

The Problem of World Culture

Towards an Appropriation of Nishida's Philosophy of Nation and Culture

JOHN C. MARALDO

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY of the passing of Nishida Kitarō offers an occasion not only to look back on his philosophy but also to consider its relevance to contemporary issues. For many people today, however, postwar criticism has cast a long shadow of doubt on Nishida's reputation and relevance for the contemporary world. Ever since the Pacific War, critics have sought connections between Nishida's later writings and Japanese imperialism. In the last five years or so, the controversy over Nishida's work and intentions has heated up, in the wake of revelations about the activity of other philosophers and scholars such as Martin Heidegger, Paul DeMan, and Mircea Eliade. It has become clear that some of their political practices in the 1930s and 40s advanced the cause of fascism in Europe. Critics have also sought to uncover the political implications, sometimes pernicious, of even the apparently nonpolitical thought of these various influential thinkers, including Nishida. We may call this aspect of criticism the politicization of their thought. The evaluations of the critics clearly deserve close attention. Some recent scholarship both within Japan and abroad, however, suggests that Nishida's thought should be depoliticized, not repoliticized as in the case of the European thinkers. That is, some Nishida scholars now read his political treatises as a philosophy of culture instead of a justification of state-nationalism (國家主義) and Japanese expansionism.¹ In the following I will show that,

¹ See the essays by Ueda Shizuteru and Andrew Feenberg in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, The Kyoto School, and The Question of Nationalism*, ed. J. Heisig & J. Maraldo

although Nishida's conception of culture is too closely identified with nation states, his philosophy offers a conceptualization with which we can reexamine current problems of multiculturalism, multinational relations, the Eurocentrism of philosophy, and the construction of Asia as an Other.

The project of reexamining these issues in the light of Nishida's philosophy of culture will require that we first understand the reasons that this philosophy became politicized. That is, in order to appropriate Nishida's philosophy of culture, and apply it to understanding our world as well as his, it is necessary to retrieve the contexts in which his later philosophy has been read, particularly the political contexts. In fact, when we read Nishida among a vast array of other philosophers who lived before and after him as well as during his lifetime, we already place him, often unconsciously, in contexts different from the one in which he wrote. We need, then, to recontextualize his philosophy before we can appropriate it. An appropriation of Nishida's philosophy of culture will take it in a direction that he himself did not anticipate. Most of what I will say in the following will merely clear some ground for taking Nishida in this direction. What I offer here is no more than a beginning in such an appropriation. Moreover, the beginning will produce largely negative conclusions, lessons we might learn about what is involved in reading a philosopher that we and he himself took to be a spokesperson for something called "the East." Much more exploration of the recontextualized content of his philosophy of culture will have to be done to finish the task, but I hope at least to show that some recontextualizing on our part is called for.

Discourse about culture is probably more globally politicized today than during 1930s and 40s when Nishida was writing. So the first step in translating his philosophy of culture into a contemporary idiom is to contrast the political contexts in which it has been read.

The Politicization of Nishida's Philosophy

Nishida did not think of his work as a political philosophy, even when

(Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995) and the book by Agustín Jacinto Zavala, *La Filosofía Social de Nishida Kitarō 1935-1945* (El Colegio de Michoacán, Mexico, 1994).

he begin to write short pieces for political leaders and government officials, and then apparently very reluctantly. But whether or not he did like it or would, Nishida's philosophy became politicized, and for three reasons, I think. The first has to do with the internal development of his thought, the second with external government pressure in the 1940s, and the third with much more recent events. I want to review these reasons before turning to his philosophy of culture proper.

