

# Thinking and Perceiving

## Nishida and Park as Embodied Subjects?

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Most philosophers are not always doing philosophy. Doing philosophy involves not only reading, thinking, and writing, but also perceiving, hearing, listening, and even touching. Since perception gives us only a partial view of a thing or an event, it is perspectival, deficient, deformed, shortsighted, and limited in itself. Thus it tends to interfere with or delimit thinking. One of the areas where perception is at its most powerful is in forming political ideas; a case in point being nationalistic sentiment or patriotism, which is inextricably tied into a philosopher's perception of things and encounters with people.

Nationalism can be a sentiment and ideology that creeps up on us through such shared memories as culture, tradition, history, and language. Or again, it may come to us through political institutions, policies, laws, and personal contact with powerful politicians. Nationalism is deeply rooted in the place where philosophers live and in this sense is somatic. The problem of nationalism is connected not only with thinking but also with perception. How can we justify our nationalism and understand the nationalism of others whom we do not see? Is it possible for a philosopher to strike a balance between thinking and perceiving? If a philosopher is not free from his/her locality, then what is the use of doing philosophy, which is supposed to be universal? I will ask these

questions of two philosophers, Nishida Kitarō from Japan, and Park Chong-hong from Korea, both of whom are to some degree influential in their respective nations.

The dictionary definition of “nationalism” is given as “the sentiment and ideology of attachment to a nation and to its interests.” Imperialism is defined as:

The extension of power through conquest, or the pursuit of “empire,” that is, of a global influence so dominant as to amount to virtual sovereignty wherever it is successful. Empire was advocated in the UK in the 1880s by Joseph Chamberlain, in opposition to the “Little Englanders” who favoured a policy of isolationism. Chamberlain argued that the expanding influence of France and Germany must be counterbalanced by the expanding influence of the UK. (SCRUTON 1982, 315)

If the latter definition may be considered acceptable, imperialism appears to have sprung up as a result of competition and struggle among European nations. Combining these two definitions, one could argue with some confidence that nationalism has evolved or expanded into imperialism. Indeed, in East Asia nationalism and imperialism were highly contagious during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Nishida Kitarō, who fought admirably against Western imperialism on the philosophical battleground through his writings, began in the 1930s to express his highly nationalistic political views. At the same time, he warned of the danger of Japan becoming imperialistic. Partly due to the lack of available information on other peoples of East Asia, and partly due to his simple extension of the form of self-consciousness, he could not imagine that imperial Japan, with its East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and idea of “All the world under one roof (八紘一宇),” would bring about deep dissatisfaction among other peoples, not to mention the violence, intimidation, control of speech and thought, arrests, and imprisonment. Imperialist slogans in vogue at the time seem to have been reborn in his historical-philosophical terms.

Following Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonialism, Park Chong-hong expressed the strong nationalist belief that national subjectivity was required for Korea’s independence and its economic development. As special education advisor to the president, he supported President Park

Chung-hee (1917–1979), whose presidency has been at the center of a fierce debate among Korean scholars and politicians.

The primary aim of this essay is to argue that perception exerts a decisive influence on nationalistic sentiment, thus limiting thinking, and that in order to examine and assess the political views of a philosopher, we have to take into account the concrete situation of the embodied subject, as a nation is always localized. In addition, I wish to raise a few questions regarding the relationship between thinking and perceiving, and to take up the possibility of a self-consciousness that does not engage in a life-and-death struggle with others. The most important question in this paper is this: Is Nishida’s philosophy of self-consciousness fundamentally unsuited to develop an ethics of the “other”?

## NISHIDA’S PHILOSOPHY

### *Nishida’s Philosophy of Self-Consciousness*

In the course of his philosophical writings, Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎 1879–1945) pursued two main lines of thought, more or less equally pervasive and persistent: the development of a philosophy of self-consciousness in his pre-1931 corpus, and a historical-political philosophy in his later writings. Both philosophies are essentially ontologies, by virtue of what Nishida calls the application of forms of self-consciousness (自覺の形式). These forms function in almost every phase of Nishida’s philosophy, and in the main include activity, self-determination, actuality, one-*qua*-many logic, and immanent-*qua*-transcendent logic. The phrase “the self’s seeing itself in itself” is included in these forms and expresses the immediate, absolute, and self-sufficient characteristics of self-consciousness. After an enormous struggle with the thought of numerous Western philosophers, Nishida finally came to a comprehensive grasp of these forms with his mature theory of self-consciousness around 1929 or 1930. Then, in what I call the “turn” in Nishida’s philosophy, he extended their application to non-conscious phenomena such as the historical epoch and the state.

Whatever Nishida applied the forms of self-consciousness to was attributed, in virtue of that application, full reality in Nishida’s texts. In general,

these forms were applied in turn to pure experience, to artistic creation, to acts of self-consciousness, to the historical epoch, to the state, and to the emperor. The extension of his forms from acts of self-consciousness to the historical epoch occurred around 1931 when the Japanese military government attempted to collect the cumulative energy and power of the country in order to galvanize its people as a nation. That extension was the most decisive shift in Nishida's philosophy because it paved the way for his return to a world which he had once rejected and called transitory (浮世). This turn signifies not only that the applications of these forms are turned from conscious phenomena to non-conscious phenomena, it also reflects Nishida's own critical stance toward his earlier religious-soteriological philosophy. In his later philosophy, he was fond of citing Leopold von Ranke's (1795–1886) phrase "Eine Epoche ist unmittelbar zu Gott" (An age is immediate to God).

### *Nishida's Political Ideas*

Nishida's most important treatment of international politics is to be found in his 1943 essay "The Principle of the New World Order" (NKZ 12: 426–34). Nishida embraced the principles of the new world order, the East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere and "All the world under one roof." These were nationalist slogans used widely during World War II to justify aggression abroad. Nishida remarks apropos of that slogan:

I think that today's world is an era of the world's self-consciousness. Each nation should build a world-historical world, that is, a world-of-worlds, by realizing its own world-historical duty. This is today's task. Even before World War I, the world had entered this era. A solution to the task remained unfinished at the end of World War I. There was no new principle of world-constitution except for the old idea of the abstract world. This is the reason why World War II broke out again. This war demands a final solution to the task. (427)

Nishida rejected Woodrow Wilson's principle of the self-determination of each nation as improper for fulfilling the task of the constitution of the world of worlds. "The fact that each nation or a people transcends itself and constitutes a world is not the same as Wilson's so-called principle of the self-determination of nations, which recognized the equality

and independence of a people”(NKZ 12: 428). The idea of the League of Nations was not the representation of the world-historical task but merely the eighteenth century’s abstract idea of the world. The impossibility of resolving the actual historical task was demonstrated by the outbreak of World War II (428).

