality and those who claim Japanese thought or tradition’s particularity. If this is the case, doubt arises as to whether these positions are really in dialogue with each other. For, insofar as both apply their stereotypes not only to others, but also to themselves, they just confine themselves within their own fixed ideas rather than actually addressing to each other.

What is more important is that these two positions, Western universalism and Eastern or Japanese particularism, in spite of their seeming opposition, strangely cooperate to endorse and reinforce cultural stereotypes. Relevantly to this matter, in the final chapter of *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy* titled “Resistance to Conclusion: The Kyoto School Philosophy under the Pax Americana,” Sakai Naoki draws our attention to “the complicity of universalism and particularism” that persists in studies of Japanese thought:

What we must be aware of is the on-going presence of a peculiar, reciprocal connivance between the Orientalist exoticization of Japanese thought by Western scholars and the culturalist endorsement by Japanese intellectuals of such exoticism. (186)

Orientalism is famously formulated by Edward Said as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). It is a way of thinking discerned in Westerners’ discourses on the Orient, intended

to shape the Orient into an object to be ruled by the Occident. It authorizes Westerners to impose a specific view upon the Orient for this purpose.³ In Sakai's words, "the West represents on behalf of the East, thereby establishing hierarchical relationships between the West and the East" ("Resistance to Conclusion" 186). It is through this Orientalist strategy that Western universalism works in the study of non-Western philosophy, excluding non-Western modes of thought from alleged "philosophy proper," or marginalizing the former within the field of the latter. Sakai's claim is that Japanese particularism, adopted to counter Western universalism (although it is not exclusively Japanese intellectuals who take this position) does not necessarily challenge its supposed opponent, but rather provides water for turning the enemy's mill. Ironically, particularizing Japanese thought and making scholars recognize this particularity has the effect of endorsing, or even reinforcing, Orientalists' assertion of the universality of Western thought as essentially different from Japanese thought as particular. Based on this view, Sakai warns that reading Japanese philosophers' works in particularist manners runs the risk of falling into the pitfall of this "mutual endorsement" between Western universalism and Japanese particularism, which he calls "the civilizational transference" ("Resistance to Conclusion" 183).

. . . the exoticizing projection of Asia, "the Oriental mind," or "the outside of Western metaphysics" onto the texts of Japanese philosophy has made it impossible for students to work through the constraints of civilizational transference" ("Resistance to Conclusion" 190)

Contrary to Western universalists, who undervalue Japanese philosophy, Japanese particularists try to enhance its value, and yet the latter are drawn into mutual endorsement with the former. This is because particularists share with universalists the intention of establishing hierarchical relationships based on the dichotomy of the West and Japan; the fact that the two parties uphold opposite hierarchies does not prevent both from supporting this dichotomy itself, while working to solidify it together. Both Western universalism and Japanese particularism not only reduce interpretation of philosophical texts to an application of cultural stereotypes, but also lend themselves to the dichotomous division of Western philosophy as universal and Japanese philosophy as particular. Considering this, investigations of Japanese philosophy must avoid taking either the Western universalism or Japanese particularism approaches to philosophy in order to do justice to its object while neither idealizing nor belittling it.

What, then, would a philosophy that stands outside of these two positions look like, and how might we reconceive universality, particularity, and

their relation differently based on it? These are big questions, and answering them fully is beyond the scope of this book and my ability. What can be said, at least, is that if a philosophy is not satisfied with being confined within the dichotomy of these positions, it should critically examine the assumed ideas of universality and particularity, and their relation to each other, as well as question how and under what conditions these ideas are produced, and what limitations or constraints they consequently involve. If such restrictions were disclosed, it would help exploring how universality, particularity and their relation can be reconceived differently, while also correcting the problems resulting from such restrictions, or caused by disregard for them. After all, particularity and universality are only there as we conceive of them. As such, they are neither as unchangeable nor essential as they seem to be. Rather, they are continually produced, transformed, undermined, and re-produced, while new problems entailed in them are discovered. No universality, no particularity, thus produced, can be the perfect final solution. So, what one can do is to accept the difficulty of this ongoing production and join its process, rather than substantiating universality/particularity as a fixed standard.