Up to 1930 Nishida developed a philosophy of consciousness that had little to do with the social and historical world. But he did philosophize in continual interaction with his colleagues and students and with the German and English texts he read. In 1930 Tanabe Hajime, Nishida's younger colleague and by then his successor at the Imperial University of Kyoto, criticized Nishida for determining the world in terms of a transhistorical principle, self-awareness (自覚), that did not do justice to the irrationality of history and the actual development of the world.² Tanabe went on to develop his own "logic of species" or sociocultural specificity that placed social entities between the individual and the genus or universal.³

Tanabe emphasized, more than Nishida had, the social and historical conditioning of humans. The nation state had a special status; it was a kind of universal that could mediate conflict between the individual and the species. At least when it was successful at such mediation, the state embodied rationality, morality, law, and social justice, and was the ultimate subject of history. In the development of his "logic of historical reality" and "logic of national existence," Tanabe hesitated simply to identify the nation state with the Absolute. Instead, by applying a Mahayana Buddhist logic, he proposed that the Japanese nation state was a particular manifestation of the formless Absolute, in theory not superior to any other nation state. In fact, however, in the early forties Tanabe affirmed the uniqueness and universal character of the Japanese nation state, which was unified by the Emperor.

² See *Nishida Sensei no oshie o aogu* 西田先生の教えを仰ぐ in Tanabe Hajime & Tsujimura Kōichi, eds. 田辺元, 辻村公一編 (*Gendai shisō taikai* 現代日本思想体系 23) (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1965), especially pp. 347-8.

³ The 1934 article "Shakai sonzai no ronri" 社会存在の論理 introduces Tanabe's new logic; and volumes 6 and 7 of the *Collected Works of Tanabe Hajime* 田辺元全集 (Tokyo, Chikuma shobō, 1964), contain six other early essays on the logic of species.

Before the end of the war, however, he experienced a change of heart and wrote a major work he called *Philosophy as Metanoetics* that denounced his previous nationalism and yet opted for a personal surrender to the Pure Land Buddhist ideal of Other Power 他力. Nishida in the meantime took to heart Tanabe's criticism and began to develop a philosophy of history and culture.

Criticisms by Nishida's former student who became a Marxist, Tosaka Jun, also spurred him to turn his efforts toward questions of the social and historical worlds. In 1932 Tosaka had called Nishida's philosophy "the most majestic bourgeois idealism in the country, or the world, for that matter," a philosophy that reduces [social] praxis to personal ethical action, and ignores the material constituents of society like production and politics. Dialectics and history, Tosaka insisted, are founded only *in history*, not in transhistorical meanings or the consciousness that supposedly constitutes them.⁴ Nishida wrote that he was grateful for all the things he learned from Tosaka's critique, and that he wanted to take up the important points made by the Marxists,⁵ although a year later he referred to the "onesidedness" of Marxism: the residue of the natural sciences that takes nature to be opposed to self and has yet to clarify the "objective world of the truly acting self."⁶ I think that Nishida's later ideas of the self-formation of the historical world, of *poiesis*, and of "active intuition" (行為的直観) arose directly from his contemplation of Marxist ideas of production, even if he rejected Marxist materialism. In any case, Nishida's own social interaction with his major philosophical critics prompted him to develop a social philosophy and philosophy of culture that were later implicated in Japanese nationalism and state politics.

This brings us to the second reason that Nishida's philosophy became politicized: external pressure from the state. I will not go into

⁴ *Kyōto gakuha no tetsugaku* 京都学派の哲学 in the Collected Works of Tosaka Jun 戸坂潤全集 III (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1966), pp. 172-4. For a critique of Nishida's philosophy of history, see my article, "The Absolute Present: Chiasm or Chiasm of History in Nishida Philosophy?" in *Nishida Tetsugaku* 西田哲学, Ueda Shizuteru, ed. 上田閑照編 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1994), pp. 1-17.

⁵ See letter #749 of October 4, 1932, to Tosaka in the Collected Works of Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎全集 (hereafter NKZ) 18 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1978), p. 460.

⁶ *Kōi no sekai—Sōsetsu* 行為の世界—総説 [The world of action: summary], in NKZ 7, pp. 178-9.