Thus, Nishida replaced Wilson’s principle of the self-determination of each nation with his own principle of a new world order. The essential nature of this principle is expressed by the idea “All the world under one roof,” which Maruyama Masao once referred to as one of the most shrill slogans of ultranationalism in twentieth-century Japan. Furthermore, Nishida says that the principle of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere must be derived from the principle of the new world order. Nishida believed that the Western world had oppressed and colonized the peoples of East Asia:

Previously the peoples of East Asia have been oppressed and colonized by the imperialism of European nations, and they have lost their duty in world history. Now is the time when all the nations of East Asia must realize the world-historical duty of East Asia, and constitute a special world by transcending themselves (each state), and execute their world duty. This is the principle of the constitution of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. This is the time when we Asians (我々東亜民族) should uphold the idea of Asian culture together, and we must rise up world-historically. (429)

In his criticism of Wilson’s principle of self-determination, Nishida harbored a deep-rooted suspicion of what Great Britain and America had done to Asian people, and he appears to summon Asians to rise up against European imperialism. But many Koreans could not respond to the call “we Asian peoples,” although Park Chong-hong might have implicitly or partially responded to it in his use of the term “our reality” in essays written during the 1930s.

Nishida sees the League of Nations as based on nationalistic egoism (民族自己主義), also given as the “imperialism of Britain and America” (433). Against this imperialism, Nishida argues, we must uphold “the Imperial Way” (皇道) as the guiding principle of thought in the nation, according to which the emperor and his subjects are one in “helping all peoples”

(NKZ 12: 431). He further states that Great Britain and America must obey the doctrine of world formation and the notion of national polity (国体) (434). Finally Nishida sums up his notion of the world-formation of the world and the state:

The formation of the world as world does not lose the subjectivity of our state (我國家の主體性). It is really a principle of subjectivity that includes others by self-emptying. To be grounded on that principle displays the glory of the national polity. Perhaps one may say that the solution of today's duty of world history will issue from this principle. Not only Britain and America must obey this principle, but pivotal powers must strive to emulate it. (434)

In this connection, it may be noted that just as his philosophy of self-consciousness was established in opposition to Western philosophy, so his principle of a new world order opposed the League of Nations. As the passage opens, the doctrine of the self-determination of the world preserves the subjectivity of Japan. Japan, at the same time through self-emptying, includes other (他) states. But it is questionable that the process of self-emptying was actually exercised. As will be shown later, Merleau-Ponty deemed the struggle between master and slave as a necessity of the human condition. From this point of view, Nishida's elevating of Japan as the center of East Asia and his treatment of Japan as a self-emptying subject is contradictory. If this contradiction is genuine, the problem is far more serious than the simple fact that Nishida lacked proper information of how other peoples felt or responded to Japanese political slogans. Japanese people and their historical situation were concrete to Nishida, but other peoples remained distant abstractions to him.

Nishida also affirms the historicity and divinity of a nation: "All peoples, as part of the historical world, have their own expression of God" (NKZ II: 456). His view of history-politics may be called a "philosophical" nationalism—perhaps a "philosophical imperialism" for the other peoples of East Asia, but not for the peoples of Great Britain and America.

### *Konoe and Nishida: Similar Political Views*

Nishida had a long and lasting relationship with the three-time Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro (近衛文磨, 1891–1945) and shared many polit-

ical views with him: a critique of the League of Nations and of Western imperialism in East Asia, as well as a perception of Japan as the rightful leader of a new Asian order. In his twenties Konoe attended Nishida's lectures as a student at Kyoto Imperial University, and was one of his disciples when Nishida lectured at Gakushuin University from 1909 to 1910. In a diary entry of 1933, Nishida recorded his lunch with Konoe at the latter's residence (NKZ 17: 492); Konoe had been vice speaker of the Upper House since 1931 and was moving ever-closer to the center of parliamentary politics. In 1933 Konoe, together with Harada Kumao (原田熊雄 1881–1946), bought a house in Kamakura as a present for Nishida.

Nishida and Konoe kept up a steady relationship. Nishida followed Konoe's career closely, and in June 1940, when Konoe was appointed prime minister for the second time, Nishida called on him to express his reservations about his having accepted the office. During the course of their conversation, Konoe revealed the blueprint of his new order. Nishida's response was that "a new order may be established but the key point is the selection of leaders; there is no political party in charge in the new order, only a monolithic entity and the inherent danger of leaving posterity with an undesirable aftermath" (NKZ 19: 129). Several days later, Nishida lamented to Yamamoto that the cabinet was going from bad to worse (77–8). In 1941, after Konoe had been named prime minister for the third time, Nishida even expressed his dissatisfaction with some members of the cabinet. In 1941, Nishida wrote to Konoe, feeling sorry for the way in which he had to resign: "The reason Japanese statesmen age quickly is that they do not study. Fortunately, you will have time now that you have retired from the position of prime minister—may I suggest you dedicate yourself to study?" On October 18 1941 Tōjō Hideki was appointed prime minister and Nishida wrote to Horii Koretaka: "We are going to have a military government. For reasons unknown, my limbs have swollen and I feel uncomfortable" (NKZ 19: 181).

The historian J. L. McClain called Konoe "a dedicated pan-Asianist from his youth, who articulated a more noble vision of Japan as the rightful leader of a new Asian order" (McCLAIN 2002, 451). Their relationship continued for over thirty years, and Nishida's political views cannot be explained without taking into consideration his intimate relationship with Konoe and other contemporaries. Things, people, and events that

Nishida encountered were all temporally and spacially givens, of which the philosopher Nishida was not the author.