From this standpoint, a critical eye should be turned not only to the above two positions in the study of the Kyoto School's philosophy, but also to this philosophy itself. For this very philosophy exemplifies the pitfalls that we should avoid when trying to get out of the dichotomy between Western universalism and Japanese particularism.

At a glance, the fact that the Kyoto School philosophers engaged in the production of universalist philosophical discourses, which seem to have validity beyond particular, local concerns of Japanese intellectual society, may give the appearance that these philosophers already surmounted this dichotomy. This, however, does not only concern their theoretical position. Their engagement in universalist philosophical projects is often invoked as a reason to distinguish their political stance from those of other Japanese intellectuals around the time of the Asia-Pacific War, especially literary figures, who enthusiastically celebrated Japan's war and colonial invasion solely in defense of its national interests. In fact, what is presupposed here is another dichotomy, namely one of emotional particularism associated with nationalism and philosophical universalism associated with cosmopolitanism.

Sakai points out that the Kyoto School philosophers used their universalistic discourses for the particularistic purpose, that is, to legitimize Japan's colonial rule over other Asian countries and establish its hegemony over them:

Not only Japan's relationship with Korea, Taiwan, China and other peoples in Asia but also the fact that the members of the Kyoto School clearly participated in the production of the legitimacy of

Japanese colonial rule in Asia in universalistic philosophical terms have been persistently overlooked in the study of Kyoto School philosophy. (“Resistance to Conclusion” 194)

Sakai describes those who use universalistic philosophical terms and privilege their own country or people as part of the “particularization of the universal project of transcendental philosophy” (“Resistance to Conclusion” 195). Given that this particularization of the universal project in the Kyoto School’s philosophy lent itself to legitimizing Japan’s colonial rule, the philosophers’ pursuit of universality cannot be enough reason for judging their philosophy as unaccountable for the legitimization of colonialism. For this very pursuit of universality becomes a pretext to disguise and justify this particularist purpose.

Moreover, this particularization of the universal does not necessarily overcome the dichotomy between Western universalism and Japanese particularism. As aforementioned, Western universalism, in asserting the exclusive universality of the West, which is basically one of many particular cultural regions, is not really universal in the exact sense of the word. Rather, insofar as it makes universality serve to privilege particular people or their culture, Western universalism entails particularization of the universal, which is indeed parallel to the Kyoto School’s philosophical discourses. The Kyoto School’s universalist discourses, legitimating Japan’s colonial rule, simply aim to put Japan and Japanese people in the same position that the West and Westerners occupy in Western universalism. They replace it with Japanese universalism, without questioning the problems implied in such a positioning itself. Thus the philosophical pursuit of universality does not necessarily amount to opposing certain people’s subjugation of others. Western philosophy already has a lot of precedence to show this.

The same applies to the cases in which allegedly universal “morality” or “ethicality” is pursued. Having a different view from that of Sakai, Heisig, in the forward of *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*, states, “for these philosophers self-awareness is intended as a moral yardstick that aims to be every bit as ‘universal’ as the principles on which their wartime opinions have been chastised” (xxv). Heisig then continues that revealing these philosophers’ “universal” moral principles would “[turn] the philosophy of the Kyoto School on itself as a way to cleanse it of the stains that the conditions of its birth left upon it” (*Re-Politicising the Kyoto School* xxv). Heisig’s claim is that the universal moral principles, upheld by the philosophers, could judge their own wartime engagement determined by a particular historical situation. Therefore, disclosing such universal moral principles would be enough to release them from the accusation of their wartime engagement. It is in the same vein that Heisig claims, in his *Philosophers of Nothingness*, that “anything

approaching or supporting the imperialistic ideology of wartime Japan” was “an aberration from their own intellectual goals” (6).⁴ Heisig here seems to have trust in the impeccability of the philosophers’ universalist and moral project, which he views as fundamental and unspoilable by their involvement in particular situations.