MARALDO: THE PROBLEM OF WORLD CULTURE

all the historical details surrounding the cooptation of Nishida's philosophy by government officials. But I will mention two representative writings that made him the object of attack by rightists during the war and leftists afterwards. By 1938 Nishida was giving lectures on "the problem of Japanese culture." I will return to the content of these lectures shortly; for now we should note that they in part were meant to offer an alternative to the narrow Japan-centrism that was at the center of government propaganda aimed at converting the people to belief in their nation's mission and at making "a million hearts beat as one," as the wartime slogan went. What moved government and military officials to ask for Nishida's assistance in their efforts was probably more his prestige as Japan's premier philosopher than his philosophy of culture which was scarcely intelligible to them. Nishida also had personal ties to some of Japan's leaders; Konoe Fumimaro who was twice prime minister (1937-39 and 1940-41) had been one of his early students, for example. According to his biographers, Nishida agreed to address this audience of officials very reluctantly. He used many of their terms, but attempted to twist a new meaning out of them—key terms like *kokutai* (國體), the entity of the nation that Japanists took as absolutely unique and without peer in the world, and terms like "the new world order" that was suggested to Konoe as the goal of Japan's mission.

I want to make a simple point about Nishida's involvement in state politics: He thought he was saying or doing one thing; his audiences took his words for something else. He thought he was borrowing their language to convince them of alternative possibilities; they missed the gist of the alternatives or missed the point altogether. In his short address called "Principles for a New World Order," written in May, 1943 at the behest of the Institute for National Policy, he tried to convince the authorities that the age of the assertive, individualist nation-state was over, was a 19th century notion, and that this century required of Japan a global conception of itself as a world power interacting with other world powers as a group of mutually-defining equals. Whether the officials understood his intentions or not, we do not know, but apparently Prime Minister Tōjō did not like what he read, or so Nishida complained in a letter: the government had excerpted his words out of context, simplified and distorted his text.⁷ Then after the war it was

⁷ See his letter to Watsuji Tetsurō of June 23, 1943, in NKZ 19, p. 245, #1784.

easy for critics to read the text as a justification for Japan's asserting itself as an imperialist power like Western world powers. Just eight months later in 1943 Nishida tried again, perhaps too naively, and wrote a tract on the *kokutai*, calling this "national polity" in his own language "a self-determination of the Absolute Present that includes past and future within itself," or again, calling the national polity the achievement of a people who determine themselves as the Absolute Present, with the Imperial Throne (皇室) as its center.⁸ Once again the officials could make little sense of his Absolute Present but could emphasize the central role accorded to the imperial family.

It was easy for postwar critics to latch onto this same point and tie Nishida's emperor-ism to Japanese imperialism. I think these two "isms" must be kept distinct, for the view that the Imperial Throne is central in Japanese history does not entail domination over other countries. Some scholars suggest that the ideology of *kokutai* did in effect entail that the Japanese Imperial Throne would have to dominate the world, because that was the way in which it expressed its goodness. In that case, emperor-ism and imperialism would indeed converge.⁹ Yet another historical incident suggests otherwise: after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, on August 9, 1945, Emperor Hirohito met in secret with his Leadership Council, four ministers in military uniform, to decide how many conditions to demand for the surrender of Japan. All agreed on one condition immediately: the preservation of the *kokutai*, by which they meant the imperial system. Surely this cannot have entailed for these imperialists about to surrender a claim to domination over the world, or even over East Asia. Nevertheless, I find both an analogy and an ambiguity in Nishida's view of the roles of *the throne in Japan* and of *Japan in East Asia*. Japan's central role in East Asia is analogous to the place of the Imperial Throne in Japan; but it is not clear whether that place in Nishida's mind is an "empty center," a kind of clearing space for political conflict and contesting forms of government, or whether it is an active unifying force meant to represent and act for others.

In the context of his own writings, Nishida was far from being a

⁸ NKZ 12, pp. 403, 409.

⁹ I am grateful to Yoko Arisaka for calling my attention to this interpretation of the *kokutai* ideology.