*Japan: Another Imperialist*

One of the key questions involving the principle of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is whether Japan itself was imperialistic. Nishida repudiated the League of Nations as imperialistic, and warned of the danger of Japan becoming the same (NKZ 12: 341). He maintains that if a subject “negates other subjects, taking them as its own self” (他の主體を否定して他を自己となさんとする), then that is no more than imperialism, which is contrary to the Japanese spirit (349). We can understand the subject here as referring to nations like Japan, India, China, and Western countries. He was clearly opposed to imperialism, which he defined as the negation of others’ subjectivity.

But his understanding of the principle of the new world order reveals an imperialist element when Nishida proceeds to identify Japan as the center of this movement as symbolized by the idea “All the world under one roof.” He argues that in the constitution of a particular world, there must be one nation at the center standing up to this historical task:

There is no other country than Japan to carry out this task.... The East Asia War should decide the direction of world history as the victory of the Greeks in the old days did for European culture. (429)

The problem in Nishida’s discussion of imperialism and the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere is the arbitrariness with which Nishida applied the logic of one-*qua*-many. This sphere was self-determinative, of the eternal now, and should not have been politically subsumed by the League of Nations. But he did not extend this logic to other sovereign nations in East Asia. Despite Nishida’s argument that the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere meant Asia for the Asiatics, and despite his denunciation of English and American imperialism, “efforts to gain support for the plan from participant countries under Japanese control... were unsuccessful as most of them regarded the Japanese as just another imperialist nation.” In an essay written in 1944 Nishida argues:

Our national polity as the self-determination of the absolute present is



the standard of historical activity. This sort of true spirit of Mahāyāna is kept alive only in Japan in the East. (NKZ II: 133)

C. S. Goto-Jones attempted to defend Nishida by referring to his private conversation where Nishida stated his conception of the Co-Prosperity Sphere as follows:

[This] is definitely not imperialism. Above all, if anyone inside the sphere is dissatisfied, then it is not a Co-Prosperity sphere. If the sphere were based on a selfish decision (by one state) and the others were coerced into it, that would violate everyone's free will, and that would not be a Co-Prosperity sphere.... If it were a true Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japan would be asked (by the others) to create it. If that is not the case, we cannot talk of a crusade. (GOTO-JONES 2005, 94)

The notion of satisfaction immediately calls to mind a passage from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness [*in einem anderen Selbstbewußtsein*]" (1977, 110). The following passage from the same work is also essential to comprehend Hegel's understanding of the relationship of self-conscious individuals:

Thus the relation of the two self-conscious individuals [*das Verhältnis beider Selbstbewußtsein*] is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life and death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case. It is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; and thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the *immediate* form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure *being-for-itself*. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. (113–14; translation modified)

Hegel discusses the dialectic of subject, desire, and the imposition of will on objects and on other subjects as two self-conscious individuals

engaged in a life-and-death struggle for recognition. Though the relationship between the two self-conscious individuals sounds similar to Nishidean self-consciousness, it is not. The former refers to a self-consciousness belonging to two different people, but the latter refers to acts of self-consciousness belonging primarily to one single person.

In his philosophy of historical-political thinking, Nishida assumes that the notion of self-consciousness may be extended to national subjectivity. Like Goto-Jones, one can easily accept, at least in principle the point that Nishida is making here. Nishida does not, however, seem to be aware of the dissatisfaction and suffering that many Asians experienced through living under the “one roof” provided by Japan. Of course, there is no denying that there were some Korean politicians who were persuaded to welcome and collaborate with Japanese colonial rulers. At the same time, it has been well documented that there were many Koreans who expressed their dissatisfaction with the Japanese in loud and no uncertain terms.

One of the most notable figures was Ham Sok-hon (咸錫憲 1901–1989). He was a well-known Korean Quaker who spent the first half of his life in colonial Korea (1905–1945); he also spent several years (1923–1928) in Tokyo as a college student, and was a follower of the Nonchurch Movement of Uchimura Kanzō (內村鑑三 1861–1930). He was also a history teacher at Osan school and a writer of Korean history, as well as being a farmer until 1945. He was imprisoned no fewer than four times by the Japanese authorities. Ham described the lives of Korean people under Japanese colonial rule with the following words: forcible oppression, military police, governing by bayonet, imperialists, wickedness, despair, agony, wail, lamentation, loss of freedom, fear, scream, confiscation, arrest, imprisonment, burning, and killing. In the English version of *Kicked By God*, he describes his imprisonment as follows: “My only crime was that of being a Korean.”

After liberation in 1945, he was arrested by North Korean communists who were themselves under Russian authority. Even after he fled to South Korea in 1947, he found himself imprisoned once again, as he fought against dictatorship led by three former presidents, including President Park Chung-hee.

## PARK'S PHILOSOPHY OF NATIONAL SUBJECTIVITY

Soon after Korea was liberated from the grip of Japanese colonial power in 1945, it was divided into north and south, eventually leading to civil war. Park Chong-hong (朴鐘鴻 1903–1976) initiated the reception of Western philosophy into Korea, and was responsible for the rise of modern Korean philosophy in the Western sense of the term. He published *Ilban nollihak* [General Logic], the first of its kind in the history of Korean philosophy. The book was based on traditional Aristotelian concepts. He studied and introduced Kant, Hegel, Rickert, Cohen, Hartmann, Heidegger, Jaspers, Cassirer, Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Ayer, and many more. Throughout his career as a philosopher he never lost his keen sense of interest in many areas of Korean culture, and wrote many articles on key figures of traditional Korean philosophy (including Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, and *Silhak*) such as Yi Toe-gye (1501–1570), Yi Yul-gok (1536–1584), Choi Han-gi (1803–1877), Wŏnhyo (617–686), and Chinul (1158–1210). However, his main contribution to Korean philosophy was made in his introduction, adoption, and assimilation of Western philosophy.