In his 1995 essay, “The Consequences of the ‘Philosophy of World History: From Wartime to the Postwar Era’” [*“Sekaishi no tetsugaku” no kiketsu: Senchū kara sengo e*], Yonetani Masafumi offers significant insight into this point. He discusses the continuity between the four Kyoto School thinkers’ wartime and postwar discourses, and underscores that they shared a specific philosophy of world history and advocated for the war with recourse to the moral ideal backed up by their philosophy. This continuity, Yonetani argues, demonstrates these philosophers’ belief that the moral ideal they upheld in wartime was right, even though the war, which was justified based on their very beliefs, was wrong. He thus asks, “even if that ideal criticized what was going on in reality, still, at the same time, wasn’t it also this ideal that consequently supported this reality?” Yonetani also points to these philosophers’ lack of awareness of this “complementarity between ideal and reality” (229). Here, both the ideal and the reality worked in tandem to allow the war to proceed, and have also bolstered recent efforts to resuscitate wartime ideologies in Japan (228). If these philosophers’ moral ideal truly criticized the actual war, it would not have lent itself to a revival of ideologies today that promoted this very war in the past. In other words, this resurgence of wartime ideologies confirms that this moral ideal harbors the very factors that allow this to happen. Thus, “the complementarity between ideal and reality” was not simply forced upon this moral philosophy by its historical situation. It does not necessarily seem to be the case that their moral philosophy—despite its profound truthfulness that arguably could constitute a criticism of, or resistance to, the war—was misrepresented and abused by the forces behind the wartime situation.

Of course, the Kyoto School’s entire philosophy cannot be reduced to the philosophers’ prewar and wartime discourses, and it is undeniable that exploration of their philosophies, conducted independently of political matters, has its own significance. Still, the fact remains that these philosophers engaged in Japan’s wartime situation based on their philosophies and argued for particularist stances by using universalistic terms of philosophy. Emphasizing merely “universal” and “moral” aspects in the philosophers’ project, as if this were enough to prove their unaccountability, would preclude the questions as to how their concepts of universality and morality worked to advocate particularism, and consequently what effects their philosophy contributed to certain social, historical, and political situations. Then, we run

the risk of misrepresenting the philosophers' statements that privilege their own particular country or people as expressions of their genuine universalist aspirations, or worse—allowing for similar abuses of philosophy on the pretense of its profundity, even though inadvertently.

Likewise, we could not assume a clear-cut division between the Kyoto School philosophers' pure philosophy and their political discourses while taking the latter as mere deviation forced to occur by historical conditions. Through legitimating Japan's colonial rule by using universalistic terms in particularist manners, the Kyoto School's philosophy itself straddled the dividing line between philosophy and politics. To this extent, it would be relevant to ask how allegedly "pure" philosophy could become a source of political problems, rather than assuming the clear-cut split between philosophy and politics.

Nevertheless, thematizing the philosophers' involvement in colonialism tends to be avoided in the study of the Kyoto School's philosophy. Although this might be partly because of academia's general tendency to separate pure philosophy and politics, Sakai finds the cause of this avoidance in the aforementioned dichotomous scheme dividing the West and Japan.

What has been evaded in the study of Kyoto School philosophy because of the binarism of the West and Japan is an inquiry into the essential alliance between colonialism and the transcendental project of universalist philosophy. ("Resistance to Conclusion" 195)

Why does this binarism work to make scholars avoid such an inquiry? If the schema of the binary opposition between the West and Japan as a part of the non-West is taken too punctiliously, and each of the opposing terms to be united within itself as homogeneous, Japan's challenge to Western hegemony is regarded as benefitting the non-West as a whole. The non-West, then, is put in a disadvantageous position in relation to the West. In turn, Japan's position in relation to other members of the non-West is left unquestioned, and criticisms of Japan's colonial rule in Asia are hastily equated with advocacies of Western domination. Similarly, raising questions about the Kyoto School's philosophical legitimation of Japanese colonialism is mistaken as standing on the side of Western colonialism and denigrating Japan and Japanese philosophers' challenge to Western hegemony. Here, non-Westerners' challenge to Western hegemony provides an excuse for Japan's colonial rule and Japanese philosophers' legitimization of it. Sakai warns us that "it is important to keep in mind that a certain denunciation of Eurocentrism, particularly of white supremacy, was used to legitimate Japanese imperialist ventures in Asia before and during the Asia Pacific War" ("Resistance to Conclusion" 186). In other words, when we avoid inquiry into the Kyoto School's legitimation of