MARALDO: THE PROBLEM OF WORLD CULTURE

nationalistic supporter of Japanese expansionism. But the view of postwar critique is different. Early postwar critics examined Nishida's politicized writings in the context not of their intentions, but of their effects on a people and a nation monstrously misled into aggressions and self-deception. More recent critics have examined the writings for the context that intellectuals like Nishida helped construct, a construction that continues to mislead Japanese people and Western admirers about a "Japanese spirit," a unique "Japanese culture," a Japan as exemplar of "the East" as opposed to "the West"—regardless of what criticisms and novel interpretations Nishida may have given these notions in his day. And contemporary critics have become particularly sensitive to fascist undertones in intellectuals aligned, rightly or not, with nationalism during the 30s and 40s. The main reason for that sensitivity, and for the recent repoliticization of Nishida's entire philosophy, is the revelation of Heidegger's further involvement with Nazism that I mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Since I am interested in a contrast of the contexts in which Nishida is read, it is important to note some differences between Heidegger's case and Nishida's. First, Heidegger was involved as the rector and then professor ordinarius of Freiburg University, that is, as a state official and spokesperson for the German state. Nishida, on the other hand, was a private citizen called to advise or support government officials.¹⁰ Nevertheless, we should remember that Nishida was a very prominent "private" citizen whose writings, whether straight or distorted, did become very public documents. Besides this difference in public roles, three more differences are notable. Heidegger is implicated in a pernicious ideology more clearly by his acts and nonphilosophical writings, whereas Nishida is implicated more clearly by writings he considered part of his overall philosophy, than by acts commonly considered as political.¹¹ Again we should add a reminder: it is now common practice to find a political undercurrent in all of Heidegger's writings, and to consider all acts as political. Yet the relative contrast, between

¹⁰ For further reflections on this difference see Andrew Feenberg, "The Problem of Modernity in the Philosophy of Nishida," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, The Kyoto School, and The Question of Nationalism*, p. 169.

¹¹ Jan Van Bragt, "Kyoto Philosophy—Intrinsically Nationalistic?," in *Rude Awakenings*, p. 245, note 26.

Heidegger's writings and acts that were overtly and intentionally political and Nishida's that were not, is still apparent, I think. A third difference is that Heidegger was intentionally complicit, whereas Nishida was complicit more by effect than intention—even if one should be held responsible as much for effects as for intentions and even if the two merge at points. Finally is the difference between *what* the philosophers were implicated in, that is, the difference between a Nazism that led to a holocaust and a Japanese totalitarianism that involved atrocities of its own.

The three reasons for politicizing Nishida's philosophy—Nishida's own turn to a social and historical philosophy, his later involvement with state officials, and the impact of the Heidegger incident on reading texts—all have to do with a shift in contexts: Nishida's own shift; the shift occasioned by early rightist and leftist critics of his writings; and the shift to a reading sensitive to Heidegger-like fingers of complicity. The review of these reasons now puts us in a position to shift Nishida's philosophy of culture to yet another context: the contemporary world that recognizes itself as multicultural and not merely multinational.

An Appropriation of Nishida's Philosophy of Culture

I will not attempt to undo the ways in which Nishida's philosophy has been politicized. Instead I will suggest more contrasts in order to begin appropriating parts of his philosophy of culture in a world he could only partially foresee. First we will need to summarize the main points of that philosophy. Next I will say what parts of his analysis should be discarded and why, and also what needs to be discarded of the context often adapted today. Finally I will draw a sobering lesson from a parallel between Nishida's multinational world and our multicultural nations. This largely negative exercise is meant to clear a space for a constructive appropriation of Nishida's philosophy of culture.

In 1940 Nishida expanded and published his lectures on "The Problem of Japanese Culture" delivered two years previously.¹² Four major points are particularly relevant to our discussion:¹³

¹² The lectures are reproduced in NKZ 14, pp. 381–417; the book in NKZ 12, pp. 278–394. There are Spanish and French translations of the book: "La crisis de la cultura Japonesa," in *Nishida Kitarō, Estado y Filosofía*, translated by Agustín Jacinto