A 1958 essay entitled “An Introductory Scheme for A Study on Korean Thought” opens with the following words: “We are Koreans; we live as Koreans, even before we bring Korean thought into question. Korean thought arose and became problematic only after Koreans lived as Koreans” (CWP 4: 3). The strong nationalistic sentiment expressed in this post-liberation writing is also found in his pre-liberation writings. In the 1970s, this sentiment colored his political engagement.

In one of his writings from 1961 Park made a short remark on his experience of imprisonment as a result of participating in a rally for Korean independence, and expressed his distaste for study in schools since he “believed that almost all studies in school were designed to make us Japs” (CWP 6: 261–2). In spite of this remark, his nationalistic sentiments often avoided direct confrontation with the colonial reality of Korea. Furthermore, one has to be puzzled or shocked at some of his pro-Japanese writings from the 1930s.

In the 1930s, some Korean intellectuals appeared to consider the colonial reality unavoidable, permanent, and final. In 1935, Park wrote eight

articles under the title “Our Reality and Philosophy” for the *Chosŏn ilbo* daily newspaper. He gave it the subtitle “The Limit-Situation (限界狀況) of the Historical Moment.” In these articles, Park placed great emphasis on reality (現實) and argued that the motive of doing philosophy is not the Aristotelian sense of wonder or intellectual curiosity. Rather, it “necessarily arises from real agony, and under an inevitable situation” (CWP I: 389). With phrases like “our emergence” and “our ultimate situation,” he certainly points to the colonial reality of the Korean people, but he avoided using the term “colonial reality.” A serious problem was that he saw the colonial reality of the 1930s as a historical fact, as inevitable, unchangeable, and final, as was meant by “our ultimate situation.” Although he showed nationalistic sentiments, these were fundamentally limited and even suffocated by his labelling of colonialism as the ultimate situation. Thus, he demonstrated no resolve to resist Japanese imperialism, that is, to change reality itself.

It appears that many of the historical events constituting a national emergency for Japanese people, were also, for Park, a Korean emergency. His sense of these made him demand that philosophy be “most concrete and most realistic (現實的)” (CWP I: 398). Park continued the same demands on philosophy after liberation.

Park contributed several articles to the *Maiil shinbo* (Mail Daily Newspaper) entitled “The Trend of Contemporary Philosophy” (1934). The following long quotation reveals his attitude toward fascism and Nazism, and his understanding of philosophy as activity rather than thinking:

Fascism is a historical fact. It is, however, not a movement that starts with a theoretical framework or a program with the purpose of realizing it, but a movement that has necessarily been moved by the political and economic situation. Fascism revolts against an abstract and intellectual philosophy. For the fascists, philosophy is not the philosophy of thinking, but of activity (實行). Furthermore, the philosophy of activism (行動主義) is necessarily compatible with voluntarism (主意主義), and therefore it is possible that this activism comes close to Nietzsche’s will to power. We can surely discern in the thought of Mussolini’s militaristic leadership the idea of the “superman” of Nietzsche, which seeks the transvaluation of all values, rejecting egalitarian individualism, and proclaims the absolute sense of the idea of

the superman. It appears that the idea Nietzsche proclaimed in the nineteenth century has been realized today in the twentieth century. The explosion of life, the will to power, the mockery of the calculated pacifism, and the great challenge of the free superman against all kinds of lukewarm mediocrity that appears in modern times—all this is fascism.... Fascism tries to overcome actual chaos, and is ready for all kinds of sacrifice. It does not evade fighting (鬪爭), rather it considers it as the only way of life, cherishing a firm conviction in a triumphal song as the superman does. It is said that the only evil is non-action (無活動); the only virtue is passion (情熱).... For the superman, life means to rule (others) and to assert oneself. The superman never gives up his desire to become the supreme ruler, rejecting all kinds of obstacles and ruling incessantly. This is spiritualism and voluntarism. The anti-intellectual activism of fascism is related to mysticism. According to Mussolini (1883–1945), we are dependent upon and succumb to a sort of mystical sentiment. This mystical faith defies both our construction in clear and distinct concepts as well as its presentation in propositions.... Furthermore, this mysticism is intended, to a certain extent, to lead the masses under mystical mottos. In this regard there is a similarity between fascism and the thought of Georges E. Sorel (1847–1922). They differ in that for Sorel, the motto is the general strike; for fascism, the motto is the state and the Italian people.

Let's now look at Nazism. For this movement not to be short-lived but to last for a long time, it should have ideas. Public sentiment (民心) has been kept at bay externally, that is, politically and economically. The task for the future is to lead it internally, or in terms of ideas. In this regard we cannot overlook the fact that Heidegger set aside private matters, and joined the Nazi Party (in March 1933). He was appointed as the rector of the university of Freiburg a year ago (1933), and took pains to found the university system and the establishment of fundamentals for spiritual renewal following political reform. It is time for us to examine the affinity between Heidegger's philosophy and Nazism. (CWP I: 362–4)

In this long quotation, Park seems to hold that there is a close connection between the will to power and Heidegger's philosophy on the one hand, and Nazism on the other hand. Park also advocates the notion of the superman acting powerfully within history. But there is no dislike

of fascism and Nazism evidenced in this report. On the contrary, and quite astonishingly, he appears to hope that Hitler's Nazism would last. Park's view is very similar to that of Rōyama Masamichi (巖山政道, 1895–1980), an activist-scholar from the Imperial University of Tokyo. Rōyama was desperately concerned that Konoe, as prime minister, have a united nation behind him, and was fascinated by the ability of charismatic leaders in Europe to manipulate the powerful emotionalism of fascist ideology to win the allegiance of the citizenry, and so desired that Japan “achieve an internal unity similar to the Nazis.” In contrast, “Fascism has come to Japan,” lamented Yoshino Sakuzō (吉野作造 1878–1933) in 1932, another professor at the University of Tokyo. He was a leading spokesperson for liberal democratic ideals in the Taishō period and favored what he called 民本主義, democracy based on the people. How would Rōyama and Yoshino have responded to a report like this one penned by a philosopher living in the reality of colonialism?

When Park said in 1934, “the only evil is non-action, and the only virtue is passion,” exactly what kind of action did he have in mind? It is quite possible that this refers to the military action of the Japanese army in Manchuria, or his own philosophy with the sense of an ultimate situation. This passage expresses a deep reflection on reality and a philosopher's political engagement in concrete time and space. This sentiment seems to repeat itself in his activities after the liberation.