Japanese colonialism on the pretense of the philosophers' just cause of challenging Western hegemony, the logic at work here is the same which was used to justify Japan's colonial aggression in Asia under the banner of fighting against Western colonialism. To avoid being trapped by this logic, Sakai suggests turning a critical eye to "the structural complicity between the West and Japan" ("Resistance to Conclusion" 186), beyond their binary opposition, with regard to their common, but different, particularist desire for hegemony and their use of universalistic terms to justify this desire.

What complicates things is that the Kyoto School's philosophers themselves often argued for Japanese particularism and privileged Japan and the Japanese in their works. Still, exploring their philosophy does not necessarily require one to share their particularist stance, including its ethnocentric assumptions, unless one willingly adopts such a stance. It is possible to critically analyze their particularist discourses, and elucidate how these philosophers used universalistic terms to particularize their own country and people, and the problems involved in their philosophy thus articulated. This critical analysis of particularist discourses should not be carried out in a particularist manner that reduces these problems to matters distinct to Japan or the Japanese, thus repeating the errors of particularism in question. Rather, it should address these problems as those which could occur to anybody, anywhere, in generalized terms. This would also help cast light upon the aforementioned "structural complicity between the West and Japan" based on their commonality.

In this book, I take the following stance in my exploration of the Kyoto School's philosophy: (1) we must avoid both Western universalism and Japanese particularism. Specifically, we must neither undervalue the Kyoto School's philosophy based on allegedly universal standards of Western philosophy, nor interpret the school's philosophy as an expression of alleged Japanese particularities. (2) Rather than assuming the division between the school's pure philosophy and their political engagement, this book treats the school's philosophy as already straddling this dividing line, and addresses this philosophy as underlying the philosophers' political engagement and endorsing politically problematic power structures. (3) Instead of taking the thinkers' universalist project of philosophy as evidence of political innocence or silent opposition to colonialism, I question how they used universalistic philosophical terms to authenticate Japanese particularism and legitimate the colonization of others. (4) In the same vein, I question how these philosophers used moral terms for the same purpose. For it was their moral project that also contributed to this authentication and legitimation.

In exploring the Kyoto School's philosophy with this stance, I will adopt a textual approach. While this approach has its own limits, my objective is not to divine or represent the true intentions of these philosophers based

on records or testimonies, whether their own or those of others. Rather my objective is to clarify what is stated in these philosophers' discourses, explore what thoughts these discourses articulate (and the thoughts thus articulated may be called "intentions" in another sense), and elucidate what problems are involved with these thoughts. It will be argued that, even if these philosophers really wished to resist the wartime regime as a whole, the presentation of various elements in these philosophers' discourses undermines the possibility of such resistance. What matters here is that the presentation and arrangement of these philosophers' texts ultimately captured people's hearts and mobilized them for the war.

An objection to this approach may be that these philosophers did not intentionally present and arrange their discourses in such ways. In fact, a typical defense of the Kyoto School, in terms their public discourse, is that due to censorship and the suppression of free speech, they could not express their true ideas, and instead were forced to publicly state what they did not really mean. This was undeniably the case with much of the Japanese population at that time. However, this defense tends to ignore or exclude the possibility of any commonality or overlap between the ideology of the wartime government and the ideology of the people who underwent censorship. In his contribution to *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*, Davis responds to this defense by writing, "a political philosophy must be judged not just on its intentions but also on its effects" (32). Certain kinds of beliefs work to justify terrible thoughts and actions carried out on others, including one-sidedly killing them without remorse. Such beliefs are not reducible to a matter of intentions. People sometimes try to put beliefs into practice with well-meaning goals, and then defend their deeds in the name of their good intentions. It bears remembering other historical events where one group of people conquered others who they regarded as "uncivilized" in order to "enlighten" them, or massacred them with the ostensibly good intention of "liberating" them. It seems that similar beliefs to these manifest themselves in the discourses of the philosophers at hand. Therefore, rather than putting too much trust in these philosophers presumed "good intentions," it is necessary to question the thoughts (or "intentions" in another sense, that are inseparable from and defined by the effects they produce) expressed or formed through the arrangements and presentation of various elements in their discourses.