MARALDO: THE PROBLEM OF WORLD CULTURE

1. Nishida advocates a “world culture” as a global arena for the encounter of various cultures. (To be sure, his notion of culture 文化 seems closer to the German sense of *Kultur* or civilization than to anthropological usage.) A culture must be self-critical, not dogmatic, and must develop a scholarly methodology—an area in which Japan is relatively weak.
2. Japanese culture must acquire a global character to properly respond both to Western culture and to its own tradition. (Nishida does not offer detailed characteristics of Japanese culture, as did his friend D. T. Suzuki and his student Hisamatsu Shin’ichi.)
3. True encounter with other cultures must be by way of self-negation, not the East’s negation of the West or vice versa. The activity of self-negation creates an intercultural space in which encounter can take place and in which one’s own culture is relativized. (The relation between different cultures is parallel to that between “I and Thou” in Nishida’s analysis.)
4. World culture is a *telos* or regulative idea to be achieved by acting (interacting) as if it were the present starting point and foundation for future development. It is a sort of *Urkultur*, not in the sense of a state of affairs that actually existed in past beginnings, but rather a project for the plurality of cultures in which each would understand itself as a particular form of a common culture. (Still, the idea of a world culture remains ambiguous in Nishida’s thought. Is it what all cultures come to have in common, the material contents that are eventually universalized? Or is it the space in which particular cultures interact?) Either way, for Nishida something nonrelative, particular and even unique is found in relativizing one’s own culture.

To apply Nishida’s insights to the contemporary “post-cold war” world will require some elimination as well as restatement. The major part of Nishida’s project that must be discarded is the Japan-centrism that is apparent in his philosophy of culture. *The Problem of Japanese*

Zavala (Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1985); and *Nishida Kitarō, La Culture Japonaise en Question*, translated by Pierre Lavelle (Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France, 1991).

¹³ For a more complete summary of these points, see the essay by Ueda Shizuteru in *Rude Awakenings*. My additions are in parentheses.

Culture had a different problem in mind than the problem contemporary thinkers face. The problem Nishida saw was twofold: the West's underestimation of the East, particularly of Japanese tradition, and Japan's ill-fated responses to that attitude. Nishida opposed the state's responses to that twofold problem. One response was the Japanese state's renunciation of past tradition, especially Buddhist tradition, in its attempt to modernize and become a technological power. Another response was the state's attempt to compensate the people for its theft of tradition by celebrating State Shintoism, a construct that deified the person of the emperor and required unswerving loyalty to him in the name of being true to the soul of Japan (大和魂). Nishida proposed an alternative response: a renewal of past tradition by recalling both the continuity of the imperial line and the value of Buddhist spirituality that could transform an egoistic nation. Nishida proposed an alternative to the West's intellectual underestimation of the East as well. He saw Japan as the country in Asia that best retained Asian traditions, because Japan's heritage was drawn from Indian and Chinese Buddhism and Chinese culture in general. And he saw Japan as the Asian country that had best modernized, that is, best adapted Western values and technology. Japan, in its ideal form at least, stood for the essence of Asia in a new world order, and it stood against Western domination. Japan was in a position to define the values and measures of the East as opposed to the West. Nishida attacked what we today call Eurocentrism by promoting an equivalent Japanism. Nishida's own brand of Japan-centrism has to be rejected because we cannot solve the current problem of Eurocentrism by recourse to an equally embarrassing problem.

At the heart of both problems, both "centrisms," is a gross oversimplification of differences. Some of Nishida's most repeated pronouncements about the nature of East and West seem like caricatures today. That the East hears the voice of the voiceless, and sees the form of the formless,¹⁴ or that it is based on nothingness (無) while the culture of the West is based on being (有)¹⁵—such statements, when repeated today, represent the Nishida at his worst. When he made such pronounce-

¹⁴ NKZ 4, p. 6.

¹⁵ NKZ 7, pp. 429-430; 446.

ments, in the 1930s, the challenge he faced was to assert the intellectual worth of Asian thought over against the domination of the self-proclaimed West. But the time for such self-assertion of Japan in the name of "the East" is over. We have come to recognize that such statements take into account neither the significant differences among Indian, Southeast Asian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese traditions, nor significant parallels between, for example, some European and Sino-Japanese philosophical concepts of nothingness. We in turn would oversimplify Nishida's highly nuanced views by taking such statements as the core of his "logic of the East."