In another pre-liberation essay from December 1939 entitled “Grasping Reality” (現實把握), there is an alarming reference to holy war, clearly indicating the war engaged in by Japanese soldiers in East Asia. What then did he really mean by “reality”? The second-last paragraph may provide a clue:

The way to grasp reality: it is a process in which ordinary reality becomes realized by the mediation of concrete practice (具體的實踐); it is the struggle for creating culture, and holy war (聖戰) for building the state (國家建設); it is a thorny path and a bloody struggle for life. It is so rough and so difficult that only a few exceptional people can really clear the way. (CWP I: 432)

The two words of “reality” and “holy war” in this paragraph quickly remind us of Nishida's writings written during the same period. Which

nation does Park refer to in building the state, Japan or Chosŏn (朝鮮)? It is surprising (or not surprising) to see that the reality faced by Park in Korea was very similar to that faced by Nishida in Japan.

Thus, if one says that some of Park's pre-liberation writings are ominous, then we must say that his entire career as a philosopher is ominous since the word "realism" (現實主義) appears in his post-liberation writings, too. For example, in the conclusion of *A Study on Negation* (1959), Park borrows the Heideggerian notion of nothingness and the Hegelian notion of negation, and develops his own understanding of negation and reality. In the following key passages he argues:

Thus, I call negativity the ultimate, ontological ground of negation as reality (現實). Reality is the dynamic process itself, that is, negativity (否定性). Only in the developmental process of reality-*qua*-negativity do substance and subject become problematic. At the same time, negativity is historicity (歷史性), therefore reality is historical reality. Negativity is nothing but historical reality. (CWP 3: 679–80)

Human beings are products of historical reality, but at the same time they are participating in shaping that historical reality. This is what we call creation (創造). The activeness (能動性) of self-negation cannot be nothingness. Negativity itself is the power of breaking through nothingness and overcoming it. This is why negativity itself becomes creativity (創造性). (CWP 3: 682)

Park's emphasis on historical reality and his admonition for participating in the dynamic process of historical reality are repeated in his post-liberation writings. His new usage of the term "negativity" there in reference to the source of creative action may reflect his study of Heidegger and Hegel.

Worth noting is his argument that human beings are both products and producers of historical reality; this reminds one of a famous phrase of Nishida's, "From the created to the creating," which represents one of the key aspects of Nishida's philosophy of history. For Nishida and Park, admitting reality is the precondition for our creative activity in it. In other words, creativity would be displayed only after accepting a particular and given historical reality. This line of thought eventually helped both of them become nationalists.

Park's theory of negativity-*qua*-creativity was epitomized in his participation in drafting the Charter of National Education (1968), which supplied an ideological vision for President Park Chung-hee. The charter begins with the sentence, "We are born in this land with the historic mission of national restoration," establishing the state ideology by which the state could deprive any citizen of inalienable rights (for example, freedom of speech).

Park wrote a short essay in English entitled "On the Problem of Subjectivity." Its date of publication is unknown, but considering his reference to the reopening of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan (1965), and its similarity to ideas occurring in the Charter of National Education, it was probably written sometime between 1965 and 1968. In this essay, before discussing the notion of national subjectivity, Park deals with the notion of subjectivity itself. He argues:

Man is conscious of the object, and at the same time he is conscious of the fact that he is conscious of the object, that is to say, he has the ability to objectify his consciousness of the object.... I believe it reasonable at this point to differentiate subjectivity in the sense of considering it in the sense of a person's relation to objects from subjectivity in the sense of considering it within the boundary of consciousness, as the thoughts defined as inner behavior by the existentialists are powerless when they are left in that way.... Furthermore, in cases where the object as another person is not an individual but a group which has more power, the might is too great to be encountered as the subjectivity of an individual, and here takes the form of the subjectivity of a state or a nation. (CWP 5: 768-9)

According to Park, there is no subject without an object, and vice versa. In addition to the normal sense of the object, whose examples are "something out there" and people, Park refers to the object considered to be within the boundary of consciousness. Thus, there are two kinds of subjectivity, each being related to its own object. Consider the case of taking people as objects. Park argued that when an individual subject faces a powerful group as an object, and cannot manage it, the necessity of national subjectivity then arises in a sort of collective subjectivity:

To secure firm subjectivity, it is necessary to be independent. But



independence is not isolation. Independence is only possible through coexistence, and subjectivity can also be established through this. This is the nation that has been formed historically and is also presently being formed in such a relationship. The subjectivity of a nation is not established by sacrificing other nations. Significance is exhibited when the characteristics of others are mutually respected. To assume that world peace occurs when the subjectivity of a nation disappears is like dreaming that the ideal society is when a person's individuality disappears. (CWP 5: 771-2)

According to Park, an individual subject, confronted by a strong group, historically evolves into national subjectivity, which should be independent, but not exclusive. His notion of national subjectivity is not imperialistic, since according to Park, for national subjectivity to exist no nation need be sacrificed. Thus, he distinguishes his position from slogans such as "Peace in the Orient" or "We are members of the same family under one roof" (all the world under one roof), which forfeits true subjectivity by ignoring or despising the subjectivity of other nations. As he argues: "[our] national subjectivity is rooted deeply in our [Korean] lives, standing above classes." He does not seem to leave any room for class struggle in Korea. Furthermore, in order to establish a national subjectivity, a nation should have the power of economy, the power of defence, an economic plan, and reeducate the people. Employing the term "self-realization," which is another term for subjectivity, he argues that "Self-realization without practice is powerless and practice without self-realization is only blind labor" (CWP 5: 775).

Park's study on negation culminated in his becoming an ideologue. His notion of negativity could not become the foundation of his negation of the military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee. The reason may be this "we-ism" and his sincere preference for a "wealthy nation, strong army" (富國強兵), which was well reflected in the phrase "we respect efficiency (能率) and substance (實質)." In general, Park's notion of national subjectivity and his political engagement seemed to point out that philosophy and economics as practical sciences are needed to build a "wealthy nation, strong army."