Indeed, the Kyoto School philosophers' prewar and wartime discourses as a whole exemplify the inseparable unity of their political and moral philosophy, ultimately grounded in their metaphysical thought. However, as dealing with all such discourses risks leading to a desultory argument, I focus on two central themes, namely: (1) overcoming modernity, and (2) Japanese

national subjectivity. I then examine these philosophers' public discourses in which these themes conspicuously manifest themselves.

"Overcoming Modernity" was the title and theme of a symposium organized soon after the beginning of the Asia-Pacific War. Its goal was to discuss the war's significance, which the symposium's title was supposed to represent. Famous intellectuals, including a few members of the Kyoto School, were invited to contribute essays and exchange their opinions. Before and after this symposium, a series of three other symposia also took place. Only four prominent members of the Kyoto School participated, including the two who attended the "Overcoming Modernity" symposium. Since all four thinkers shared a particular conception of world history, their philosophy was a consistent topic across these symposia. In pursuit of the symposium's goal, these thinkers discussed the importance of a Japanese national subjectivity that could lead to the overcoming of modernity, and also bring world history into perspective. Thus, for these four philosophers, the themes of overcoming modernity and Japanese national subjectivity were inseparably connected, reflecting their thoughts about not only what the Second World War was, but also what it should be. Although their mentor, Nishida, distanced himself from his four disciples' project during these symposia, this does not necessarily mean the former's philosophy was completely removed or resolutely opposed to that of the latter. As I will discuss, the ideas of similar subjectivity and the lines of thought that constituted another attempt to overcome modernity can be discerned in Nishida's philosophy in the same period. Nishida's thinking thus conceptually buttressed the ideas his disciples expressed during these symposia.

The Kyoto School philosophers' pursuit of universality and their concern for overcoming modernity have an inherent connection. Modernity, as we usually understand it today, originated in the West and then spread globally. As such, it appeared as something universal, but only as an effect of historical processes of universalizing. The nation-state, as a polity that is characteristic of modernity, is also the universal in a similar sense. Indeed, it is an amalgam of the universal and the particular, a combination of the state as a universalized form of a political body and the nation as a particular (or particularized) human group. In Japan's case, Japanese people largely equated modernization with Westernization at that time. It, along with the importation of Western philosophy, began almost concomitantly with the establishment of the nation-state in the Meiji period. Following this time of importation and adaptation, "Japanese" modern philosophy developed and culminated in the emergence of the Kyoto School. The Kyoto philosophers' bid for universality only took place under specific conditions, in which the Japanese nation-state had already been established and universalized. More

precisely, in the prewar and wartime periods when these philosophers were most active, Japan struggled to expand its power beyond itself as a particular nation-state. Considering this situation, it is not a coincidence that the Kyoto School's bid for universality, in line with Japan's policies and war efforts, sought the universality beyond that of modernity and the West. Reflecting the amalgam of the universal and the particular in the Japanese nation-state, these philosophers' pursuit of this "higher" universality was permeated by their allegiance to the values of the particularity of their nation. Therefore, it is not surprising that these philosophers viewed the task of overcoming modernity and the West as connected to the realization of this "higher" universality to Japanese national subjectivity in particular.

Doubt has been cast on the success of the Kyoto School's attempts to overcome modernity. As the title of his 2002 book, *Overcome by Modernity*, suggests, Harry Harootunian evaluates the philosophers' attempts as failures, claiming the Kyoto School was overcome by the modernity they tried to surmount. This claim might be criticised as a sweeping generalization that does not inquire deeply into the philosophy at issue. Still, his formulation on the general historical context concerning the theme of "overcoming modernity" is helpful to situate the Kyoto School's philosophy within a broader scope, and explore it in line with "the structural complicity between the West and Japan," which Sakai emphasized.