Still another aspect of Nishida's Japanism needs to be rejected as well: his assumption that the Japanese are and have always been one people (民族) sharing one language and culture and therefore naturally forming one nation, even if that nation must awaken to its global meaning in order to become a true nation-state. Today we know better. The so-called homogeneity of the Japanese people is, in part, the result of long centuries of absorption and suppression of minority ethnic groups, Chinese, Korean, Okinawan, Ainu. And in part, this supposed homogeneity is a twentieth-century construct imposed on all the indigenous peoples in Japan, past and present, by the modern Japanese state. This particular kind of homogenization may not be as common in the so-called "Western" world, but nevertheless, as a response to Europe in the name of Japanese unity, it is related to Eurocentrism. It never occurred to Nishida to question the assumption of a homogeneous Japanese people.

What remains in Nishida's philosophy of culture that we can appropriate after we have eliminated the elements of his "reverse Orientalism," as some critics have called it? And can we eliminate some parts and retain other parts of a philosophy that is deeply integrated and holistic, without distorting that philosophy? I believe that we can, as long as we do not discard key elements pell-mell or in their entirety, but rather consider substitutions for them that are appropriate to the contemporary world, fifty years after Nishida. This indeed is the task of appropriation.

In many respects, we live in the kind of global world (世界的世界) that Nishida envisioned. In other respects, individual nations have become "globalized" in ways that Nishida did not anticipate. Adopting the ar-

chaic sense of *nation* (國, くに), Nishida took for granted that a single people formed the ethnic basis of a nation state, and he foresaw a *multicultural world* of different ethnic nations. He did not recognize or foresee multi-ethnic or *multicultural nations*, consisting of various groups of people each with its own distinct language and tradition. The problem that Nishida addressed was how individual nations/peoples/cultures could interact as equals and mutually determine themselves in the global world. For us today, an equally perplexing problem is how individual peoples or cultures can interact as equals within a single nation. I will leave aside some technical points about Nishida thought we could achieve a truly global world. Instead I will draw out some parallel problems by way of substitution.

Nishida's problem concerned nations confronting one another in a global arena, on the level of the whole world. It concerned the central role of Japanese culture in recognizing that nations are constituted by their interrelations and no longer primarily by the relation between government and individual. Today this problem is reflected on the level of the nation again, only not in the relation between government and individual, but more so between government and cultural group (which is what Tanabe called the "species" 種).

One key passage in Nishida reads: "A true world culture will be formed only by various cultures preserving their own respective viewpoints, but simultaneously developing themselves through global mediation."¹⁶ To draw the parallel between Nishida's vision and today's multiculturalism, we can substitute *nation* for *world culture* in the same quotation: "A true nation will be formed only by various cultures preserving their own respective viewpoints, but simultaneously developing themselves through national mediation." In this substitution, *the multicultural nation takes the place of what Nishida called "the world culture."*

Another substitution anticipates a contemporary solution to the problem of multiculturalism and also portends the difficulty with that type of solution. Already in 1934, Nishida wrote that, "for a regional world to take shape, it is necessary for one country to assume a central

¹⁶ NKZ 7, pp. 452-3.

MARALDO: THE PROBLEM OF WORLD CULTURE

position and shoulder the responsibility."¹⁷ We need merely substitute *nation* for *world*, and *culture* (or people) for *country*, to make the transition to today: "for a [multicultural] nation to take shape, it is necessary for one culture to assume a central position and shoulder the responsibility." In Nishida's thought, Japan was the ideal mediator, leader, and protector. Surprisingly, some philosophers propose a parallel solution to today's problem of multiculturalism. For these philosophers, in today's multicultural nation the dominant culture takes the place, for better or worse, that Japan held for Nishida. Let me explain.