One has to mention that the entire philosophy of Park, before and after liberation, failed to give the individual a place going beyond both the

morality of a colonial reality and a nation state. Perhaps the time when Park wrote on aesthetic feeling (審美的感情) in 1926 (CWP I: 103) was one of the rarer moments in the development of his entire philosophy that might have evolved into a different direction in placing the “self-conscious individual” over national subjectivity. Except for his demand that Korea be strong against powerful nations, he did not develop further the idea of how a weaker nation should handle a stronger nation.

As far as his pre-liberation writings are concerned, Park did not show direct opposition to imperial Japanese slogans. But in his post-liberation writings, he was critical of the idea of “All the world under one roof.” His perception seemed to have changed. The Japanese reality as the key object of his perception was gone forever with independence in 1945.

#### DEFENDING NATIONALISM THROUGH CORPORALITY

This study shows that there is a strong affinity between Nishida and Park in their political views and activities: the belief in national subjectivity, the warning of each respective nation becoming imperialistic, close relationships with the most powerful politicians of the day, and the expression of political ideas in their work. To say that their political ideas were shaped significantly by historical situations and societal conditions sounds somewhat trite. For example, it seems that there was no way for Nishida, as a Japanese, to understand how Koreans felt under the “one roof” policy that was created during Japan’s imperialist phase. This kind of inability is basically something bodily.

Corporality, with its limitations, appears to work powerfully in both philosophers. Their thinking and writings become contextualized; the context is given by bodily positioning. Bringing in the notion of body (身体) into our discussion is not altogether inappropriate, given that Nishida discusses the various aspects of the body both in his theory of self-consciousness and philosophy of history-politics. Comparable notions in this context are the historical self, the historical body, historical mediation, and acting intuition. Nishida argues that:

We cannot exist without body... our body is the one seen as well as seeing. Without it, it is impossible to see.... Our reality has to come

into contact with our bodies somewhere. Hence the starting point must be seeing bodily (身体的に見る). (NKZ 8: 328)

According to this passage, the body is not simply the object of others' gaze, but it is the seer. Nishida explains that "preserving, not leaving behind our body" is identical to "remaining always in a specific place and time of the historical world." Nishida emphasizes the notion of historical mediation when he states:

In the historical space (空間) of self-consciousness of the historical self, our actions are absolutely mediated historically. And at the same time, as Ranke says, each era is immediate to God, so we are immediate to the absolute. (NKZ 10: 123)

Thus, Nishida's notions of preserving the body, historical space, and the historical self may be called on to defend his nationalism and patriotism as well as Park's. But this defence is always assailable in that nationalism often encroaches upon other subjects and inflicts violence on them.

## NISHIDA AND MERLEAU-PONTY

### *Nishida's Acting Intuition vs. Merleau-Ponty's Perception*

As far as Nishida was concerned, the principle of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in itself was not imperialist at all. However, consciousness of the dissatisfaction of others is seriously hampered by the idea of acting intuition, and remains internal and self-reflective in the sense that it does not comply with Merleau-Ponty's phrase "we are what we do to others." The idea of acting intuition does not seem to allow one to give "an instant through the eyes of others."

In order to know to what extent the other is satisfied or dissatisfied, one must know others; one requirement is listening. This is well documented in one of Merleau-Ponty's texts, where, contrary to François Mauriac (1885–1970), who said "We have established a 'beneficent civilization' out there," he listens to the Vietnamese:

Your system functions beautifully. You have your colonialists. And among your administrators, writers, and journalists, you have many

men of good will. The former act, the latter speak and are the former's moral guarantee. Thus principles are saved—and colonization remains in fact just what it has always been. (MERLEAU-PONTY 1964B, 325)

Facing and listening to others is an essential way of knowing how the oppressed feel toward their colonial administrators and writers. Without this sort of direct contact, the principle of dissatisfaction does not say anything, always remaining abstract. Abstraction makes one “deaf to the cries of those who meddle in killing and dying.”

To borrow the first few lines from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Nishida's extension of the forms of self-consciousness make his philosophy of history-politics a kind of philosophy of “essences.” This disregards “an inalienable presence,” or direct and primitive contact with the world, and so are not the phenomenology of existence, or of facticity (MERLEAU-PONTY 1962, II).

In this context, a comparison between Nishida's notion of acting intuition and Merleau-Ponty's notion of perception will highlight a few essential features or deficiencies perhaps inherent in the idea of acting intuition. A contrastive study is more preferable to a comparative study here. There are at least two essays where we can see Nishida's understanding of acting intuition. These are “The Perspective of Acting Intuition” (行為的直観の立場, NKZ 8: 107–218, 1935) and “Objects and Practical Knowing” (395–499, 1937). A few passages from them are sufficient to see how Nishida deems the unity or intimacy between the mind and the body:

We see a thing by action, and the thing we see determines us as much as we determine the thing. That is action-intuition. (NKZ 8: 131)

Just as the body of an artist is the organ of art, so is the body of a scholar the organ of scholarship; the life of an artist exists in beauty and that of a scholar in truth. Even the activity of thinking does not exist separately from our physical body. (174)

Seeing and acting must be deemed in the world of historical reality. That is, it must be deemed... bodily. We are neither merely body nor consciousness. We are dialectical existence. (407)

It is not that our living is known to us by thinking, but it is that we think since we are living. (*Preface to Philosophical Essays II*, 1937, 269)

As Michiko Yusa has noted, the notion of acting intuition focuses on “the unity between the mental (or the spiritual) and the physical (or the mental) that constitutes our experience (YUSA 2002, 265).” It is clear that for Nishida, living bodily takes primacy over thinking. Being a philosopher and living in Japan, this may be applied to his own person, facing the historical epoch as the absolute.