Harootunian's statement may be misunderstood as a Western-centric claim that non-Western countries must follow the same path of modernization as the West, and therefore are fated to be overwhelmed by the West forever. However, this is not what he means. When he qualifies Japanese modernity as "co-eval" in the sense that it "shared the same historical temporality of modernity (as a form of historical totalizing) found elsewhere in Europe and the United States" (Harootunian xvi), he does not propose that European or American modernities are/were at more advanced stages than Japanese modernity in a single, linear course of progress. As history shows, Japan was urged to modernize through its encounters with Western modernity, and it achieved modernization through its confrontation with the West. To this extent, Japanese modernity was born from the same historical process as Western modernity. This coevality does not necessarily imply that the latecomer is doomed to be overwhelmed by the predecessor. The point is that, as the result of this coevality, Japanese modernity, in spite of or precisely because of its rivalry with Western modernity, ran the risk of internalizing its structural oppression against the non-West. This is the same oppression which Japanese modernity is supposed to counter to achieve a non-Western form of modernity for itself. More concretely, Harootunian raises the question of whether it can be said that a Japanese modernity overcame Western

modernity when the former appropriated the latter's modes of imperialism and colonialism that have historically tormented the non-West. It is from this perspective that Harootyan claims the Kyoto School was overcome by the modernity they tried to surmount. What he means is not that the West defeated, and will continue to defeat Japan, but that Japanese modernity has been, and will be challenged by its own self-contradiction, just as Western modernity has been, and will continue to be. Another question raised is whether the Kyoto School philosophers, in their discourses on overcoming modernity, could develop ideas that aimed to break such complicity between Japanese and Western modernity.

Along this line of thinking, this book asks: Could the Kyoto School philosophers' thoughts about overcoming modernity offer a valid prospect for the Japanese people to overcome modernity, rather than being overcome by it? Could their ideas about a Japanese national subjectivity, as the agent for this overcoming, offer visions of a mode of existence that differs from Western-centric subjectivities? Attending to these questions by focusing on the two themes of overcoming modernity and Japanese national subjectivity, and by thoroughly examining these philosophers' discourses, are the tasks this book sets out to achieve. The criteria for evaluating these philosophers' attempts will be taken from their own criticisms of Western modernity and the subjectivity that is characteristic of it. Thus, evaluating their attempts entails examining whether their moral and political philosophies were true to the ideals they themselves professed to uphold and, relatedly, elucidating how these philosophers particularized their own country and people by using universalistic philosophical terms against their own ideals. It will be shown that this particularization of the universal, in terms of how it was expressed, will take the shape of the universalization of the particular in terms of the content of expression in the discourses at issue.

In part 1 of this book, I will examine the discourses of four prominent members of the second generation of the Kyoto School: Kōsaka Masaaki, Kōyama Iwao, Suzuki Shigetaka, and Nishitani Keiji. While only Suzuki and Nishitani participated in the "Overcoming Modernity" symposium, all four thinkers participated in the three subsequent symposia, during which they discussed their philosophies of world history. I will explicate these thinkers' philosophy, as expressed in these symposia, on Japanese national subjectivity and the philosophy of world history, based on which they asserted the significance of this subjectivity and the necessity to create it. By looking into its three salient characteristics, I will inquire whether this subjectivity could become the agent for overcoming modernity, as these thinkers envisioned. I will also question whether this subjectivity could become the agent for ethi-

cally transforming the Japanese wartime state or its military government, as recently claimed by some scholars.

In part 2, I will turn to these thinkers' mentor, Nishida, and examine his discourses, published almost contemporaneously with these symposia. My analysis will turn an eye to the overlaps and continuity between his lines of thought and that of his disciples. In reference to the above three characteristics of Japanese national subjectivity, I will argue that Nishida not only promoted ideas of a similar subjectivity, but also elaborated a theory of the structure of the Japanese state that could condition the possibility of this subjectivity. By unpacking the visions of the state and the world that Nishida believed this subjectivity would create, I will inquire whether such views could offer alternatives to the forms of the state and world that are characteristic of modernity, thus constituting a successful project to overcome modernity.