Nations such as the United States, Canada and Mexico are each traditionally home to peoples of several different cultures and languages. Post-cold war nations like Germany are increasingly multicultural. (Perhaps someday Japan too will recognize that a diversity of peoples have inhabited its islands and formed its traditions.) In many countries, the rise of ethnic consciousness and calls for self-determination are on the increase. Although there may be no strong separatist movements in the United States as there are in Canada, for example, the relation between ethnicity and national identity is a problem in the USA too. Can a nation sustain its own identity and at the same time that of multiple peoples living in its boundaries? Answers are controversial today. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues that, in a multicultural society, the only viable government is one that protects the basic rights and welfare of nondominant groups and yet nurtures the particular culture that is historically dominant.¹⁸ The role of the nation in this view, I suppose, would be to mediate nondominant cultures through the particular dominant culture. The nation here overlaps with, but is not synonymous with, the government insofar as the government is striving to become truly representational of all its peo-

¹⁷ NKZ 12, pp. 429. Agustín Jacinto Zavala has pointed out to me that Nishida's thinking subsequently changed concerning what must shoulder the responsibility. Nishida first saw the state as the active subject *shutai* 主体 that was to accomplish the task of the present world; later he placed the people (*minzoku* 民族) or in some contexts, more abstractly, a "creative element" (*sōzōteki yōso* 創造的要素) in this role.

¹⁸ "The Politics of Recognition" in Charles Taylor *et al.*, *Multiculturalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 25-73.

ples or cultures. That is, what matters is not merely the individual representative, but his or her gender, race, ethnicity, etc. This roughly describes the situation of the United States.

But this ideal mediator role is undermined often by the historical relation between a dominant culture and the nondominant cultures. In the United States, for example, the politically dominant Anglo or white culture feels threatened "from the outside" by the growing population of Hispanics, Asians and African-Americans that will soon outnumber whites in states such as California. The dominant culture is threatened internally by the increasing recognition of its own history of violence toward the nondominant peoples, a history of enslaving blacks and nearly exterminating Native Americans. Thus the particular culture that happens to be the politically dominant one became dominant through force in a way resented by the nondominant cultures. The force, moreover, was often exerted in the name of nation-building. It is questionable, therefore, whether the nation "built" by the now dominant people can preserve that people. Nations with a history of colonizing other peoples who then became its immigrant citizens face a similar problem. The ideal of the dominator's mediating role has become highly problematic.

Have, then, some nations evolved to the point where the global or "world-historical standpoint" (世界史的立場) envisioned by Nishida is now embodied in a single nation? If so, that development has meant a gigantic problem for nations, not an ideal state. This is one negative lesson I think we learn from Nishida's philosophy of culture.

The other lesson has more directly to do with current habits of contextualizing philosophers like Nishida and their "world." Again I diverge from the specific content of his philosophy of culture and focus instead on a context in which it is read. If we are to discard the Japan-centrism of Nishida's philosophy of culture, we must also abandon our reading him as an "Oriental" philosopher. Just as Japan no longer stands for Asia in the realization of a global world, if it ever did, Nishida does not represent "Eastern" or "non-Western philosophy." Even the cursory sketch I have drawn here begins to show that the most basic problems Nishida dealt with are universal, and his way of dealing with them contrasts as much with other Asian philosophers as with philosophers of the so-called West. His philosophy of culture should be evaluated and appropriated in a way that does not discriminate be-

MARALDO: THE PROBLEM OF WORLD CULTURE

tween massive and increasingly meaningless cultural or geographical blocks like “East” and “West.” For reasons I have elaborated elsewhere, it is time to put “East” and “West” to rest.¹⁹

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¹⁹ John C. Maraldo ジョン C. マラルド, “Nijū-isseiki no sekaikan no shozai o motomete” 21世紀の世界観の所在を求めて in *Nijū-isseiki no sekaizō no shozai o motomete—Tetsugaku, shūkyō, geijutsu* 21世紀の世界像を求めて—哲学, 宗教, 芸術 (Ōsaka Daigaku Gojū-nen Kinen Kokusai Symposium 大阪大学50年記念国際シンポジウム), 平成五年度 (1993), pp. 91-110.