All these arguments serve to remind us of several key notions discussed by Merleau-Ponty in his philosophy of perception and history. There appears to be a certain affinity between these two philosophers: their emphasis on the unity of the mental and the physical, the bodily aspects of human experience. But acting intuition is very different from the phenomenological notion of perception discussed and developed by Merleau-Ponty. In *The Primacy of Perception*, he gives us a lamp as an example in order to show the essential features of perception:

It is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which is it given exhaustively. It is accidental for the object to be given to me in a “deformed” way, from the point of view (place) which I occupy. That is the price of its being “real.” The perceptual synthesis thus must be accomplished by the subject, which can both delimit certain perspectival aspects in the object, the only ones actually given, and at the same time go beyond them. This subject, which takes a point of view, is my body as the field of perception and action (*pratique*)—in so far as my gestures have a certain reach and circumscribe as my domain the whole group of objects familiar to me. (MERLEAU-PONTY 1964A, 15–16)

Another key passage runs as follows:

I grasp the unseen side as present, and I do not affirm that the back of the lamp exists in the same sense that I say the solution of a problem exists. The hidden side is present in its own way. It is in my vicinity. Thus I should not say that the unseen sides of objects are simply possible perceptions, nor that they are the necessary conclusions of a kind of analysis or geometrical reasoning. It is not through an intellectual synthesis which would freely posit the total object that I am led from what is given to what is not actually given; that I am given, together

with the visible sides of the object, the nonvisible sides as well. It is, rather, a kind of practical synthesis: I can touch the lamp, and not only the side turned toward me but also the other side; I have only to extend my hand to hold it. (MERLEAU-PONTY 1964A, 14)

The lamp I am seeing is given only in a certain perspective; it is given to me by change and is deformed. It is given only from a place the embodied subject occupies or inhabits. In this way, in order to discuss perceiving objects in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the following notions are necessary: situatedness, the accidental, an indefinite series of perspectival views, the subject, the body, non-visible parts of present objects, absent objects, total objects, essential partiality, a range of possible views, deficiency, deformation, and reality.

Any notion given ontological primacy by the forms of self-consciousness in Nishida's philosophy becomes full reality. Although the historical subject of acting intuition may be called embodied subjects, these subjects do not imply limitation, weakness, or deficiency of the body. Thus, seeing (見る) in Nishida's writing is unlike perception but is intuitive, self-reflective, and self-conscious. If the term "acting intuition" applies to Nishida, "acting perception" would apply to Merleau-Ponty. The multiplicity of acts of self-consciousness is quite different from acts of perceiving subjects.

They also differ in their understanding of the experience of time. As Nishida states: "The present is the place of acting intuition. Therein we possess our bodies" (NKZ 8: 387). But this present is not a present that implies non-visible parts of the present, as is the case with Merleau-Ponty. At one point Nishida even discusses the notion of flesh with body: "What I call body means historical body. With it we can understand that words have become flesh (肉) and that various social realities are of the body" (336-7). However, Nishida's understanding of body and flesh as the incarnation of words is neither perspectival nor deformed.

### *A Critique of Nishida's Philosophy of History-Politics*

Let us repeat a previously-mentioned passage: "Each epoch is immediate to God, so we are immediate to the absolute" (NKZ 10: 123), which may be seen as the key philosophical slogan in Nishida's writings after

his “turn.” Does this passage imply that, since Japanese living in this epoch are facing the absolute, they do not experience its contingencies or deficiencies? Is it true that the Japanese military actions carried out in northern China and Korea are included among examples of acting intuition? Does this also mean that these actions exclude other subjects, showing violent expansion or the culpability of imperial Japan? If it does, Nishida’s notion of the absoluteness of the historical epoch is in sharp contrast to the history and the actions of the state or the communist party as understood by Merleau-Ponty in *Humanism and Terror*. Merleau-Ponty fully accepts a passage from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “Each self-consciousness aims at the destruction and death of the other.” He continues:

But consciousness can do nothing without its body and can only act upon others by acting on their bodies.... Thus history is essentially a struggle—the struggle of the master and the slave, the struggle between classes—and this is a necessity of the human condition; because of the fundamental paradox that man is an indivisible consciousness, no one is able to affirm himself except by reducing the others to objects.

Inasmuch as we are incarnate beings, violence is our lot.... Violence is the common origin of all regimes.... It is a law of human action that the present encroaches upon the future, the self upon other people.

Political problems come from the fact that we are all subjects and yet we look upon other people and treat them as objects. Coexistence among men seems therefore doomed to failure. For either some men exercise their absolute right as subjects in which case the others submit to their will and are not recognized as subjects. Or the whole social body is devoted to some providential destiny, some philosophical mission, but then this case reverts to the first; objective politics becomes subjective politics since it is really necessary that only a few be the incumbents of this destiny or mission. (MERLEAU-PONTY 1969, 102, 109, III)

Of course, all these passages appear in quite different contexts where Merleau-Ponty discusses such problems as Marxism, history, the roles of the proletariat, the party, and the state. However, they seem to fundamentally challenge Nishida’s somewhat naive understanding of human

consciousness, history, and politics. The self-consciousness in the Hegelian assertion must be quite different from an act of self-consciousness in Nishida's earlier philosophy, which is expressed in the phrase "self's seeing itself in itself." Since this act of self-consciousness is not expansive or violent but self-intentional or self-sufficient, it does not aim at the destruction and death of the other.

In the first quotation, a kind of unity of consciousness and body is asserted. As far as human relations go, acting upon others is only possible through acting on their bodies. History is essentially a struggle between master and slave. The struggle is a necessity of the human condition. Merleau-Ponty then introduces what he calls "the fundamental paradox" that the only way of affirming oneself is by reducing others to objects. This is because man is an indivisible consciousness. Therefore, "inasmuch as we are incarnate beings, violence is our lot." There is no pure human action nor regime that does not incur violation on the future or on other people. Being subjects ourselves and treating others as objects is the origin of political problems.

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, there seems to be no possibility of coexistence among peoples. If a social body, a regime, or an empire claims to be devoted to providential destiny or some mission in world history, there is no objective politics since only a few claim to lead in fulfilling a historical mission. He would argue that if Nishida took it as his mission to philosophize political slogans (as he perhaps wished to), would this be due to his philosophical naïveté?

If violence is our lot, we must disagree with Nishida when he states: "Politics is essentially... the art of the whole as historical species. It is not a simple morality.... Aiming to achieve human formation, politics must be absolutely moral" (NKZ 12: 330). One has to replace the term "absolutely" with "relatively," even if politics is indeed moral.

Early I referred to the logic or forms of self-consciousness such as the "self's seeing itself in itself," active, self-determinative, self-cognitive, self-intentional, instantaneous, unique and complete, joyful, and religious. All these forms, as long as they are called forms, are intended to be universalistic, applicable to all human existence, whether Japanese, Korean, or Western. These forms of self-consciousness do not, however, allow



any room for contingency and ambiguity, let alone the culpability of a nation acting in national and international political matters.

What then were the reasons for his naiveté in developing a philosophy of history-politics? One of the key reasons might be his extension of the forms of self-consciousness to non-conscious phenomena such as historical epochs and the imperial way. Although the Nishida of “acts of self-consciousness” philosophy (prior to his “turn”) would not have accepted the Hegelian assertion that self-consciousness aims at the destruction and death of the other, he was persuaded to develop his political philosophy.

As was indicated earlier, due to the full reality or ontological primacy given to acts of self-consciousness, Nishida’s philosophy does not admit acts of self-consciousness and any realm of habitual sub-personal experiences of the world. The sources of sub-personal experiences for Nishida’s philosophy were to be living in Japan, feeling sadness (悲哀), and seeing various political slogans such as “All the world under one roof,” “National Polity,” and the “Imperial Way.” Having a close relationship with a powerful politician was also a source of sub-personal experience. These sources were less than absolute in the sense that all of them were historically given. Simply put, the fact is that imperial Japan was a given, that is, something that was not dependent on Nishida’s free choice. Being a Japanese, and having a close relationship to Konoe, were not objects that could be shaped by self-consciousness. Thus, forming political ideas by perceiving national events and encountering his/her own people is always contingent and incomplete.

In short, Merleau-Ponty conceives the world or the “phenomenal field” as “the horizon latent in all our experiences and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought” (1962, 92). At least for Nishida, being a Japanese under the imperial way itself constitutes a phenomenal field, that has had a substantial impact on his philosophy. Nishida does not appear to have been aware of this fact, nor of the fact that the forms of self-consciousness eliminated all contingencies from the phenomenal field, thus depriving it decisively and permanently of its anteriority. This may be a result of an implicit intention, or perhaps simply of his personal dislike of facing the transitory world head-on as it is. Thus, in Nishida’s philosophy, thought takes precedence over perception. If Merleau-Pon-

ty's theory of perception is true, then Nishida's ontology is fundamentally challenged.

I have used the word "turn" to identify the moment when Nishida extended the application of the forms of self-consciousness from acts of self-consciousness to non-conscious phenomena. In one of his most important essays expressing this turn, "Concerning Self-Consciousness," Nishida clearly indicates in this essay (and in previous essays which deal with the historical world) that he is "directly unifying self-consciousness and the historical world" (NKZ 10: 515). As I have stated elsewhere, this short essay reveals not only Nishida's intent but also his assumption that the forms of self-consciousness, primarily distilled from his discussion of artistic creation and conscious phenomena, are applicable to non-conscious phenomena or events. I have called this turn "fundamentally inappropriate," or a wrong turn. A key question for evaluating Nishida's entire texts is, then, whether an act of self-consciousness and a historical epoch are indeed similar enough that his "direct union" is possible, as Nishida clearly assumed.

Living in Korea, Park Chong-hong must have heard and seen the dissatisfaction clearly demonstrated by many Koreans against President Park's regime in the 1970s. But Park appeared to believe in the president's policy for building a wealthy nation and a strong army. In this sense, his eyes were directed to only one side of the Korean reality. Even today, divisive debates on President Park's legacy in politics and economics continue. Politicians and academics have disparaged their opponents with polemicist cries of "leftist" or "rightist." I can only say to the extent that if our perception is perspectival, one can neither see the full reality nor claim absolute truth.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The foregoing study of Nishida and Park, based on a rather loose distinction of thinking and perceiving, led me to the conclusion that we are doing philosophy as embodied subjects, inseparably related to living in a specific time and place. It also appears that thinking and writing collude with the prevailing political ideology, which worms its

way into the deeper layers of a philosopher's body-mind. In this sense, the corporality of the prevailing ideology of Japan and Korea finds its way into our body-mind through perceiving, hearing, and even touching. Thus, we may say that a philosopher's life and thoughts are often interwoven.

Problems arise as the range of perception is usually far shorter than reading and thinking. Japanese and Koreans are not the authors of the world, and things and events that appear on our perceptual horizon are usually temporally and spatially given. More importantly, according to Merleau-Ponty, perception constitutes a sub-personal experience of the world, and percolates thinking, and in this sense may be considered "prior to every determining thought." In this respect, even people encountered exert a substantial influence on, or interfere with, thinking. Perceiving our own people and not perceiving others is one of the main reasons for letting nationalistic sentiments become naturally strong but fatally problematic: these sentiments are destined to become contingent, one-sided, and often violent. However, Nishida did not seem to realize that the "one roof" policy caused not only dissatisfaction but violence to the oppressed peoples of East Asia.

Contemporary Koreans seem to enjoy the diversity of their political views. But it is not the simple matter of living in Seoul, surrounded by conflicting but loud slogans, liberal and conservative, left and right. How can we accept the deficiency of our own perception and traverse or transcend physical distances to know the dissatisfaction and violence inflicted upon others by us? If this is an impossible dream, then what is the use of doing philosophy? I am occasionally persuaded to express political views, but without firm assurance.

Are the acts of self-consciousness understood in Nishida's early philosophy something like Buddhist liberation? Is it true that they do not aim at the destruction and death of the other? Was Nishida naive to extend the philosophy of the acts of self-consciousness to explain the place of other peoples in international politics? I am quite sceptical about any facile answers. One thing is certain, though: such key notions discussed in this article as consciousness, embodied subjects, and nationalism point to a problem of alterity that was not discussed thematically anywhere in Nishida's entire philosophical corpus nor in Park's philosophy of national

subjectivity. Unless we seriously consider and solve this problem, Nishidean-type ontology will fail to develop an ethics of the other.

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